

If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a seis, or a sapachas. (13:2)

The Torah details various forms of *tzaraas*, which is often incorrectly translated as “leprosy.” It is a spiritual illness that manifests itself in the body by displaying white spots on one’s skin, similar to leprosy. The **Sifsei Kohen** posits that the words *seis* and *sapachas* allude to two spiritual deficiencies which catalyze the *tzaraas*. *Seis* is connected to *hisnasus*, elevating/lording oneself over others, raising himself above those around him. Such a person walks with an upright gait as if to “push up against the *Shechinah*” Who towers over everyone, *melo kol ha’aretz Kevodo*, “The entire earth is filled with His Glory.” One who arrogates himself over others, pushes himself upon, thereby “cramping up against the *Shechinah*.” Hashem says, *Ein Ani v’hu yecholim ladur k’echad*, “I and he are not able to live together.”

One who is arrogant eventually belittles himself and, in time, loses his distinction. *Seis u’sapachas*; one who raises himself up ultimately become *nifchas*, diminished. *Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl*, relates a conversation he had with the *Ponevezer Rav, Horav Yosef Kahneman, zl*. The *Rav* was a close student of the **Chafetz Chaim, zl**. One day, the *Chafetz Chaim* turned to his student, “Yosha (a term of endearment for the name Yosef), you know, of course, that Hashem loves each and every Jew, despite the circumstances in which he finds himself. Once **Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl**, was learning the *Sefer Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu*, and he came across a passage in which the author cites the many attributes of Hashem. Among them he includes, *sameach b’chelko*, being happy with his lot/portion. He questions this quality. Being satisfied with one’s lot applies to a human being who, despite wanting more, settles for less and is happy with what he has. It will suffice. Hashem, however, does not have to settle. He can create anything that He wants. The concept of “settling” is foreign regarding Hashem. He either has it – or He will make it. This question so thoroughly troubled *Rav Chaim* that he decided to travel to Vilna to speak it over with his *Rebbe*, the **Gaon, zl, m’Vilna**.

The *Gaon* explained that Hashem’s *chelek*, portion/lot, is *Klal Yisrael*. Yes, we are Hashem’s portion. The Almighty wants His portion to be as perfect as possible, so that both the collective nation and each Jew individually should strive to be the paragon of perfection. Alas, it is not all in the hands of Heaven. *Chazal* teach: *Hakol b’yidei Shomayim, chutz m’yiraas Shomayim*, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven – except for fear of Heaven!” This is one quality that Hashem has given over to us. We are in control of our spiritual health. If a Jew reneges his opportunity to be a *yarei Hashem*, G-d-fearing Jew, he will not be compelled by Heaven to be observant. It is his choice. Therefore, Hashem is *sameach b’chelko*, is “pleased”/“happy”/“accepts” each and every Jew as he is. Even when we were exiled from our own home, when we lost the *Bais Hamikdash*, Temple, Hashem accompanied us throughout the millennia. From adversity to misfortune; from degradation to humiliation; from the spiritual high of Yerushalayim with the *Bais Hamikdash*, to the spiritual impurity in which we have been subjected to make our home – Hashem came along with us, *Ha’Shochein itam b’soch tumasam*, “Who resides

with them (even when they are) within their impurity.”

“If this is the case,” asked the *Chafetz Chaim*, “if Hashem tolerates our degradation and does not forsake His commitment to us, despite our wallowing in the filth of spiritual impurity, why is it that He has zero tolerance for the *baal gaavah*, the arrogant person? What makes the sin of arrogance so egregious that it stands out above/below all of the rest?”

The **Toras Chaim** (*Sanhedrin* 90a) explains the essence of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, as being manifest by the first letter of its spelling, which also happens to be that letter of the alphabet which defines it. The *tzadik* is a letter which is comprised of a *nun* – slightly bent over, with a *yud* sitting above it. The *yud* represents Hashem, the *nun* of *tzadik* is bent over to allow for Hashem’s Presence to rest on it. Together, they comprise the *tzadik*. This alludes to the notion that the righteous are a *merkavah*, chariot, for the Almighty. They are bent over – with humility, sort of to make room for the Almighty. This is how the righteous live – ever-cognizant that the Almighty is above them.

Returning to the question, the *Ponevezer Rav* was stumped. Veritably why is Hashem so offended by the *baal gaavah*, more so than any other sinner? The *Chafetz Chaim* explained, “Hashem resides among the one who is *tamei*, spiritually contaminated, because for him there is hope; he can immerse himself in pure water and become purified. Likewise, the *rasha*, wicked person, can wake up, introspect, and realize that he has spent his life wallowing in the mire of sin; his life has been one big waste. This will impress him to get his act together, make spiritual amends and repent. For him, too, there is hope.”

“The *baal gaavah* is a *tipeish*, fool.” The *Chafetz Chaim* quotes the *Ramban* in his *Iggeres*, Epistle, “*Bameh yisgaeh lev ha’adam?* ‘With what should the heart of man arrogate itself?’ If because of wealth – Hashem determines who should be poor and who should be wealthy. Is it because of his glory? Glory comes from G-d (Only He has true glory). Is it in his wisdom? Hashem can easily change that. In other words, whatever the *baal gaavah* thinks he is really comes from Hashem. He, actually, has nothing. Why is he arrogant? Obviously, he is a *shoteh*, fool. For a fool, there is no hope!”

The *Ponevezer Rav* looked up at his *Rebbe* and said, “The *Rebbe* has no idea in how much debt I am to him. The *Rebbe* actually saved me!”

“How?” asked the *Chafetz Chaim*.

“One of my *baalei batim*, lay members, asked me a question concerning the *Haggadah*. The *Haggadah* lists the four sons: the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, the one who does not know how to ask. It seems that it lists one son with its opposite. If so, it should say *chacham* – *tipeish*, fool. Why is the *rasha* the converse of the *chacham*? One is either a *tzaddik* or *rasha* – *chacham* or *tipeish*. At first, I did not know what to reply. Now, however, it all makes sense. The

chacham prayed to Hashem asking, ‘Hashem, please have pity on me. I have only one request; Please do not place me next to the *tipeish*. I am willing to be with the *rasha*. I know what he is, and I can prepare myself by making the necessary effort to distance myself from him. Even bumping into the *tipeish* by chance, however, can be harmful. I fear being anywhere in his proximity.’” Hashem listened.