

## **“This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification: he shall be brought to the Kohen.” (14:2)**

The *Kohen* has the first and last word in regard to *negaim*, plagues. *Toras Kohanim* states that it is a *gezeiras haKasuv*, Biblical edict, that the rendering of *tumah* and *taharah*, impurity or purity, is solely in the hands of the *Kohanim*. *Sforno* adds that the *Kohanim* are the ones who teach and guide the people in the spiritual dimension. Interfacing with them all will encourage the *metzora*, afflicted sinner, to repent and mend his ways.

While the *Kohen* is the decisor concerning *negaim*, *Chazal* say that “one can see/inspect all *negaim*, except his own.” Even a simple, clean-cut plague cannot be decided by the *Kohen* – if it is his own plague. This teaches us that the closer one is to an object/subject, the less objectivity he has. The ability to see clearly becomes greatly impeded. A judge may not accept *shochad*, a bribe, because bribery blinds the judge’s ability to see. In the *Talmud Kesubos* 105b, *Chazal* say that the word *shochad* is made up of the words *shehu chad*, “he becomes one”. The judge who accepts a bribe becomes “one” with the litigant, obscuring his objectivity.

The *Baal Shem Tov* takes an alternative approach to *Chazal*’s objection to one viewing and rendering judgment on his own plagues. He explains it homiletically. All plagues that a person sees *chutz*, in someone else, are a reflection of *nigei atzmo*, his own shortcomings. He goes as far as to say that one who is free of any failing will not be able to see anything wrong in another person.

*Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita*, relates that when the saintly *Belzer Rebbe, z.l.*, moved to Tel Aviv, whenever he saw a car moving on *Shabbos*, he would assume that it was a woman on the way to the hospital to deliver a baby or it was a medical emergency in transit. He could not fathom that *chilul Shabbos*, desecration of the Holy Day, was occurring. He always felt that anyone who drove on *Shabbos* only did so for a serious medical emergency.

The *Baal Shem Tov* writes that if one sees bad in another person, it is like looking at a mirror – he sees a part of himself. Consequently, he feels that one should relate to another person’s failing as he would to his own. Just as he finds a way to gloss over his own shortcomings, so, too, should he be able to seek justification for his fellow’s inappropriate behavior.

The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Isurei Biah* 19:17, writes that “all Jewish families are *b’chezkas kashrus*, in a state of purity, and one may marry into any family. If, however, a member of the family has a brazen personality, contends with everyone and does not get along with people in general, it is sufficient reason to distance oneself from that family. Furthermore, if a member of the family is always finding fault in others, questioning people’s pedigree and calling them *mamzeirim*, illegitimate – we may suspect that he himself is of illegitimate descent.”

The bottom line is that he who is always finding fault in others probably has a defective character

himself. It is this deficiency that is provoking his malignant perspective of people.

Considering the above idea, we are better able to understand a number of *Chazal's* maxims. In the *Talmud Sotah 2a*, *Chazal* say, "One who sees a *sotah*, wayward wife, *b'kilulah*, in her degradation, should prohibit wine to himself by becoming a *nazir*." While it is certainly important that one takes the *sotah's* degradation to heart, why should he become a *nazir*? He has not sinned. He just happened to be walking by when she was being publicly shamed. Is that sufficient reason for him to become a *nazir*? Whatever happened to the concept of "innocent bystander"?

*Rav Reis* explains that had there not been a serious dormant deficiency within the psyche of the innocent bystander, he would not have seen the *sotah*. The fact that he saw, that he was privy to her degradation, transforms him into a "not so" innocent bystander. Hashem is conveying a message to him – one which he should immediately act upon.

The *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* applies this idea to *Chazal's* dictum in *Pirkei Avos 4:1*, "Who is a wise man? He who learns from all men." The phrase "all men" means all men, regardless of their background and level of observance and virtue. If one notices a failing in his friend, he should take it as a message that a trace of this shortcoming is also a part of himself. Regrettably, too many of us are so obsessed with looking at our friends' failings that we disregard the message this deficit is communicating to us.