

IF ONLY!

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe and Aaron, saying: "If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eis, or a sapachas, or a baheres, and it will become a tzaraas affliction on the skin of his flesh: he shall be brought to Aaron the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim. The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh; if hair in the affliction has changed to white, and the appearance deeper than the skin of the flesh- it is a tzaraas affliction; the Kohen shall look at it and declare him contaminated. (Vayikra 13:1-2)

Why is the priestly cast, the descendants of Aaron, the ones singled out for the task of diagnosing tzaraas? Why should someone so afflicted be required to visit a Kohen?

Everyone knows that the illness referred to here as tzaraas has a particular cause. Everything flows from or is blocked by Loshon Hora- evil gossip. The Chofetz Chaim has pointed out that the sin of Loshon Hora can often be traced to some character flaw in the perpetrator. Therefore the one who speaks ill of others is in need of some correcting himself and yet he chooses to study the deficiencies in others while failing to notice his own faults. What's to be done to fix such a fellow?

HASHEM in his infinite mercy designed a feedback system to indicate that something is wrong and needs correction the same way that car designers have installed an amber light on the dash board when the gas is low or the engine requires checking. The car must be brought to a mechanic and the person with a character defect must go to a Kohen. Why a Kohen? The Mishne (Pike'Avos 1:12) states, "Be from the students of Aaron, love peace, pursue peace, love people, and bring them close to Torah." Aaron and his children are predisposed to loving and caring for others. It's not only that they are medically competent to diagnose the physical dimension of the disease but they are largely compassionate and likely to seek out a solution.

Just being in contact with and gazing at the holy visage of such a Kohen already affects a partial remedy as the verse states, "And your eyes shall behold your teachers." (Isaiah 30:20) Also this learned man might also impart some worthy advice that can help the afflicted to curb his tongue and cure his soul.

One of the master educators of all time Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl the Alter from Slobodka

recounted the following childhood memory: "In my youth in Vilna I saw a woman vendor standing in the market place selling beans. For some reason she got angry at her competitor and began to abuse her loudly. Her wrath increased until she foamed at the mouth and became drenched with sweat. At the peak of her rage, a customer approached her table and asked her for a penny's worth of beans. In an instant, the vendor underwent an amazing transformation. Her face beamed, her lips curled into a smile, and she graciously turned to wait on her customer.

This teaches us a great secret of the human personality. A mere penny has the power to change a person from one extreme to another to make him control his stormiest emotions. This is something that no amount of wisdom can accomplish, but if a penny can do it, so can praise, a compliment, or even a smile or a polite word. All of these can win people's hearts and dispel their wickedness. This is not the end of the story. After the customer had paid the penny for the beans, she started to thank him for his kindness and to heap blessings on him, his wife, children, and grandchildren. From here we see that not only can a penny cause a person to control his bad moods, it can transform him into a fountain of love and kindness."

"The Alter" lands a powerful point, "Treat every person as a million-dollar customer!" Now, if only "The Alter" could have told us this lesson in person. **If only!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.