

## This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purifications: He shall be brought to the Kohen. (14:2)

Modesty, privacy, *hatznea leches*, is a principle to which we should all adhere. The *Navi Michah* exhorts us to “walk modestly with Hashem” (*Michah* 6:8). When a person acts modestly in public, it is easier to feel a sense of pride and have ulterior motives (even) when serving Hashem. When a person acts modestly in private, these ulterior motives are not an issue, since no one sees him.

The *Noam Elimelech* observes that this is true only when one wishes to come close to Hashem via his service. He must walk on the path of modesty. The *baal teshuvah*, penitent, who originally had transgressed publicly with such sins as slander, defamation of character, and evil speech must necessarily repent in public as well. This follows the *halachah* of *K’bo’lo kach polto*, “in the manner in which it was swallowed, so it is expelled” (*Pesachim* 30b). According to this law, in the same manner that a forbidden thing is either ingested or absorbed, it is expelled. Thus, a sin that is committed in private should have its repentance performed in private, hidden from people. A sin that was committed publicly, flagrantly, should have its repentance, likewise, performed on the public stage.

This is all fine from the perspective of atoning for the sin, but how can *teshuvah* be carried out publicly, where there is the issue of ulterior motives with which to contend? If the penitent is “plagued” by ulterior motives, the attention grabbing aspect of the public domain is seriously undermined and his act of repentance flawed.

The *Lishensker* (*Noam Elimelech/Rebbe Elimelech* of Lishensk) explains that this is why the *metzora* must go to the righteous leader, the *Kohen*, whose life is devoted unequivocally to Hashem and His service. When one comes in contact with such spiritual integrity as evinced by the *Kohen*, who stands at the apex of spiritual demeanor, the penitent no longer has thoughts of ulterior motives. The *Rebbe* explains that the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination (which is the force behind the ulterior motives), has no power when a totally righteous person challenges it. Furthermore, the *baal teshuvah* observes the actions of the *tzaddik* and is so inspired that ulterior motives do not play a role in his life. Indeed, he is inspired to ask himself, “How can I take pride in my deeds (ulterior motives), when I compare them to the actions of the true *tzaddik*?”

The Torah teaches us: “This is the law of the *metzora* – on the day” (daylight/publicly), when he publicly and openly repents. And if you might question this publicity, because he might become haughty from the public display – he first goes to the *Kohen*, in whose presence he will be relieved of any traces of ulterior motives.

In his *Aznaim La’Torah*, *Horav Zalman Sorotzkin*, *zl*, asks how we reconcile the *metzora* going to the *Kohen* with, *V’yatza ha’Kohen michutz la’machaneh*, “And the *Kohen* shall go outside of the camp.” If we bring the *metzora* to the *Kohen*, why does the *Kohen* have to go out of the camp (so

to speak to “greet” him)? The *Lutzker Rav* explains that the *metzora* cannot come into the camp, due to the fact that he is still in a state of *tumah*, ritual impurity. Until the *Kohen* views the plague and renders it pure, the *metzora's tumah*, impurity, remains in full force. The Torah teaches us an important *chiddush*, novel idea. The *Kohen* goes to a designated place located outside of the camp. The *metzora*, however, comes first and waits until the *Kohen* arrives.

This procedure is executed in this manner, because *tzaraas* (for the most part) is brought upon a person due to *gasus ha'ruach*, vulgarity, pompousness. (These coarse qualities lead to *lashon hora*.) If the *Kohen* were to arrive first, the *metzora* might, in his pompous mind, conjecture that the *Kohen* must wait for “him.” He is the greater of the two. Instead, the *metzora* goes and waits for the *Kohen*. This should diminish his arrogance. The *metzora* is brought to the *Kohen*, but he waits in the designated place for the arrival of the *tzaddik* who will purify him.

One observation: It is eye-opening how self-centered an individual can be. The *metzora* is *tamei*, having ritually contaminated himself with his vulgar attitude and slanderous tongue. Now, after the period of quarantine and its accompanying embarrassment, the *metzora* is still plagued by his overbearing ego, to the point that if the *Kohen* would arrive before him, he (the *metzora*) might delude himself into thinking that the *Kohen* is waiting for “him”! This is the meaning of *gasus ha'ruach*. Even when all the cards are stacked against him, and he has suffered humiliation, his ego does not deflate. The same ego which is the foundation upon which one's self-esteem is built can simultaneously be the most self-destructive quality which can catalyze his downfall.

Why does the *Kohen* have such power? How does his mere presence, the face to face between the *metzora* and the *Kohen* transform the *metzora's* arrogance into sheepish submission? A similar instance is found in *Megillas Esther*, which relates the inability of Haman *ha'rasha* to tolerate the existence of Mordechai *ha'tzaddik*, to the point of obsession. *V'chol zeh einenu shove li*; “Yet all this means nothing to me” (*Megillas Esther* 5:13) (as long as I see Mordechai, etc.). What was it about Mordechai that extinguished Haman's arrogance? What undermined this evil man's power, rendering it worthless? I heard an insightful explanation. Mordechai represents *emes*, absolute, pristine truth. Living a life guided fully by Torah imbues one with an unabashed intolerance for *sheker*, falsehood. Likewise, falsehood cannot function in the presence of *emes*. Haman personified falsehood. Mordechai lived *emes*. Thus, Haman simply could not live in Mordechai's presence. Suddenly his life had no meaning, no value. It was all a sham. When he saw Mordechai, he began to lose control of himself. Likewise, when the *metzora* stands before the righteous *Kohen*, his preconceived notion of “self” dissipates as he transitions into meek submission. This is the power of truth.