

Tazria

Almost the whole of Parshat Tazria speaks at great length about the plague of *Tzaraas*—leprosy—that may afflict man. We are taught that if a "*Tzaraas*" is suspected it must be brought before a Kohen for examination.

This physical condition, our Rabbis teach, is a medium of atonement for a sin committed, namely "*Loshon Horah*," failing to guard one's tongue. For this reason, they explain, the afflicted was to be placed in solitary confinement to reflect and to arouse a feeling of "*Teshuvah*," penitence.

The Mishna says that "a man cannot view his own affliction even if he is a Kohen himself. He may be the greatest expert in the field; yet, he may not judge his own *Nega*. On the other hand, even a Kohen who is a simpleton and must be prompted by another may pronounce a *Nega-Tahor* or *Jameh* (pure or impure). The implication of this transcends its simple meaning. Metaphorically speaking, all our personal shortcomings might be included. No man can objectively view his own *deficiencies*.

In the act of "*Lashon Horah*," speaking evil of another, his deficiencies are publically discussed. It is simple for any one of us to be shocked by the poor manners of another, to be repelled by his arrogance and nigerliness, or to be dismayed by his clumsiness and ineptness. We see his shortcomings with clarity and feel compelled, in the interest of truth, to point them out. No sooner, however, does our gaze become introspective than we become blind. Our vision suddenly becomes myopic, blurred. Those same shortcomings that could not escape our detection in others become virtues in ourselves.

What then does the Parsha of Tazria teach us? One obvious lesson is how one must view the shortcomings of another and how to view our own. In recognizing the deficiencies of another we must be nearsighted and be unable to detect them at a respectable distance. Only the Kohen, properly trained to be the "*Ysh HaChesed*," the man of kindness, may personally tell another of his fault. So,

too, the Kohanim in our day, the "*avdei Hashem*" must assume this burdensome task. The *Metzora*, however, must learn the humility necessary to see others in a gentle and positive light. It is our own failings that we should scrutinize carefully and not unlike the *Metzora*, to contemplate and reflect upon them so that they may be corrected.