

THE REAL YOU

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"If a person will have upon his skin of his flesh...a tzara'as affliction...he shall be brought to Aaron the Kohen (priest) or one of his sons the Kohanim" (Vayikra/Leviticus 13:2) Our Sages explain that of the different manifestations of the tzara'as affliction, the form that attacked the body was the result of improper speech. If a person slandered someone else or did not fulfill a sworn oath, he was stricken with tzara'as sores. Of all of the external and internal sicknesses existent in G-d's creation, why did He choose a disease similar in appearance to leprosy as the punishment befitting one who errs with his speech?

The Torah testifies to Adam's creation as, "And G-d the L-rd formed the man of dust from the ground and he blew into his nostrils the soul of life and the man became a living soul." (Beraishis/Genesis 2:7) Targum Onkelos (authoritative Aramaic interpretive translation by the Tannaic-era proselyte Onkelos, c.90) elucidates that the "living soul" of Adam was the spirit of speech. Thus, the Torah illuminates that the essence of the soul, the essence of the human, the attribute that elevates man over the entirety of the animal kingdom as the power of decisive, intelligent speech. The Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 99b) expands this concept by stating that the entire purpose of the birth of mankind is the righteous use of his speech.

Rabbi Yitzchok Goldwasser, in his work Be'eros Yitzchok, clarifies that a person who is frivolous with his speech indicates that he does not appreciate his elevated status above the rest of the animals of creation. He is not focusing on his spiritual self and using speech to elevate his soul to its fullest potential. The purpose of tzara'as was to have the bearer become disgusted by his own physical appearance. While in such an unappealing physical state, the afflicted will comfort himself with the knowledge that the physical body is merely the "clothing" adorning the real person - the soul - within. That soul that defines the person remains unblemished by the sores of tzara'as; it is only affected by the holiness present in (or absent from) his words and deeds. With this renewed consciousness and reorganization of priorities, the bearer will then shift his focus away from the vanities of the material world and strive to maximize his spiritual potential by using his speech - indeed, all of his G-d given resources and talents - properly.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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Kol HaKollel is a publication of the Milwaukee Kollel Center for Jewish Studies 5007 West Keefe Avenue; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 414-447-7999