

NEGA-TIVITY

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the person with Tzaraas in whom there is the (NEGA) 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 (NEGA) affliction is upon him he shall remain contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

What is NEGA? Where does it come from?

The Sefas Emes quotes the Zohar, "One who is able to delight in the Shabbos and does not do so, his ONEG- delight is converted to NEGA- affliction. Conversely, how much more so in the positive direction, through delighting in the Shabbos NEGA is converted to ONEG." How do we make sense out of this obtuse statement?

Well, first of all it is important to know that the letters for NEGA and ONEG in Hebrew are the same. AYIN-NUN-GIMEL is ONEG. NUN-GIMEL-AYIN is NEGA. The Sefas explains further that AYIN stands for the word EDEN (as in the garden of...) and NUN stands for NAHAR -river and GIMEL stands for GAN -garden, and verse states, "And a river went out from Eden to water the Garden..." (Breishis 2:10) This is a model for the entire world and also for a person who is a microcosm of the world.

The dynamic is like this: The NESHAMA (higher spirit) communicates through the RUACH (speech) to the NEFESH (bodily domain). On Shabbos there is greater access to an even higher aspect of the NESHAMA. When the G-dly mind directs the broadcasting spirit to inspire and discipline the animal soul the result is a really holy pleasure called ONEG!

However, when the speech and communication system is hijacked by the animalistic soul and its coarse agenda rules over the NESHAMA, that produces an experience called NEGA.

The holy NESHAMA is exiled in a coup by its most grotesque element. Instead of the Soul elevating the body, the body is degrading the soul. Similarly the person stricken with the NEGA is sent outside the camp to sit in isolation. Symbolic and too true too!

The words of the Piaseczno Rebbe may prove helpful here, "*The human soul relishes sensation, not only if it is a pleasant feeling but the very feeling of stimulation. Sooner sadness or some deep pain rather than boredom of non-stimulation. People will watch distressing scenes and listen to heartrending stories just to get stimulation. Such is human nature and a need of the soul, just like all its other needs and natures. So he who is clever will fulfill this need with passionate prayer and Torah learning. But the*

soul whose divine service is without emotion will have to find its stimulation elsewhere. It will either be driven to cheap, even forbidden sensation or will become emotionally sick from a lack of stimulation."

Now consider how attached and detached one can become, that **PVS, Phantom Vibration Syndrome**, (sensing your phone is buzzing you even when it's not there, like on Shabbos) was voted "word of the year" recently in the Macquarie Dictionary survey.

Maybe now we can begin to understand the words of the Sefer Yetzira, "Nothing is higher than ONEG and nothing is lower than NEGA." A person needs to feel! What that feeling is depends on a profoundly personal choice. This is a hint on how to enjoy life positively and how to avoid the trap of **NEGA-tivity**.