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A Change of Perspective

Towards the end of *Parshas Tazria*, the *Torah* writes regarding the laws of garments inflicted with *Tzara'as*, "The *Kohen* shall look after the affliction has been washed, and behold! – the affliction has not changed its color (*ha'nega lo hafach es eyno*) and the affliction has not spread, it is contaminated..." (*Vayikra* 13:55). A number of questions can be raised regarding the *Torah's* use of the word "*hafach*" (commonly translated as "reverse") and the word "*eyno* – color."

The *Chiddushei HaRim* interprets the words "*haNega lo hafach es eyno*" in a literal sense to mean that the affliction did not change its "*ayin*." Many commentators point out the relationship between the word *nega* (spelled *nun gimmel ayin*), meaning affliction, and the word *oneg* (spelled *ayin nun gimmel*), meaning enjoyment. The two words are made up of identical letters. The only difference between them is where the letter *ayin* is placed. Is the *ayin* at the beginning of the word (as in *oneg*-enjoyment) or at the end of the word (as in *nega*-affliction/lesion)?

The point, according to the *Chiddushei HaRim*, is that whether something is an affliction (*nega*) or it is a pleasure (*oneg*), all depends on where one places the *ayin* (the eye). Many things in life depend on a person's perspective. Something can happen that appears to be a blemish, an illness, an affliction. Depending on how a person views the situation, the event can be transformed. With the proper perspective and insight, a person can see this same incident as an *oneg* – a delight. As we often say,

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Mr. Jeffrey Ganeles
Teacher

Seeing One's Own Faults

Parshas Tazria presents the laws of *tzara'as*, a skin disease that would appear upon a person as a result of the sin of *lashon hara*. A person who discovered an infection on his skin would go to the *Kohen*, who would inspect it and determine whether or not it was indeed *tzara'as*.

The *Mishna* states, "*Kol ha'nega'im adam ro'eh chutz mi'nig'ei atzmo* – a person sees all infections, except for his own infections." This refers to a *Kohen* who discovers *tzara'as* on his own skin. Although he is empowered to inspect *tzara'as* infections on all other people and determine their status, he is not permitted to pass judgment on a lesion found on his own body.

This *Halacha* teaches us a very important lesson in human nature. People notice the faults of others, but not their own. When it comes to other people, a person can draw up a long list of character flaws. Regarding one's own faults, however, he always manages to find some justification. We tend to be blind to our own shortcomings, while being keenly aware of the faults of others. This aforementioned attitude is very dangerous. If a person never takes notice of his own shortcomings, he can never work to improve himself.

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Aaron Kattan
Senior

Three Blinding Sins

**Daniel
Sobin**
Junior

Parshas Tazria discusses the *chukim*, or seemingly incomprehensible laws of *tzara'as*. The *Chachamim* rationalize the *negaim*, the affliction of *tzara'as*, as punishment for a number of aveiros. Among these aveiros are *lashon hara*, envy, and murder, as stated in *Maseches Arachin*. Rav Yosef Dov Soleveitchik explained the *tzara'as* lesions through three scriptural terms used to express different forms of *tzara'as*: *se'es*, *sapachas* and *baheres*. The *Midrash Rabba* on *Tazria* expounds upon these three terms connecting them to different oppressive monarchies. It states that *Se'es* references *Bavel*, as it is written "*Vinese'es hamashal hazeh al melech bavel.*" *Sapachas* refers to *Medai*, where *Haman Harasha* came from, "*shesaf cenachash,*" as he crawled like a snake on his belly. *Baheres* is Greece, "*shehaysa mevheres begzeroseha,*" they were conspicuous in their decrees against *Bnei Yisroel*.

Se'es is a punishment for the sin of arrogance. *Nevuchadnezzar* set up idols and commanded everyone to bow to down to him. The *Chachamim* note that the root of all sin is *gaavah*, or arrogance. By nature, people want to boost their egos. Thus they are lead on the wrong path to sin. This can be seen regarding King *Yeravam*. The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* says that *Yeravam* was one of the biggest Torah scholars of his generation. What led him to sin? What led him to set up *Avodah zara* statues in *Dan* and *Beis-Kel*? The answer is simple. He was corrupted by his arrogance. *Yeravam* was so scared that the people would return to *Rechavam*, the competing Jewish king, that his ego blinded him to set up idols and lead the people to stray from *Hashem*. *Yeravam* was so corrupted by his ego that he chose earthly desires over divine will. The *Gemara* relates an *Aggadadic* incident, where *Hakodosh Baruch Hu* grabbed *Yeravam* by his garment and told him to recant his evil ways, saying, "If you do so, I, yourself and the son of *Yishai* (*Dovid HaMelech*) will take a stroll in Gan Eden." *Yeravam* responded by saying, "Who will go first?" to which *Hashem* responded, "the son of *Yishai* will go first." *Yeravam* replied that he was not interested in *Hashem's* offer. *continued on page 3*

Seeing One's Own Faults *continued*

He will always remain spiritually complacent and stagnant. For this reason, many great Rabbis made a point of assigning others to come and offer them rebuke. The *Vilna Gaon*, probably the greatest person alive in his time, hired the *Dubno Maggid*, a scholar of the human condition to come and criticize him. The *Maharshal* would hire a cabdriver, a simple Jew, to tell him what he was doing wrong. It is told that the *Chiddushei Ha'Rim*, one of the great Chassidic masters, left the Yeshiva in Kozhnitz where he had studied, because he was constantly told there of how great a student he was and how he was guaranteed a large share in *Olam Ha'ba*. He found it necessary to move to a different Yeshiva, where he would be informed of his faults and shown where he had room for improvement, rather than be complimented for his greatness. These Rabbis understood human nature, the natural tendency to take note of everyone's faults except for one's own, and therefore they ensured to have somebody point out to them their shortcomings.

The Rabbis instruct us to love those who offer us rebuke, and to be wary of those who compliment us. Although compliments and praise make a person feel good, they cause him to become complacent, rather than working to improve. The *Mishna* in *Avos* tells us, "Make for yourself a Rabbi, and acquire for yourself a friend." A "friend" is not a person with whom to socialize. A friend is somebody who, like a Rabbi, offers constructive criticism. Without such a friend, a person can never grow and will never learn of his faults and imperfections.

A story is told of a physician who informed his patient that he suffered from a serious disease. "This is not a nice thing to say," the patient replied. "Why don't you tell me something positive and favorable?" The doctor, of course, reminded the patient that his intention is only to help him by giving an accurate diagnosis so that the problem could be properly treated.

The same is true of criticism. Many people don't like to hear criticism from a Rabbi. But this is the Rabbi's job. Like the doctor, he is responsible for informing people when something is wrong, where there is a problem that demands attention. Rav Yisrael Salanter would say that a Rabbi who does not make his congregants feel uneasy when he speaks from the pulpit is not doing his job. His job is not to tell the people how great they are, but rather to point out where they have room for improvement. Criticism, like a physician's diagnosis, can only help a person by showing him the faults that he could never see on his own.

A Change of Perspective *continued*

there are those that see the glass half empty and there are those that see the glass half full. This is the difference between *nega* and *oneg*.

Perhaps we can now better understand the above pasuk. When the pasuk says that the “affliction did not switch his *ayin*” (*lo hafach haNega es ayino*), it means (homiletically) that the person’s attitude did not change. The person’s perspective was not yet reversed. The *Gemara* states in *Masechet Erechin* that one of the reasons why *Tzara’as* afflicts a person is because of “*tzaras ayin*”. *Tzaras ayin* is the inability of a person to look at things positively. A person who is a *tzar ayin* is narrow in his outlook. He looks with a jaundiced eye at anyone else’s success. Consequently, the person is likely to speak poorly of others, resulting in the contraction of *Tzara’as*. In order for the *Tzara’as* to be completely cured it necessitates a change in the root cause of its contraction- namely the person’s perspective on the world around him. *Tzara’as* is an affliction in which one’s “true colors” are distorted somewhat. Only a reversal of one’s eye (attitude) can cause the *Tzara’as* to subside and allow one’s pure true colors to shine.

Three Blinding Sins *continued*

This incident shows how *Yeravam* was so engulfed in his own arrogance that it destroyed him. His *Gaavah* caused him to give up on a chance for salvation. This is what the Midrash is implying about the King of *Bavel*. He was so engulfed with material wealth and honor that he was corrupted from truth.

Sapachas is the sin of the loss of dignity, and is reflected by *Medai* and the archetypical anti-semitic from *Medai*, *Haman*. He was like a snake, as he possessed fawning personality spiced with arrogance. He was a spineless man, which caused him to use flattering terms with *Achashverosh* and even *Esther* (after she exposed him). Like other haughty people, he did not realize how base he actually was. From the root of the word *ga’ah*, which means pride or honor, come two words, one negative and one positive. The negative is *ga’avah*, which, as we explained, is arrogance. The positive is *ge’us*, which is a term that describes *Hashem*, as it is written, “*Hashem malach ge’us lavesh - Hashem reigns; He dons grandeur.*” We have to attempt to imitate *G-d*’s attribute of *ge’us* and overcome our desire to have *ga’avah*. *Haman* was full of *ga’avah*, not *ge’us*, as he couldn’t comprehend that *Achashverosh* would grant reward to someone other than himself. On the other hand *Mordechai*, a man who viewed life from a Torah perspective, had no desire for *ga’avah*. He had to allow himself to be honored, because that was the will of the king. Yet after *Haman* took him around on the horse, he returned to wearing his sackcloth. Since *Mordechai* possessed *ge’us*, the royal horse and fame did were ancillary, not the focus of his life.

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Taking the Initiative

The standard *Haftora* for *Parshas Tazria* tells us the story of *Na’aman*, the General of *Aram*. *Na’aman* is stricken with *tzara’as* and is only cured of it when he followed the suggestion of *Elisha HaNavi* and bathed in the *Yarden*. While *Elisha* refuses payment for his advice, *Gechazi*, *Elisha*’s servant, extracts payment from *Na’aman* and, in doing so, he is “*Mechalel Shem Shamayim.*” Consistent with *Hashem*’s policy, *Gechazi* is stricken with *tzara’as*, *midah k’neged midah*.

**Moshe
Fink
Junior**

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Three Blinding Sins *continued*

The third and final form of *tzara'as* is *baheres*. As stated above, *baheres* is represented by Greece. The ancient Greeks stated, "Write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the *G-d* of Israel." Why did they write this on an ox? The ox is a symbol of agriculture. The Greeks did not want to completely destroy Judaism. Rather, they attempted to make it external, as if it was inscribed on the outside of a horn. They wanted to make Judaism into an external religion driven by aesthetics. This is *baheres*. The Greeks focused on the outside of the object, not its essence. The Rav pointed out that many Rabbis weren't great speakers, but rather it was their essence that was so great. This is epitomized by *Moshe Rabbeinu* who himself was inarticulate. *Bilaam*, on the contrary, was an excellent speaker, but *Bnei Yisrael* did not fall to the danger of *baheres*. They did not flock after outer beauty. Rather, they adhered to the essence of life, Torah.

Taking the Initiative *continued*

Ultimately, the *Mishna* tells us, *Gechazi* loses his *chelek* in *Olam Haba*, for continuing on a life path that lacked *Yir'as Shamayim*.

Gechazi's sorry narrative continues in the *Haftora* of *Parshas Tazria* where *Gechazi* appears again, still as a *metzora*, one afflicted with *tzara'as*, along with his sons who are similarly afflicted. The Arameans had been set to attack *Yerushalayim* at dawn. Viewing themselves as done for, he and his sons wander into the camp of *Aram*. They find the Arameans have fled due to a miracle wrought by *Hashem*. *Gechazi* immediately informs the king of the Arameans' flight and in doing so, the *Navi* tells us, he is able to facilitate a great victory for *Bnei Yisrael*. *Chizkiyahu* and the city are saved. How can such a great victory been accomplished and accredited to one who was such a *Rasha*? Shouldn't salvation and its rewards be effected through the actions of righteous people?

A similar question may be asked on a *Midrash* that appears on *Parshas Beshalach*. *Moshe* instructs *Yehoshua*, to choose "anashim" – men – and "go and fight with Amalek." Rabbi *Yochanan* and Rabbi *Elazar* argue. One says that "men" means soldiers and the other says "men" means individuals who are *G-d* fearing.

We can understand how a war can be fought with soldiers. But how can one expect *Yehoshua* to walk into the *Beit Midrash* and take inexperienced *yeshiva* boys and expect them to fight a war against the trained armies of *Amalek*?

The answer to these two questions may appear in a *Ramban* on *Parshas Vayakhel*. The *Ramban* questions how the Jewish people, who for 210 years did back breaking work that involved "bricks and mortar" in Egypt, were able to do artistic work that required precision and skill for the *Mishkan*. Where did the *Bnei Yisrael* learn how to cut precious stones, weave delicate garments and cast gold and silver? The *Ramban* teaches us an important lesson. When a person really believes in *G-d* and commits himself to do His work, *Hashem* gives him the skill and ability to accomplish what he sets out to do. Because the artisans in the desert desired a *Mishkan* and they showed up with full intention to build it, *Hashem* gave them the ability to do so. Similarly, men that go out to war recognizing that it is *G-d* and not man who wages war are victorious against steep odds.

While there were very religious people in the time of *Chizkiyahu*, none of them took the initiative to march on the camp of *Aram*. Because *Gechazi*, albeit a *rasha*, takes the initiative, *Bnei Yisrael* were victorious and he was credited with the victory. Many believe that the State of Israel has no validity because it was envisioned and established by antireligious Zionists. Perhaps we can suggest otherwise. The incident of *Gechazi* and his three sons teaches us that when the righteous people do not stand up to insure salvation for the Jewish people, *G-d* rewards the actions of the less righteous and those devoid of religion to secure his plan. As such, the formation of the State of Israel, at the hands of *G-dless* men may not be a contradiction to Jewish thought or Torah tradition.

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