

PARSHAS METZORAH

by Gedalia Litke

Tzora'as afflicts a person who needs to deal with his having spoken lashon hora. Part of the purification process of a metzora includes his being required to call out to all 'tamei, tamei', meaning that he notifies passersby of his tzora'as status. (13:45). According to Rashi this so they will be aware of his status. The Gemoro says that this is for his benefit so people will be aware of his plight and pray for him. (Shabbos 67a)

The Gemoro (Bava Kamma 92a-b) says that the poor get poorer. According to one opinion, this maxim is meant in a non-monetary sense and can be derived from the process of purification that a metzora must undergo. As Rashi in Bava Kamma explains, the metzora, in addition to having unsightly splotches of skin, also now faces the humiliation of having to call out 'tamei, tamei'.

If the reason for his calling out 'tamei, tamei' is for his benefit - so people will pray for his recovery - then how is this also cited as an example of the poor becoming poorer, which does not seem to be for his benefit. How can we reconcile these two views of calling out 'tamei, tamei'?

That the poor get poorer, at least in the Gemoro's treatment, does not mean merely that it has gotten worse for the poor. It also means that getting poorer is a tool or an opportunity. Sometimes we get used to situations and treat them as unfortunate but inevitable. One might say (and not be wrong - see Bava Basra 165a) that speaking lashon hora is just an unavoidable part of the human condition. To avoid becoming scripted in this way HKB'H will send us down another notch. This assures that we will not get too comfortable at the original, merely poor, level. Now that things have gone from bad to worse we will really endeavor to break out of the pattern.

In this sense the poor getting poorer is a benefit; for the complacent poor it might be the only way they will be inspired to dig out. And for this reason it is appropriate for 'tamei, tamei' to mean both the benefit of having people pray for him and the benefit of being knocked down further to avoid complacency.

[This is based on a shiur of HoRav Yochanan Zweig, Shlita.]

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