

And declare to the Kohen, saying: “Something like an affliction appeared to me in the house.” (14:35)

Chazal (*Arachin* 16a) teach that leprous (spiritually induced) marks (*tzaraas*) afflict a person for seven sinful matters: malicious speech; bloodshed; an oath taken in vain; immoral prohibited relations; arrogance/vulgarity; theft; stinginess. (I have taken the liberty of translating *gasus ha’ruach* as both arrogance and vulgarity, because the arrogant person is vulgar – even if he does not realize it.) The *Tosefta* (*Negaim* 6:6) interprets the word *leimor*, saying (in the above *pasuk*), as applying to the *Kohen*; he says to the afflicted person: “Go home and introspect your actions/behavior and repent your ways, because the *tzaraas* affliction is only visited upon a person as a result of *gasus ha’ruach*.”

We have before us two *Chazals*: one which enumerates seven reasons for *tzaraas*; and one which selects only one of those seven. Is it one or seven? Furthermore, if the *Kohen* delineates the reason for the affliction, why must the *metzora* go home to introspect? He has been told the reason for his diagnosis. Obviously, he should eliminate *gasus ha’ruach* from his character. Why look for more trouble?

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, explains that *gasus ha’ruach* is the root of all the evil which the remaining six sins perpetrate. The afflicted person should introspect how it all reverts back to his arrogance and vulgarity. Since he thinks he is better, he may be obnoxious, take advantage, do what he wants, regardless of who is hurt. His pernicious attitude towards those for whom he has no need speaks volumes about his deficient character. He does not dislike anyone, because no one is sufficiently “worthy” of his dislike! One who is guilty of *gasus ha’ruach* is highly likely to be culpable for the other six sins.

A person’s *middos*, character traits, determine how he will act. The type of person he is influences his behavior – morally, spiritually and ethically. *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, gives a powerful *mashal*, analogy. A city was suffused with counterfeit money. The police searched all over for the perpetrator of the crime. One day, the police had a lead which panned out, and they caught the man with thirteen packages of bills – straight from the printer! They arrested both the offender and the counterfeiter who was producing the fake money. They had all the proof necessary to charge them, and it did not take long before the judge issued his ruling: the criminal who was passing out the money was sentenced to one year behind bars, while the printer was given a seven-year sentence. The printer complained bitterly concerning his sentence, which he claimed was unfair. “What did I do?” he yelled. He felt that, if the “real” criminal had been given one year, he, the “simple” printer, should have been sentenced to (maybe) one week. The judge explained, “The law prohibits the dispersal of counterfeit money. True, you had no money with you when you were apprehended, but you are the printer, who at any time can go to your place of business and print thousands of dollars that are really worthless. Indeed, you should be given an even greater sentence!”

This is what *middos* are all about. They are the source of everything good and bad which we do. A person who is plagued with vulgarity has various paths in which he can act out his contemptuous character. The *Kohen* instructs him to go home, sit down alone and think about his life and how he lives, and he will see that it all heralds back to his unconscionable arrogance. If he does not stop now, he might one day very well be guilty of murder.

Rav Galinsky cites the *Shem MiShmuel* who quotes his father, the *Avnei Nezer*, who posits that based upon the *Rabbinic* maxim, *aveirah goreres aveirah*, "One sin causes another sin" (*Pirkei Avos* 4:2), it would not be appropriate to punish the perpetrator completely for his sin. After all, it is the end product of a previous infraction. Why should he be held accountable for it? Everything should be heaped on the first sin, since it created the sinner's laundry list of sins.

The *Chafetz Chaim* supports this with an insightful analogy. A group of businessmen were traveling to the *yerid*, monthly market, where sellers from all over would gather to purchase their wares at a low wholesale price. They would then return home and sell these items at a profit. Indeed, one who was fortunate to buy well could earn enough profit to support himself and his family for a year. Unfortunately, the *yerid* did not always take place during the warm, dry summer months. It often occurred in the midst of the winter, causing buyers and sellers to travel on dangerous slippery roads which often were not visible due to the depth of the snow. This night was no different. The caravan of businessmen, one coach after another, was groping its way on the snow-packed roads, knowing that one bad turn could spell disaster. If roads were treacherous during the day, it was much more so at night. The group decided to call it quits and stop at the nearest inn for dinner and a night's sleep.

As dawn was breaking, one of the hardy businessmen decided that he was not about to arrive late at the *yerid*. Arriving in the afternoon meant losing a half day's opportunity for earning money. He decided to leave on his own. Aware that it was bitter cold outside and knowing that his wagon had no "heat," he fortified himself with a few shots of vodka and set out for the *yerid*. It was still dark outside, the fellow had been tired to begin with, and augmented by a few belts from the bottle, he dozed off, allowing for the horse to "decide" which path to take. No path existed, however, so the horse made its own. Right, right and another right, and they were, unbeknownst to the driver, on the way back to the inn.

Meanwhile, the other businessmen woke up, *davened*, ate a hearty breakfast and set out for the *yerid*. They, too, could not find the road, but they were "fortunate" enough to locate the tracks left by the other wagon. They would just follow along and arrive safely at the *yerid*. As the reader knows, however, those tracks led back to the inn. By following the other fellow's tracks, they compounded his error and lost out – as did he.

Aveirah goreres aveirah; the first sin begins the plunge, and the ensuing sins just follow blindly along. Unless the first sin is addressed and neutralized, the domino effect can be devastating.