

THE EYE OF A MICROSCOPE

by Rabbi Label Lam

When a (nega) affliction of tzoras is on a person you shall bring him to a Cohen. (Vayikra 13:3)

Does the Cohen have a monopoly on administering care for the nega of tzoras? The answer may be very simple to understand and yet not easy to accomplish.

The Mishne in Avos advises: "1) Make for yourself a teacher, 2) Acquire for yourself a friend, and 3) Judge the whole of the man to the side of merit. Each part of the three fold Mishne is a study by itself but the secret is revealed when putting all the pieces together. Which one of these is not like the other one? You guessed right. The last one!

A person needs to find a teacher who can offer objective criticism. Since nobody is perfect we need constant correction to get ever closer to our goals. A teacher like a doctor is someone that we have to seek out and make ourselves available to in order to gain the insights necessary to improve. It is self evident that in order to remain strong in a program of personal development we need a support system of at least a friend who can encourage us and to help us remain loyal to the advice of the wise teacher.

Where does it fit into the equation the idea of judging the entirety of the man to the side of merit? Let's try a few approaches.

- 1) Sometimes a person cannot find a qualified teacher or friend because he tends to see and be distracted by the faults of a person, and we all have shortcomings. By not having the ability to see the better aspects of a man he remains bereft of a much needed teacher and friend.
- 2) At times a person will get excited about his teacher and friend, his rebbe and peer group and thereby look condescendingly upon others. This parochial attitude is not the full benefit of having an "A Team" around you. Remember that they are your medicine and somebody else needs his particular rebbe and friend to cure his ills.
- 3) The emphasis may be best placed on the words "yourself". The Mishne demands that since we do not naturally notice our own faults, we should turn our glance inward at ourselves and not at others. Unless someone recruits you as his rebbe or hires you to be his friend then we dare not dedicate our time studying the faults of others.
- 4) It could very well be that as one improves the faults of others that are often a signal of what we struggle to avoid within ourselves will become less apparent. In that sense working on ourselves

improves the portrait in our minds that we have of others.

I have a wonderful friend and learning partner who used to chastise if I ever launched a critical comment about somebody else. He'd say, "Turn the microscope on yourself!"

When someone had a case of nega tzoras he needed to come in contact with a wise and holy Cohen who could show him what he needed to fix within himself. Since the cause of the nega tzoras is known to be loshon hora, talking badly of others, that same person is removed from the community to perhaps gain the habit of seeing others from a distance as through a telescope while learning to see himself more clearly with the eye of a microscope. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.