

## I AM BETTER THAN YOU!

### PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

Queen Elizabeth II was the British royal monarch. At one event, Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister, wore the same outfit as the Queen. Margaret Thatcher was mortified! When she returned home, she wrote a note of apology to the Queen. The Queen's arrogant reply was, "Her Majesty does not notice what other people are wearing." (Rabbi Hillel Eisenberg, Torah Anytime Daily Dose)

The punishment of *tzaraas* is not merely leprosy. Rather, *tzaraas* is a physical manifestation of a spiritual disease. The **Talmud** (Arachin 16A) lists 7 sins that are punishable by *tzaraas*. Speaking *lashon hara*, speaking negatively about others, is the most common sin that is punishable by *tzaraas*. Having arrogance, in of itself, is also a sin that is punishable by *tzaraas*.

One who was afflicted with *tzaraas* had to bring a korban *Asham*, a guilt offering. That offering was brought when one desecrated something which is holy. **Sforno** (Vayikra 14:12) says that one who is arrogant is desecrating Hashem by showing a lack of awareness of Hashem. If he were aware of Hashem's infinite greatness and how small he was in comparison, it would be impossible for him to be arrogant.

**Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm** zt"l said that arrogance is reprehensible and can lead to many other negative traits. One who is arrogant will easily become angry when others do not do as he wants. He won't be satisfied with what he has since, in his mind, someone such as himself should always have more. He will speak negatively of others because he feels that he is above them. He won't do favors for others because he feels that others should be doing favors for him. He will take advantage of other people because he feels that everyone should be of service to him. He will not admit to any mistakes because that would show that he isn't infallible. He will frequently lie and he will blame others when things go wrong. (Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

Even righteous people must be concerned lest they fall prey to the sin of arrogance. King Uzziah son of Amatziah was a righteous king and a powerful warrior. He became

*"The kohain shall take one lamb and bring it as a guilt-offering..."*  
(Vayikra 14:12)

king at 16 years old and reigned righteously for 52 years. He was enormously successful in his battles against his enemies. He even invented innovations for different weapons. Due to his successes, he became haughty. He did not appreciate the fact that his successes were due to

Hashem. King Uzziah was not satisfied with just being the king. He also wanted to be the Kohain Gadol. **Rashi** (Divrei Hayamim 2 26:16) says that King Uzziah felt "It is proper for a king to serve the King of glory." He entered the sanctuary to burn incense to Hashem. Azariah, the kohain, and eighty other kohanim, confronted King Uzziah and told him that it was not befitting for him to offer incense to Hashem. King Uzziah became angry. Suddenly, *tzaraas* broke out on King Uzziah's forehead. The Kohanim quickly rushed him out of the Beis HaMikdash. King Uzziah was afflicted with *tzaraas* for the rest of his life and lived in isolation.

The **Talmud** (Taanis 20B) relates a story of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon. He was returning home after spending much time with his rebbe. He felt exceedingly happy about all the Torah that he had learned. Unfortunately, his happiness caused him to cross a fine line. He passed by an exceedingly ugly person who greeted him respectfully. Rabbi Elazar did not return his greeting. Instead, Rabbi Elazar said to him, "Are all the people of your city as ugly as you?" The man responded, "I do not know, but you should go and say to the Craftsman [referring to Hashem] Who made me, 'How ugly is the vessel you made.'" Rabbi Elazar realized that he had sinned and insulted this man. Rabbi Elazar asked the man for forgiveness. The man refused. Rabbi Elazar walked behind the man, trying to appease him, until they reached Rabbi Elazar's city. Finally, the man forgave

Rabbi Elazar. **Rabbi Henach Leibowitz** zt"l pointed out a few things from this story. Firstly, that jubilant happiness, even when coming from holiness, can lead to feelings of pride and arrogance. Secondly, when one feels even the slightest amount of arrogance, one's view of people can change. He may see faults in others that he would not have normally noticed.

We, too, G-d forbid, can fall into the trap of arrogance during especially good moments. We may concentrate and daven a long Shmone Esray. We may notice that others finished their Shmone Esray much earlier. Maybe even the rabbi finished earlier. That may cause us to think that we are better than others. We may even want others to notice how long our Shmone Esray was. Isn't that a feeling of arrogance?

What if we were the only one able to answer a question that our rebbe asked. We may understandably feel good about ourselves. However, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to feel arrogance. We should not feel that we are better than the other children who were unable to figure out the answer.

If we choose to take an extra stringency upon ourselves to do something good, we must be careful. That, too, can lead to feelings of arrogance, especially if our action is done in public. We may feel that others think that we are so special as they notice our actions. That may inflate our ego and bring us feelings of arrogance.

What can we do to avoid the pitfall of this terrible sin of arrogance? How can we remain humble even when we

accomplish great things? We can learn from Moshe Rabbeinu. He was our greatest leader, our greatest prophet, and spoke directly to Hashem. How is it possible that even the Torah testifies that Moshe was considered the humblest person? How could such a great person be so humble?

In his famous Iggeres (Ethical Letter) to his son, **Ramban** writes that *anavah*, humility, is the greatest of all good midos, and that it leads to *yiras* Hashem, awe of Hashem. Being humble does not mean to think of oneself as a "nobody," a failure. On the contrary, a person can be successful in life only if he has self-esteem and feels good about himself. What, then, is humility? To be humble is to realize that whatever we accomplish in life is only through Hashem's help. Without Hashem's help, we are helpless! To be humble also means to realize that although we have accomplished many good things, we really do not know if we are achieving our full potential. It is possible that we are able to accomplish so much more. To be humble also means not to feel haughty just because we have been blessed with talent in any given area. Talent is a blessing from Hashem to be used in His service, not to make one feel superior to others. Finally, to be humble means to realize that we are not perfect. No one is. Rather than focus only on our good qualities and feel proud, we should give "equal time" to our faults, recognize them, and work to correct them. **When we examine our character, we become aware of our own imperfections. Then we will be less likely to speak against others.**

**I am a better athlete than you are. I am smarter than you are. I am better looking than you are. I am wealthier than you are. But I don't feel that I am better than you! My success is only due to Hashem!**

**I should not feel that I am better than you. Maybe I would be even better and accomplish more if I would utilize my potential even more.**

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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