

He is to call out, “Impure, Impure!” (13:45)

Rashi explains that the reason for the declaration, *Tamei!*, *Tamei!*, is that it is a benefit for others, warning them not to come in contact with the spiritually defiled *metzora*. In the *Talmud Shabbos 67a*, *Chazal* explain that when he notifies the “world” that he is *tamei*, people will hopefully take pity and pray for him. While it is clearly commendable, how do *Chazal* derive from the words, *Tamei, Tamei, Yikra* that the *metzora* should encourage others to pray for him? It makes more sense that these words are a warning, so that people will not err and come in contact with the *metzora*.

Horav David Povarsky, zl, quotes the *Targum Onkelos* who seems to teach us something with his translation of the words. He writes, *v’la sistaavun, v’la sistaavun yikrai*, “And **you** should not become spiritually defiled, and **you** should not become spiritually defiled,’ he should call out.” On the one hand, he appears to be following *Rashi’s* rendering of the *pasuk* that the declaration is to serve as a warning. If so, why does he write *v’la sistaavun*, which is the same as *v’lo staamu*, “And you should not become *tamei*”? It is for this reason that the *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that the Torah is teaching us that the *metzora* is crying out for pity, rather than offering a warning that we protect ourselves from contamination. Otherwise, the Torah would have written *lo s’taamu*, “do not **become** *tamei*.” Instead, the Torah writes: *tamei, tamei*. The *metzora* wants us to think of him, to remember him. He is also a human being. He made a mistake. Pray for his release from his imposed seclusion, so that he can return to friends and family.

I recently had the opportunity to give a talk concerning the issues confronting Jews in restricted environments. It was entitled, “The Forgotten Jew.” This is a very real problem. There are Jews who are literally locked up, and there are those who lock themselves up, who live in self-imposed seclusion. This does not mean that they do not see the light of day. On the contrary, they attend *shul*, go to the grocery, etc., but they live a closed-book life in utter seclusion, refusing to open up to anyone. There are also shut-ins, who wait by the window for someone to visit and sit by the phone waiting for someone to call. These are society’s forgotten Jews.

Upon speaking with those who are actually locked up, whose freedom has been taken from them, the one concept that comes across – the one wish that they all have – is not to be forgotten. They seek relevance. These prisoners want to know that people still care about them, despite their misdeeds – for which they are paying a heavy price.

This is what the *metzora* asks for: Please pray for me. Please remember me. I made a tragic mistake, for which I am paying. What better way of remembering someone than by praying for him? It shows sensitivity, empathy, compassion. Above all, it shows the *metzora* that he has not been forgotten. He is still relevant.