

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the person with Tzaraas in whom there is the affliction - his garments shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to his lips; he is to call out, "Contaminated, contaminated!" All the days the affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

Tzarass is woefully misunderstood. It is seen as an archaic matter, a form of leprosy that for some reason is no longer applicable or relevant. The truth is that Tzarass, according to the sainted Chofetz Chaim was a blessing in disguise. How so?

I went through half a dozen clunker cars until I learned two important words that have served me in good stead. Actually it was not until I bought a more expensive vehicle and realized that I was not comfortable making payments for a car that no longer functioned that I bothered to take the user's manual out of the glove compartment of the car and discover this two word phrase that has granted longer and healthier life to every one of my automobiles ever since. By the way, those two words are, "Oil change!"

Now, though, the newer cars have something the older ones did not and that is the proverbial, "Amber light!" Once the amber light goes on, or the "check engine" sign on the dashboard it's time to ask. Without that earlier warning system we are at a real disadvantage. Tzarass was a sort of earlier warning system, an amber-light to alert us that spiritual deficiencies were starting wreak havoc on our system. We operate now at a distinct disadvantage without Tzarass!

There's an old country folksy phrase that goes like this, "You can hide the fire, but what are you gonna do with all the smoke?!" Tzarass is like smoke bellowing out form the engine of our being, a scent of danger to remind us repair our ways. Although, Tzarass, technically, is no longer active the concept of Tzarass is still very much alive!

Guilt also got a bad rap for similar reasons but it's also good in a way that needs explanation. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. Although nobody likes to experience pain it can be extremely beneficial. A person without the ability to feel pain would certainly be likely to be missing digits and whole limbs. While making a salad they might realize a little too late that the red in in the bowl is not from tomatoes, pardon me! Both guilt and pain if properly responded to, serve to guide us away

from certain damage.

Another signal that helps us figure out what might be wrong is in the arena of raising children. In a class I have been giving for a while called, "The Ten Commandments of Parenting". The first of the "big ten" is "I am HASHEM your G-d Who took you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage!" The first commandment of parenting is that parents too stand before their children, whether aware or not, and say with their actions, "This is who we are and this is what we do!" It's no wonder that in the first paragraph is written, "And these words that I command you today you shall place upon your heart and you should teach them to your children." First they must be on your heart and then to be taught because children read the heart. They have a sincerity meter that's extremely sensitive! In the second paragraph of "Shema" it says, "And you should teach your children to speak in them (Torah)" and then it continues to tell us how to teach this lesson, "with your sitting in your house, and your- going on your way and the way you go to bed and the way you rise up". Children are following their primary role models, their parent!

A young lady was asked by a Rabbi at a general lecture, "What is your parents' greatest source of pleasure?" A broad smile came across her face and she replied, Me!" The Rabbi continued his line of questioning, "What's your parents' greatest source of pain?" Now with in a more somber tone she responded, "My sister!" Why are kids both the greatest source of pleasure and the greatest source of pain? I believe we all realize intuitively that they are "us- (mother and father) playing out our real selves on the big screen of life.

Many things are a form of Tzarass, in that they can lead us to make critical adjustment before it's too late. All of life is a self-portrait and the canvass on which we operate grabs our undivided attention, all too often only when we witness vivid pictures of **good news and bad news**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.