



TAZRIA-METZORA

The Art of Loving Rebuke

How to Correct Others without Hurting Them

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

TAZRIA-METZORA

The Torah portions of *Tazria* and *Metzora* continue the discussion of the laws of *tumah vetaharah*: ritual impurity and purity.

A woman who has given birth should undergo a process of purification, which includes immersing in a *mikveh* (a naturally gathered pool of water) and bringing offerings to the Holy Temple. All male infants are to be circumcised on the eighth day of life.

Tzaraat (often mistranslated as “leprosy”) is a supernatural plague that can afflict people as well as garments or homes. If white or pink patches appear on a person’s skin (dark pink

or dark green in garments or homes), a *Kohen* is summoned. Judging by various signs, such as an increase in size of the afflicted area after a seven-day quarantine, the *Kohen* pronounces it *tamei* (impure) or *tahor* (pure).

A person afflicted with *tzaraat* must dwell alone outside of the camp (or city) until he or she is healed. The afflicted area in a garment or home must be removed; if the *tzaraat* recurs, the entire garment or home must be destroyed.

When the *metzora* (the person who has *tzaraat*) heals, he or she is purified by the *Kohen* with a special procedure involving two birds, spring water in an earthen vessel, a piece of cedar wood, a scarlet thread, and a bundle of hyssop.

Ritual impurity is also engendered through a seminal or other discharge in a man and menstruation or other discharge of blood in a woman, necessitating purification through immersion in a *mikveh*.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

What is the most effective way to bring someone's faults to their attention without offending them?



מְצוֹרֶע — person with *tzaraat*

metzora

צָרַעַת — “leprosy”

tzaraat



Only a *Kohen* was authorized to declare someone a *metzora*.

TEXT 1A

Leviticus 13:2

אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ שֵׁאת אוֹ סַפַּחַת אוֹ
בַּהֶרֶת וְהָיָה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרְעַת, וְהוּבָא אֶל
אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים.

If a person has a lesion called *se'et*, *sapachat*, or *baheret* on the skin of their flesh, and it forms a lesion of *tzaraat* on the skin of their flesh, they should be brought to Aaron the priest or one of his sons, the *Kohanim*.

TEXT 1B

Mishnah, Nega'im
3:1

הַכֹּל כְּשָׂרִים לְרֹאוֹת אֶת הַנִּגְעִים, אֲלָא שְׁהַטְמְאָה
וְהַטְהַרָה בְּיַדֵּי כֹהֵן. אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: אָמַר טָמֵא, וְהוּא
אוֹמַר טָמֵא. אָמַר טָהוֹר, וְהוּא אוֹמַר טָהוֹר.

Everyone [who is trained] is fit to examine the blemish; however, authority over proclaiming one impure or pure rests with the priest. The experts instruct the priest to declare one impure, and the priest proclaims, "Impure." Or the experts instruct the priest to declare one pure, and the priest proclaims, "Pure."

Regardless of age or eyesight, a *Kohen* in charge can make the **declaration.**



TEXT 1C

Maimonides,
Mishneh Torah, Laws
of Impurity Imparted
by *Tzaraat* 9:2

אֶפְלוּ הָיָה הַכֹּהֵן קָטָן אוֹ שׁוֹטֵה - הֶחֱכָם
אוֹמֵר לוֹ, וְהוּא מִחְלִיט אוֹ פּוֹטֵר אוֹ סוֹגֵר.

Even if the *Kohen* was blind or a minor, the expert would tell him [what to say] and the *Kohen* would quarantine, release, or isolate the patient.

QUESTIONS

Why can't the expert who determines the diagnosis pronounce it? Why do we need a *Kohen*, especially if he isn't an expert? If the *Kohen* knows nothing about lesions, or worse, if the *Kohen* is a child or blind, how can he contribute?

ANSWER

It is a Divine decree that only a *Kohen* has the authority to declare purity or impurity.

TEXT 2

Rashi, Leviticus 13:2

גְּזֵרַת הַכֹּתוּב הִיא שְׂאִין טִמְאַת
נִגְעִים וְטִהַרְתָּן אֱלֹא עַל פִּי כֹהֵן.

It is a Divine decree that the authority to pronounce the purity or impurity of a lesion rests with the *Kohen*.

TEXT 3A

Rabbi Ovadiah
Seforno,
Deuteronomy 21:5

"וְעַל פִּיהֶם יִהְיֶה כָּל רִיב וְכָל נֶגַע" (דְּבָרִים כ"א, ה).

בְּאוֹפֶן שֶׁהֵם בְּקִיָּאִים בְּדַרְכֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם וּמְזִיגֵיהֶם כְּמוֹ שֶׁרָאוּ הֵם
וְאַבוֹתֵיהֶם, וְאוֹלֵי יַכִּירוּ מִי גִתְלִכְלִךְ בְּחֶטָּא זֶה בִּידִיעַת דְּרָכָיו
וּמַעֲלָלָיו, וַיִּתְגַּלֶּה הַדָּבָר.

"By their mouth, every controversy and lesion will be judged"
(Deuteronomy 21:5).

Priests, who served on the court for generations, developed an expertise in human attitudes and human nature. Thus, they could often identify and bring the guilty party to light by examining their ways and exploits.



The *Kohen* recognized the problem and guided the person toward *teshuvah*.

TEXT 3B

Rabbi Yair Moshe
Wolf, *Divrei Daat*
(Jerusalem, 2015), p.
145

וְצָרִיד לָבֹא לַכֹּהֵן, שֶׁהַכֹּהֵן יִבְחֵין עַל אֵיזָה
חֵטָא בָּא הַנֶּגַע וְיִוְכִיחֵנוּ לְחַזֹּר בְּתַשׁוּבָה.

The afflicted were required to come to the priest so that the priest could determine which sin they were guilty of. The priest would then urge and guide them to repent.

The *Kohanim* guide us along the right path

Because they love the Jewish people.

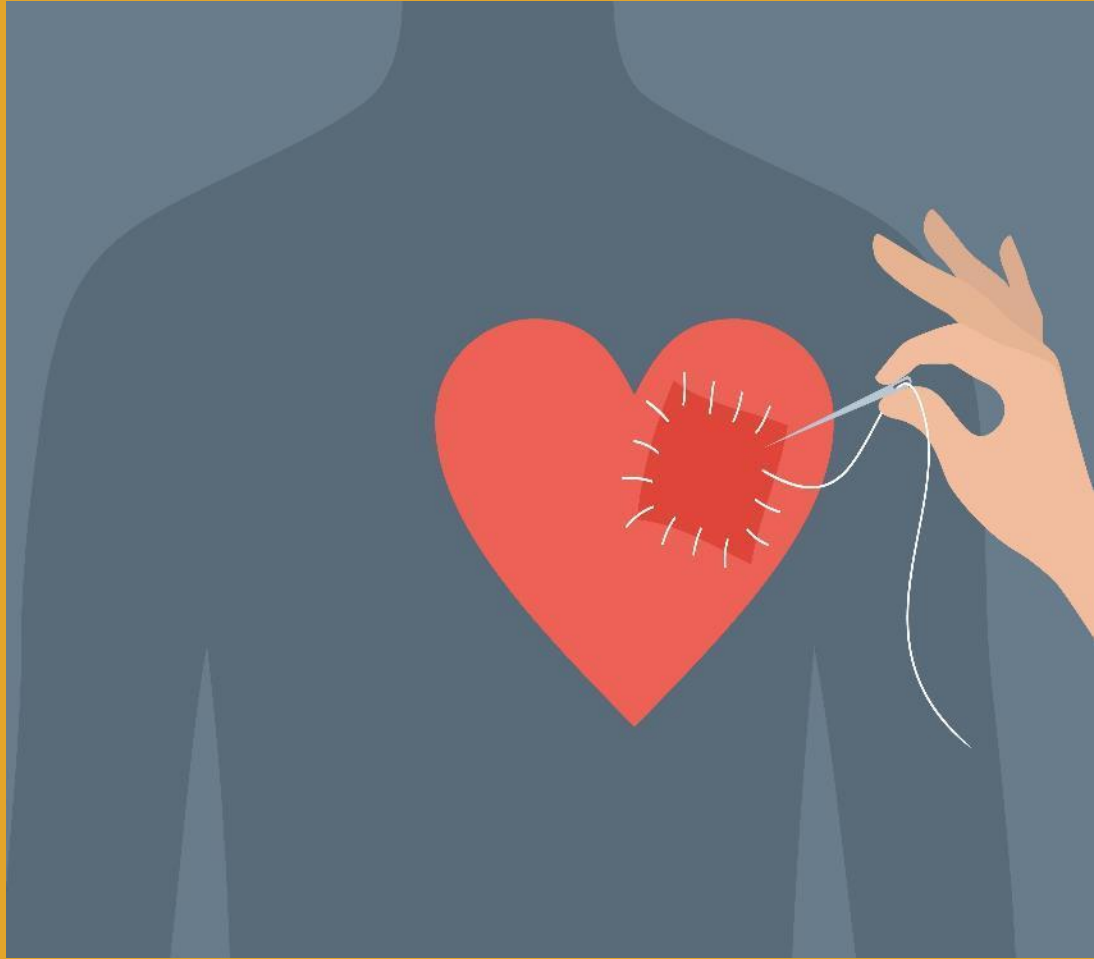


TEXT 4

Mishnah, Avot 1:12

הָיִי מִתְּלִמְדָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף
שְׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה.

Be among the disciples of Aaron, the High Priest: a lover of peace, and a pursuer of peace, and a lover of all people, who drew them close to the Torah.



Guided by his inherent love, the *Kohen* was the perfect guide to heal the fractures that *lashon hara* (evil speech) caused.

TEXT 5

Rabbi Shlomo
Ephraim ben Aharon
of Luntshitz, *Keli
Yakar*, Vayikra 13:2

אִין טְהָרְתוּ כִּי אִם עַל יְדֵי כֹהֵן . . . כִּי חֵטָא הִלְשׁוֹן
גּוֹרֵם כָּל רִיב, וְכָל נִגְעַע וּבֵין אַחִים יִפְרִיד. עַל כֵּן יָבֹא
אַהֲרֹן שְׂאֵחֹז בְּמִנְחַת הַשְּׁלוֹם וַיִּרְפָּא לָזֶה, כִּי הוּא הָיָה
אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם.

A person cannot become pure except through a *Kohen*. . . .
For the sin of gossip is what causes strife, discord, and
division between siblings. Therefore, Aaron, who embodied
the trait of peace, must come and heal this. He was a lover
of peace and a pursuer of peace.

The *Kohen's*
kindness softened
the punishment
and helped the
metzora heal.



TEXT 6A

Rabbi Menachem
Recanati,
Deuteronomy 21:5

וַטַּעַם "וְנִגְּשׂוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי" (דְּבָרִים כ"א, ה), כִּי "בְּחֶסֶד יְכוּפֵר עֲוֹן"
(מִשְׁלֵי ט"ז, ו).

וְאָמַר בְּנֵי לֵוִי כִּי הֵם מְמוּנִין עַל הַדִּין וּבָהֶם תִּתְרַצֶּה מִדַּת הַדִּין. וְזֶהוּ
אוֹמְרוֹ, "וְעַל פִּיהֶם יִהְיֶה כָּל רִיב וְכָל נִגְעָה" (דְּבָרִים כ"א, ה) . . . לְטַבּוֹל
יְדֵיהֶם בְּמֵי הַחֶסֶד שֶׁלֹּא תִשְׁלוֹט מִדַּת הַדִּין עֲלֵיהֶם.

"The priests from the tribe of Levi approach" (Deuteronomy 21:5) because "with kindness . . . iniquity is expiated" (Proverbs 16:6).

The priests oversee judgment because they mitigate judgment with goodwill. The Torah determined that "by their mouth, all controversy and lesion will be judged" (Deuteronomy 21:5) . . . because the priests, who dip their hands in the proverbial waters of kindness, ensure that those judged guilty are not treated with severity.

When a judge feels the weight of a sentence,
fairness and compassion follow.



TEXT 6B

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 27, p. 89

א פהן איז ענגנו "לְבַרְךָ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה",
א פהן איז דער "איש הקסד" וואס בענטשט אידן,
און באהבה. און טאקע מהאי טעמא וואס דער פהן
איז "איש הקסד", פארלאזט זיך תורה נאר אויף
אים צו ארויסגעבן אויף א אידן אזא פסק פון
"מחוץ למחנה מושבו" (ויקרא יג, מו).

אונדאי און אונדאי מוז דער פסק פון פהן זיין
מיוסד בלויז אויף תורה. וואס דערפאר, איז לכל
לראש מוז זיין די ראית הנגע דורך א חכם
בחקמת התורה און בקי בכל הנגעים. ווען עס
קומט אבער צום אראפטראגן דעם פסק דין
בפועל, מוז דאס זיין דורך דעם פהן איש הקסד.
ווארום דוקא ער פילט דעם פולן חומר פון
ארויסגעבן אזא פסק דין אויף א צווייטן אידן און
דערפאר וועט ער ניט שפארן קיין יגיעה און גוט
חוקר ודורש זיין ביים חכם, בנוגע דעם פסק דין
התורה ומעורר אויף ופשטו העדה והצילו העדה.

The priest's mission is to "bless G-d's nation, Israel, with love." A priest is a person of kindness who blesses Jews lovingly. It is precisely because he is a person of kindness that the Torah entrusts only him with the responsibility of sentencing a fellow Jew to "Your dwelling must be outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:46).

The verdict must indeed be based exclusively on the facts and the Torah law. This is why examination by an expert familiar with all the rules and types of lesions is critical. However, the actual sentence must be issued by a priest, a person of kindness. Only the priest feels the full weight of issuing such a severe sentence against a fellow Jew. He will, therefore, spare no effort and thoroughly examine the expert on the nuances of the law and remind the expert of the court's equal obligations to convict and to exonerate.



TEXT 6B

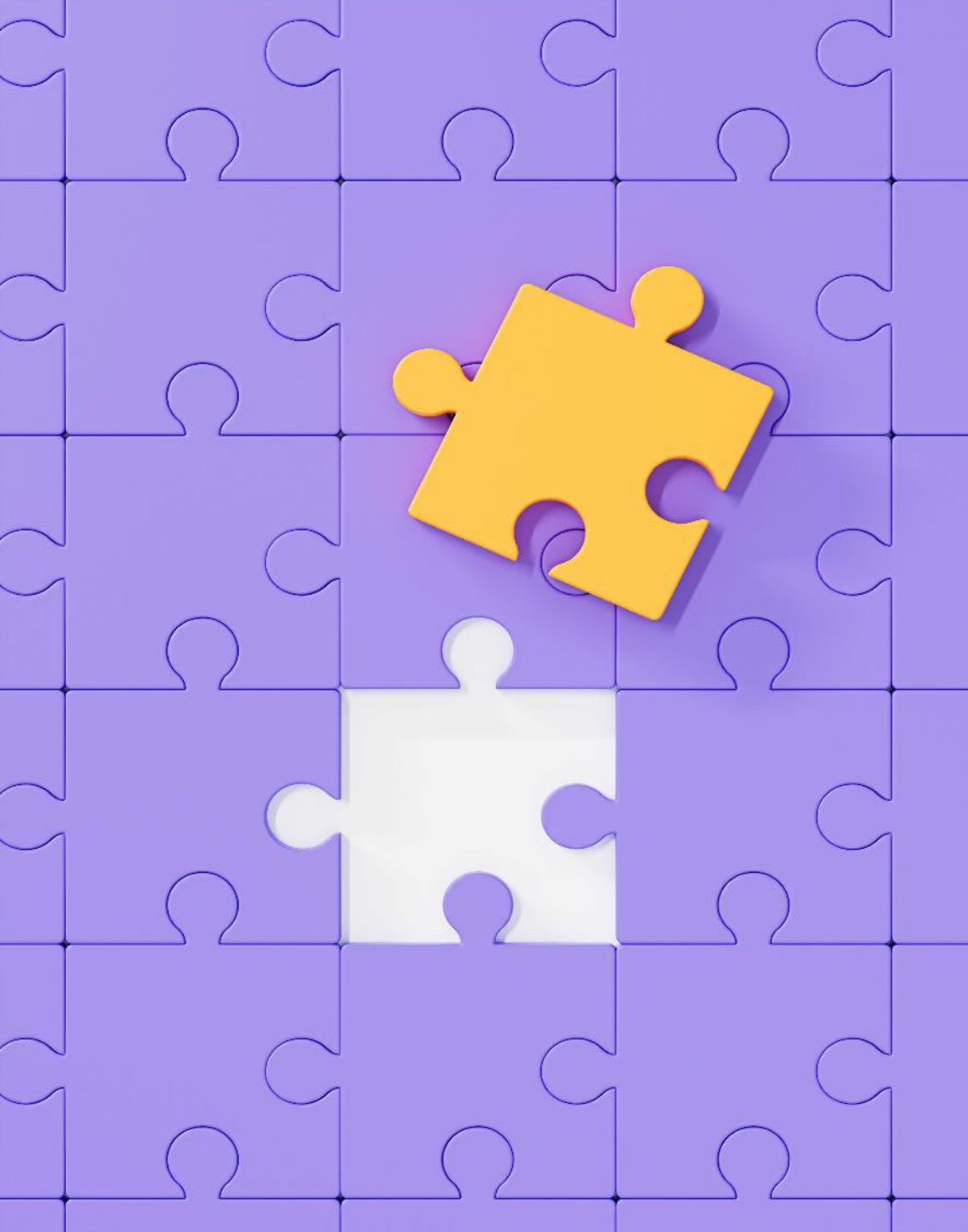
The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 27, p. 89

און אז נאָך זיין גייעה נחקירה ודרישא איז דער
פהן איש הסוד מחליט און זאגט טמא, דאן איז
מען זיכער אז דאס איז דער פסק דין אמיתי פון
תורה. ולאידך איז מען בטוח אז דער פהן וועט
זיך אריינלייגן אין דעם בכל יכלתו אז דערנאך
זאל זיין טהרת המצורע.

If, after this thorough examination, the priest is convinced that he must declare the person impure, we can be sure that this is a true Torah verdict. We can also be absolutely sure that the priest will do everything possible to bring about this person's purification.

ANSWER

We need an expert to know the rules and examine the lesion carefully and a *Kohen* to care about the person. The *Kohen* makes sure that the expert has checked every way to help and that the *metzora* are eventually purified and released.



Just like a *Kohen* cannot check his own lesion, we often need others to help us see our own faults.

TEXT 7A

Mishnah, Nega'im
2:5

כָּל הַנִּגְעִים אָדָם רוֹאֶה, חוּץ מִנִּגְעֵי
עֲצָמוֹ.

One may see anyone's lesions, except
their own.

TEXT 7B

Proverbs 10:12

וְעַל כָּל פְּשָׁעִים תִּכְסֶה אֱהָבָה.

Love covers all transgressions.

TEXT 7C

Rabbi Menachem
Mendel of Lubavitch,
Derech Mitzvotcha,
p. 29a

אין הפירוש שאינו יודע כלל חובותיו. אדרבה יוכל לראות ולהבין היטב עמקות
פחיתותו יותר מראיית זולתו עליו. שהרי זולתו אינו רואה אלא לעינים, והוא יראה
ללב.

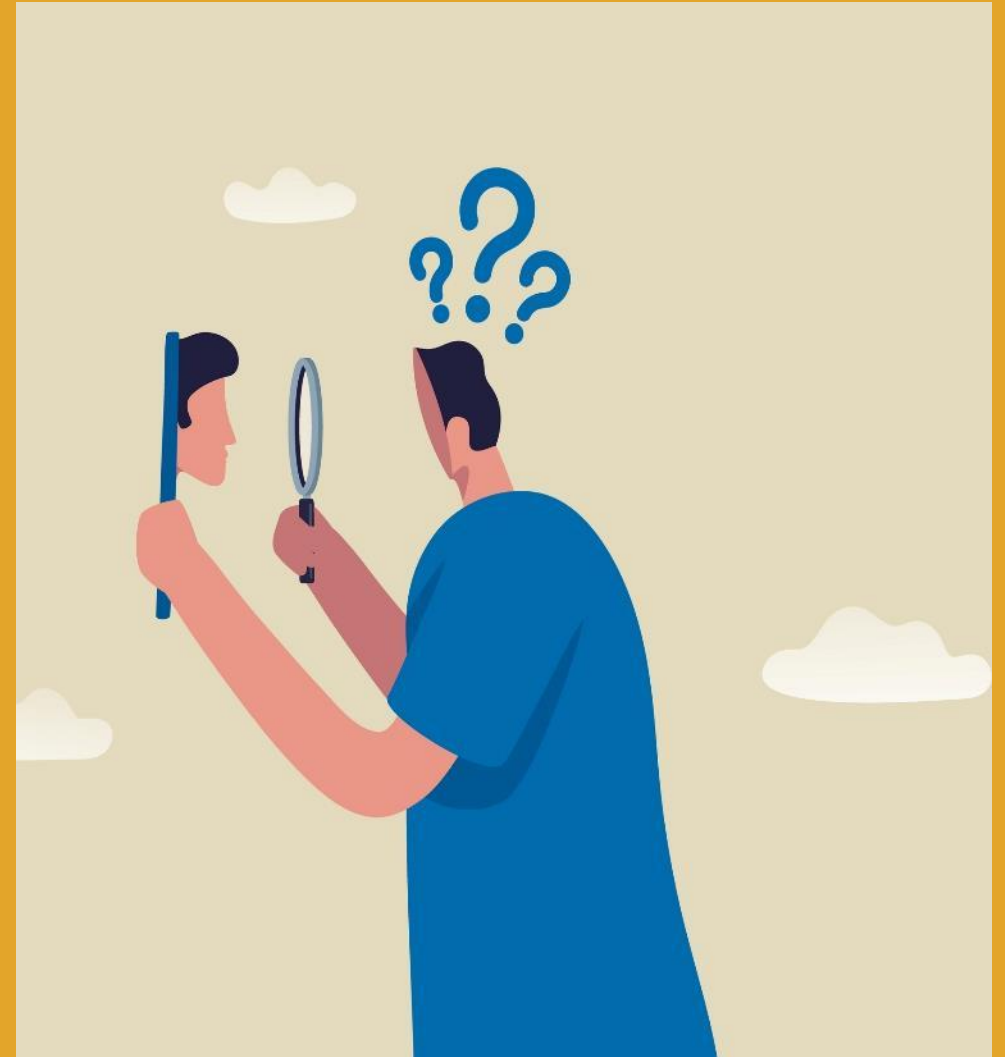
אלא הפננה שאין החוב תופס מקום אצלו כלל להתפעל מזה וכאילו אינו רואה אותו
כלל. כי מפני האהבה הגדולה אשר הוא אוהב מאד את עצמו, על כל פשעיו, שיודע
בדעתו, תכסה . . . שנשקע ונתבטל בהאהבה רבה.

It doesn't mean we are oblivious to our faults. On the contrary, we know ourselves better than others know us. They can only see our surface faults; we know our hearts.

Instead, this means that our faults don't drive us to self-improvement; we continue nonchalantly as if we didn't notice them. This is because we love ourselves so much that our love covers up the faults we know about . . . the faults drown and dissolve in our great love for ourselves.

We see our own faults,
yet forgive ourselves.

Loving others as
ourselves stops us from
judging their faults.



TEXT 8

Rabbi Menachem
Nachum Twersky of
Chernobyl, *Me'or
Einayim*, Chukat

הבעל שם טוב, נשמתו בגנזי מרומים, אמר נשהצדיק הגמור שאין רע בקרבו אין רואה שום רע על שום אדם.

אך מי שרואה שום רע בחבירו, הענין הוא כמו שמסתכל במראה. אם פניו מטונפין רואה גם כן במראה כך, ואם פניו נקיים אינו רואה במראה שום דופי, כמו שהיא, כך רואה.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that truly righteous people with no faults whatsoever see no fault in others.

Looking at others is like looking in a mirror. If our faces are sullied, we see sullied faces in the mirror. If our faces are clean, we see a pristine image in the mirror. What we are is what we see.

QUESTIONS

1. How could the *Kohen*, who was perfectly righteous and loved others as he loved himself, ever see impurities in others?
2. How can truly righteous people ever help others repent if they are incapable of seeing another's flaw?

TEXT 9

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 10, pp. 27-28

כְּאִשֶּׁר שׁוֹמֵעַ שְׂאִישׁ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל עָשָׂה דְּבָר
בְּלִמְתֵי הַגּוֹיִן חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם, הַחֹבֶה בְּזֵה לְרֵאוֹת . .
רַק מָה שְׁנוֹגֵעַ לְזֵה שֶׁהוּא (הַרוֹאֶה) צָרִיךְ
לַעֲשׂוֹת, לְתַקֵּן. לְהוֹכִיחַ אוֹתוֹ (פְּמוּבֹן, בְּדַרְכֵי
נוֹעַם וּבְאִפְסוֹן הַרְצוּי) וּלְהַחֲזִירוֹ לְמוֹטֵב. עַל
כָּל פְּנִים, זֶה צָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת עֵיקַר הַרְאָה.

אֲמָנָם, אִם בָּעֵת שֶׁשׁוֹמֵעַ מֵהֵלֵא טוֹב שֶׁל
זוּלָתוֹ הֵרִי הוּא רוֹאֶה לֹא אֶת הַהוֹרָאָה
לְמַעֲשֵׂה הַמְכַוְּנֵת לוֹ, אֶלֶּא שֶׁהוּא רוֹאֶה רְעוּתוֹ
שֶׁל תְּחִירוֹ (עַל כָּל פְּנִים, זֶה מוֹדֵגֵשׁ אֶצְלוֹ),
זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת שְׁמֵרְגִישׁ (לֹא הַנְּחִיצוֹת מְצִדוֹ
לְתַקְּנוֹ, כִּי אִם) אִיךְ שֶׁיֵּשׁ מְצִיאוֹת רַע בְּזוּלָתוֹ
הֵרִי זֶה רְאָה מוֹבְהָקֵת שְׁפָנְיוֹ מְטוֹנָפִין.
שֶׁהֵלֵא טוֹב שֶׁרוֹאֶה בְּזוּלָתוֹ הוּא רֹאֵי שֶׁל הֵלֵא
טוֹב שְׁלוֹ.

When we hear that a Jew did something inappropriate, G-d forbid, we must register only our responsibility to help them correct the problem—our obligation to mentor them (pleasantly and appropriately) and help them repent. At least this should be the primary aspect that registers.

If we hear something not good about another, and instead of thinking of our duties toward them, we notice primarily their faults and how bad they are, it is ironclad proof that our face is sullied. The faults we see in others are reflections of our faults.

SEEING ANOTHER'S FLAWS

SHAMEFUL



Reveals our own shortcomings

OPPORTUNITY TO HELP



Reveals a chance to help another

ANSWERS

1. The *Kohen* didn't see impurity as making someone a bad person. He saw it as a sign that the person needed help. Even when he knew what was wrong, he never judged them. His love for others made noticing their fault painful, not critical.
2. Righteous people do notice flaws, but they don't label people by them. They see what's wrong so they can help fix it, not to criticize. They speak only when they truly want to help and support the person until change happens.

TEXT 10

Rabbi Menachem
Mendel Hager of
Kosov, *Ahavat
Shalom*, p. 70a

"נגע צרעת פי תהיה באדם והובא אל הפהו". כשאדם פוגם חס ושלום, אזי הצדיק תיכף מרגיש הפגם שפגם האדם פנודע. וכמו שמרגיש האדם אם נלקה אחד מאבריו, כמו כן מרגיש הצדיק הפגם של האדם. פי הישראל הם אבריו של הצדיק. וזהו מצד גודל אהבתו וקרבתו ואחדותו עם ישראל באמת לאמיתו פנודע.

וזהו "נגע צרעת פי תהיה באדם", אזי — "והובא אל הפהו", פירוש אזי תיכף נרגש הצדיק הנקרא פהו וכנזכר לעיל, והצדיק יכול לתקן הפגם שפגם.

וכמו כן באהבת חברים באמת יתחייב הדבר להיות ההרגש פועל בהם, ואיש את רעהו יעזורו לתקן הפגם

"When a person is afflicted with *tzaraat*, they shall be brought to the *Kohen*" (Leviticus 13:9). When a Jew stumbles, G-d forbid, the *tzadik* immediately senses the blemish that was caused. Just as a person feels pain if one of his or her limbs is injured, so too the *tzadik* feels the blemish of another Jew. For the Jewish people are like his own limbs. This comes from his deep love, closeness, and true oneness with them.

That is the meaning of "When a person is afflicted with *tzaraat*, they shall be brought to the *Kohen*." The "*Kohanim*" are the *tzadikim*, who instantly sense the failing and have the power to help repair it.

And the same is true in genuine friendship. Real love means that we feel each other's struggles, and that awareness moves us to help one another correct and heal.

WHEN CRITICISM HURTS



Criticism spoken without care hurts others and yourself.

WHEN CRITICISM HELPS



When you truly care, you notice their faults to help them improve.



We have to see people,
not their faults, and
guide them with love,
never judgment.

TEXT 11

Rabbi Mordechai
Ziskind Hager,
Simchat Mordechai,
p. 734

וַיֵּשׁ כָּאֵן לְיָמוּד עֲצוּמָה בְּעֵינֵי חֵינּוּף שְׂכַנְרוּצִים לְחִנּוּף מִיִּשְׁהוּ וּלְהוֹכִיחַ אוֹתוֹ
עַל מַעֲשֵׂה לֹא נָכוֹן שְׂעֵשָׂה, הַתּוֹכְחָה חַיִּיבָת לָבוֹא מִתּוֹךְ אֲהָבָה, וְכֹךְ גַּם הָאִישׁ
שֵׁשׁ אֲצִלוֹ נִגַּע הוּא מִבֵּין שָׂרָק רוּצִים בְּטוֹבָתוֹ, וְאִין כָּאֵן עוֹנֵשׁ.

וְהַרְגֵּשׁה כְּזוֹ בַּר הַפֶּהן יָכוֹל לָתֵת . . . יֵשׁ לוֹ הַתְּכוּנּוֹת הַנֶּפֶשׁ שֶׁל אֲהָרֹן וּבְנָיו.

There is a marvelous pedagogical lesson in this. When we want to educate someone and point out something inappropriate in their behavior, our words must come from love. We must ensure that the person feels we are not out to punish them. Our sole motivation is to help them.

Only a priest or someone who shares the traits of Aaron the High Priest and his descendants can impart this feeling.

KEY POINTS

1. The Torah requires us to rebuke our fellow when we observe them doing or saying something forbidden.
2. Rebuke is only permissible if it is given out of love. If there is less than absolute love in our hearts for them, we are not permitted to point out their flaws.
3. If we talk about their flaws in a loving, nonjudgmental, and uplifting way, they will appreciate our concern and be responsive. If we talk about them critically, they will resent us and shut us out.
4. When we love someone, we overlook their flaws, just as we overlook our own flaws. When their flaws are brought to our attention, all we see is something we can and should help them repair.
5. Pointing out their flaws is never enough. We must follow up by mentoring, inspiring, and guiding them toward complete repentance.

