

The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin... the Kohen shall look at it and declare him contaminated. (13:3)

The *Kohen* is looking at the same *nega*, plague, – once; yet, the Torah writes that he sees/looks twice. Why is there a redundancy? The **Meshech Chochmah** offers a powerful insight to explain that, in fact, the *Kohen* is instructed to have a “double take,” look twice: once at the plague; and once at the person who manifests the plague. In the *Talmud Moed Katan* 7b, *Chazal* quote the *pasuk*, “*U'b'yom heiraos bo*; ‘On the day that healthy flesh appears in it’ (*Vayikra* 13:14).’ There are days during which you (*Kohen*) may view the *nega*, and there are days when the *Kohen* should not view the *nega*.” This teaches that a *chassan*, bridegroom, upon whom a *nega* has surfaced, is to be given (allowed to celebrate) the *shivas yemei mishtah*, seven days of festivity following the wedding. Likewise, if the *nega* were to appear right before the *Regel*, one of the three Festivals, the *metzora* is not deemed impure, so that the individual may celebrate the seven days of the Festival.

The *Meshech Chochmah* derives from here that the *Kohen* does much more than look at the plague. He must also take into consideration the time frame when this plague appears. A plague may appear to be *tamei*, ritually impure, but, until the *Kohen* declares it to be *tamei*, it is *tahor*, still pure. The *Kohen* may not declare a *chassan tamei* if it means that he will have his *sheva brachos* ruined. If a husband/father must become *tamei* prior to *Yom Tov*, it will destroy the joy of the Festival not only for him, but equally for his entire family. Therefore, the Torah writes that the *Kohen* looks at the plague – but before he declares it to be *tamei*, he must look again at the circumstances surrounding the plague. What will be the greater ramifications of his decision? Thus, the Torah instructs the *Kohen* to first look at the affliction to see if it has *simanei tumah*, signs of contamination. Then, after he has determined that indeed the affliction has all the signs of *tumah*, the *Kohen* should now look again – at the person: Is he presently up to becoming *tamei*, or, perhaps, it would be best to wait.

What an inspirational commentary! We live in an age of “egos” in a generation so overwhelmed with insecurity that many of those who are charged with making decisions act out of pressure, rather than employing basic common sense or a dose of compassion. When we discipline students, do we take into consideration the wider ramifications of our decision? Do we think how it will affect the parents, siblings, the student? Do we even care? “But if I keep this boy/girl in my school I will look bad; the school’s reputation might suffer.” The *Kohen* had to delay his “call” on the affliction, even though his “take” on it was *tamei*, but it would deprive the man and his family of the *Yom Tov*. Why should the *kallah*, bride, suffer? Let her have her week with her new husband.

I remember a few years ago making a *shivah* call to the Hellman family, who had just lost the patriarch of the family, **Rav Uri Hellman, zl**, the legendary educator and pioneer of girls’ education. There were so many stories about this great man. One episode that impacted me then and has inspired me over the years was related by his secretary. Apparently, after school started, Rav Hellman would retire to his office, close the door, and do his work. The secretary would bring

him a slice of cake and a cup of coffee. At the end of the day, she would retrieve the empty dishes. That day, *Rav* Hellman had the misfortune of having to ask a girl to leave the school. The secretary went about her daily ritual in her usual manner. This day, however, when she returned at 4:00 p.m., the cake and coffee had not yet been touched. She asked *Rav* Hellman what had happened, why he had not eaten the cake, or at least, drunk the coffee. *Rav* Hellman looked up from the *sefer* he was reading and said, "You know that I must speak today with a certain girl, and you are aware of the ramifications of this necessary decision. When I must ask a girl to leave the school, it is a fast day for me! I cannot eat! How could I eat, knowing that I am sending a Jewish girl out on the street?!"

One last story: My good friend, Rabbi Raphael Gelley, was in the Akron/Canton airport waiting to board a flight to New York. He struck up a conversation with a young soldier returning for a second tour of duty in Iraq. He asked the fellow, "What motivates you to go back?" "As long as my Commander-in-Chief (President George W. Bush) says, 'There will be no dessert in the White House until every American soldier returns home,' I will continue to fight." This is secure and sensitive leadership.