

If a tzaraas affliction will be in a person, he shall be brought to the Kohen. (13:9)

Someone who lives in the dirt, whose garments are perpetually soiled, does not comprehend the ruckus made over a stain on one's shirt. Likewise, as *Ramban* explains, the *parsha* of *negaim*, plagues, applies only when *Klal Yisrael* is *shleimim b'Hashem*, whole, perfect with the Almighty, when the *Ruach Elokim*, Spirit of G-d, is always over them. It is then that they must maintain a pristine attitude and appearance in the external semblance of body, apparel and abode. *Sforno* writes that it is the *Kohen*, the spiritual mentor and exemplar of the Jewish People, who determines the viability of the plague and designates its ritual contamination status. Thus, his presence is in and of itself an admonishment to the sinner and serves as an inspiration for him to repent and to ask the *Kohen* to pray for him.

We are no longer visited by the Biblical plagues, since we are far removed from the spiritual level demanded of the Jewish People to be worthy of such supernatural treatment. Nonetheless, Hashem still speaks to us, admonishing us when our behavior is lacking. Every time something out of the ordinary happens to us – slipping on the ice, fender bender, illness, financial loss – we are experiencing some of the many instances during which Hashem speaks with us.

Sichah Naeh cites the *Talmud Bava Basra* 10a, in which the *Talmud* relates that *Rav Papa* slipped and fell on the steps, causing him great pain and anxiety. He remarked, "I am suffering punitively on the same nadir as those who profane *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*." *Chazal* acknowledge that we are punished, even when we have committed no sin worthy of such punishments. *Chiyah bar Rav Difti* commented, "Perhaps a poor man came to you asking for alms and you did not support him." He added, "Whoever closes his eyes (turns his eyes away as if he does not see) from giving charity, it is considered as if he worshipped idols." *Chazal* view every occurrence in life, every circumstance which we experience, as Hashem's message that something is amiss in our lives.

In his *Shemiras HaLashon*, the **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, teaches us a frightening lesson. He quotes the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 21:23, *Shomer piv u'leshono, shomer mitzaros nafsho*, "He who guards his mouth and tongue, guards his soul from troubles." The *Midrash* makes a play on words and teaches, "Do not read the word as *tzaros*, trouble; rather, (read it) *mitzaraas nafsho*, ie, one who guards his tongue spares his soul from developing (spiritual) leprosy!"

The *Chafetz Chaim* explains that, although today we no longer have *negaim*, plagues, which are visited upon a person, this applies only with regard to their external manifestations on his body. We do, however, have *tzaraas* which strikes a person's soul. Therefore, when a person leaves this world (and he has spoken *lashon hora*, slander), this *tzaraas* will be revealed on his spiritual soul when he arrives in Heaven. All will see the effects of his evil speech. Imagine the shame that he will suffer. Just as, in this world, one is isolated from the community as a result of *tzaraas*, so, too, will he be compelled to sit separate in Heaven, not allowed to gravitate and join others.

Thus, we see that the plague which “surfaces” on one’s skin is a gift from G-d. It surely incurs many more benefits and much less embarrassment than the leprosy that is manifest spiritually. Since we are no longer worthy of *tzaraas* on our body, we are relegated to suffer the internal shame of *tzaraas ha’nefesh*.

Unfortunately, we do not give much thought to what we will look like in the eternal world. We are concerned with the sham of this world, what people will say, how they will judge us, how it will affect our future. What will take place following our mortal stay in this world is an experience too far removed from our thought process. It is specifically how we relate to the ultimate future which distinguishes the observant Jew from his non-practicing brother. An observant Jew realizes that there is much more to living than “life” on this world. There is *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, the true world, the world where all appearances count.

Chazal enjoin us to penetrate beyond the façade of this world, to perceive a world of reality in which we will have to answer for our behavior, one where the scale of justice is quite unlike the one which we think prevails here. *Nochum Ish Gamzu* was a holy man who lived a life of suffering – one, for which, interestingly, he had asked. He lay blind, without hands and legs, his entire body covered with painful boils, lying on a bed lowered onto water, so that ants could not crawl up the legs of the bed and bite him. Without hands, he was helpless against the ants. His house was a ramshackle, shaky hut, which should have been condemned. Yet, he was a righteous, virtuous, devout and pious individual, *Rebbe* to Rabbi Akiva. What egregious sin could he have committed that Hashem was exacting such punishment from him?

Shocked to see their revered mentor in such a sorry state, his disciples asked him the same question, “What could you have done to warrant such Heavenly reaction? (They were acutely aware that nothing – absolutely nothing – “just happens.” It is all part of a Divine Plan.)

Rav Nachum Ish Gamzu explained that he had been approached for alms by a poor man. He had food which had to be unloaded from his donkey. He asked the poor man to wait a moment. During this time, the man died. *Rav Nachum* blamed himself, and, for penance, he asked Hashem to strike various parts of his body, because he had been slow in responding to the needs of the poor man.

We are unable to fathom the depth of sin committed by the sage. Yet, he was certain that he deserved such a painful reaction from Heaven. He understood the value of *yissurim*, affliction/pain/troubles. He comprehended their purifying value and how they spare the penitent from more intense punishment in the World to Come.

The *Tchebiner Rav*, **Horav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, zl**, was a *gaon*, brilliant Torah scholar, without peer. A saintly individual, he accepted the painful loss of four of his sons and their families during the Holocaust. Originally, following the Holocaust, he thought that they might have survived, but, with increasing time, it became apparent that his hope was without foundation. Alas, the *Tchebiner’s* loss – his sons and their families, his *yeshivah*, his writings – was but a small part of

the suffering that the greater *Klal Yisrael* had sustained. He wrote, "The pain and heartache over what befell our brothers in *Klal Yisrael* is constant. May Hashem heal our brother's hearts and may He raise up the glory of the Torah and the glory of *Am Yisrael*."

He rarely discussed his personal tragedies. *Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl*, related that he had once discussed the tragedy of the *Tchebiner Rav's* sons murder with the *Rav*, and how, if they had survived, it would have greatly altered the spiritual panorama of the world of Torah. *Rav Shlomo Zalman* continued, "When I left *Rav Dov Berish* that night, I burst into tears. This was not because his sons had been murdered, for many other *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants, had suffered a similar fate. I wept at the sight of this great and heroic man accepting his *yissurim b'ahavah*, with love. I cried when I heard him declare, 'Our G-d is a merciful Father.'"

During the twenty years that the *Tchebiner* lived in Yerushalayim, it was his custom to recite the *Pesukei D'Zimra*, opening Morning Prayer service, out loud. Every word was read from the *siddur* without raising his voice or intonation. There were two verses, however, over which he would pause. One could see him ruminating over them, the expression on his face changing ever so slightly. Then he would recite them calmly and pleasantly. The first verse was: *HaRofei l'shevurei lev, u'mechabesh l'atzvosam*, "He Who heals the broken-hearted and binds up the wounds," (*Tehillim* 147:3); and *Ad yaavor amcha Hashem, ad yaaavor am zu kanissa*, "Until Your nation, G-d, shall pass over, until this nation that You have acquired will pass" (*Shemos* 15:16).

Despite his personal losses, he was beside himself suffering over the collective pain of his people and over the pain of the *Shechinah* which was relegated to continue its exile. He waited constantly for the clarion call that would herald an end to the bitter exile with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.