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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 shaved, and he should cover himself up to his lips; he is to call out, "Tame'!- Tame'!"(Contaminated! Contaminated!) All the days that that the affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

It struck me as odd that the Torah which is sparing with words should invest the ink to tell us in a double- emphatic expression what the Metzora should declare, "Tame' –Tame'" – "Contaminated- Contaminated!" Why twice? Ok, it is more emphatic that way! There are spiritual dangers associated with coming into contact with a Metzora. He needs to warn people to stay away. Maybe something else is being hinted at here.

There are only a few places where a word or even two different words with the same letters are parked conveniently next to each other like identical twins. One of them we find way back at the dawn of Jewish History. "And HASHEM said to Avram: (Lech Lecha) 'Go for or to yourself from your country, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.'" (Breishis 12:1) The words Lech and Lecha are spelled in Hebrew identically though they pronounced differently and have different meanings. What's the connection to the Metzora shouting Tame'- Tame'?

The numerical value of Tame' is 50! 50 and 50 equals 100! So! So is the numerical value of Lech Lecha 50 plus 50! So! What's the connection? When Avraham is told to leave it is curious that his journey starts with the outer circle "your land" then proceeds inward to "your birth place" and finally closest to home, "your father's house". It's really an inward trek! The idea of Lech Lecha is to go to your-self! Then he is promised broad influence in the affairs of man. The bumper sticker that expresses this seemingly paradoxical ideal best is, "Think global! Act Local!" or as the Talmud states, "Fix yourself! Then Fix others!" It's not just the order. It's the way! Fix the world man, through self-mastery. If you can discover the key to your own heart then you will have fashioned the master key to help many others too.

What does this have to do with the Metzora? He too is sent out of three concentric rings of society. He finds himself in isolation! Literally, that is where he finds himself. How did he get there? What was his tragic flaw? It's no secret that the Metzora identified and spoke about the faults in other

without having improved himself first. Life is a self-portrait to a great extent. In psychology it is known as projection. As the poet says, "A man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest..." This is the mindset that invites the speaker of Loshon Hora to justify his negative speech by wanting to save a world he perceives is riddled with fault. He is affectively thinking local, about his own self-interest while acting on the global! Rather than trying to change the world through himself, he is ultimately failing in trying to change himself through world!

It's like the old bad joke: A wife calls her husband, who is on his way home. She is in a panic, brimming with concern. "Dear, please be careful. I just heard on the news that there is a maniac driving the wrong way on the highway!" "What are you talking about!?" he answers in a cavalier tone, "There are thousands of people driving on the wrong side of the highway!" He cannot succeed! He comes face to face with a real life lesson! King David observed truthfully, HASHEM is good and straight therefore He instructs sinners along the way. (Tehillim 25:8) Lech Lecha! There are 50 levels of Tuma- Contamination! There are 50 levels of Kedusha- Holiness! The Metzora has hit bottom! He is stuck! He is down 100 levels, 100 degrees from his potential. Lech Lecha says Keep on going, growing, changing and improving for the sake of the world! You can climb to the heights of holiness!

There's another old bad joke. Question: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: One, but the light bulb has got to want to change! The Metzora is on the bottom now acknowledging his wrong, announcing he is ready for a dramatic change. Can he make it to the top?

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