

This is the law for every tzaraas affliction... to rule/teach about which day it is impure and on which day it is purified. (14:54,57)

Toras Kohanim quotes Chanina ben Chachinai who asks why the Torah uses the word, *l'horos*, which primarily means "to teach." He explains that a *Kohen* may not view and determine the contamination of a plague unless he had first been taught by his *rebbe*. It is no different than a medical student who must be taught the various intricacies of medicine "hands on". The above issue is reflected in recent rabbinic discussions concerning the *halachic* attitude towards the time-honored approach to medical education of bedside rounds. This involves performing activities of clinical care at a patient's bedside.

The *Netziv*, *zl*, focuses on the words "to teach." He cites the *Raavad* who explains that the *Kohen* would show the affliction to the student-*Kohanim* in town in order to teach them how to identify *tzaraas*. Thus, the patient/*metzora* becomes the text for student instruction. In his *Tzitz Eliezer*, *Horav Eliezer Waldenberg, zl*, explains that the *Netziv* is referring specifically to the case of *tzaraas* where there is a punitive aspect to the illness. Thus, he rules that, "This is the law of *tzaraas*," is not a general policy of medical education. *Tzaraas* is not a medical disease, but rather a manifestation of Hashem's displeasure with the *metzora's* violation of the laws of appropriate speech, as well as for his flagrant gossiping and embarrassing others. Thus, the bedside education received by the student-*Kohanim* is a form of atonement for the embarrassment he has caused others. Clearly, having one's body on display for a group of students can be quite embarrassing.

Rav Waldenberg rules that while it is appropriate in the case of *tzaraas*, the physician must request the patient's permission prior to entering the room and using his/her body for study purposes. While it is certainly true that physicians learn much from their bedside interaction with the patient, it cannot come at the patient's expense.

There are contemporary medical professionals, well-versed in *Halachah*, who debate this ruling. They contend that the *Netziv's psak*, *halachic* decision, applies to **all** illnesses. He concludes more as an afterthought that concerning *tzaraas*, the afflicted person has a penance issue to experience, so this might even be good for him.

After all is said and done, respect for the privacy of a fellow Jew – especially one who is bedridden and, thus, in emotional turmoil – is a basic *halachic* value, as well as an ethical concern. Addressing the emotional well-being of a patient is almost as important as his/her physical condition. A physician's bedside manner, as well as the respect he/she gives the patient plays an important role in the recovery process. If someone is made to "feel good," they want to be healthy. It is plain common sense.