



# FROM THE SCHOOL OF THE RAMCHAL

BY JACOB SOLOMON

**I**t is the plague of tzaraat. The Kohen shall examine him and pronounce him tameh (13:3).

Most of the parasha is about the plague of tzaraat. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that tzaraat is not leprosy as we understand it, but G-d's indicating His disapproval to an individual about the way he or she is carrying on. The Sefer Hachinuch (Mitzva 168) explains:

"To fix in our souls that G-d is watching each and every human being... including the smallest details, and likewise it is with a sufferer of tzaraat during the days of his confinement. If he repents, then purifying signs will appear and he will be healed. If he does not repent, then the opposite will happen."

Extending this idea, tzaraat is not so much a punishment, as a warning from the Almighty. As Moshe said to the B'nei

Yisrael before his death: Like a father who chastises his son, so... G-d chastises you (D'varim 8:5). Out of love, so that the child learns from his or her wrongdoings and mistakes. And we are all G-d's children.

Indeed, the Kitvei Ramad Vali (R. Moshe David Vali, student of the Ramchal) explains that common to all forms of tzaraat is the spiritual current of Chesed, kindness, and this Chesed is on two levels.

Firstly, G-d brings suffering on individuals so that they may reflect on their past behavior and correct those faulty character traits for the future. This is a Chesed. It is a sign that G-d has not rejected the individual, but is working with him or her on a One-to-one basis. That involves isolating the individual from the community for the period of his tzaraat, which gives the time to think and commit oneself to a new start. The person's mandatory exclusion from

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contact with others until the tzaraat has healed will give ample time to reflect and to resolve to behave suitably in the future.

Secondly, the individual with tzaraat "should be brought to Aharon the Kohen or to one of his sons, the Kohanim" (13:2). The spiritual root of Kehuna is Chesed, rooted in Aharon himself as the person who "loved peace, pursued peace, loved people, and brought them close to the Torah" (Avot 1:12). It would be the Kohen who would declare him tameh. For his symptoms indicate that his tendency to gossip or act haughtily in public (Arachin 16a) would make society more peaceful if he or she would be out of the way for the time being. In short, a Chesed to the community. It would also be the Kohen who, on examining the now-faded symptoms as a Divine expression of accepting the person's repentance, who would effect the re-entry of the individual back into society as a less contentious individual. In short, a Chesed to that person.

Perhaps today's equivalent is situations when series of things inexplicably seem to go wrong, one after the other, which may become increasingly embarrassing as people get to hear all about it. A person should consider that it is G-d's wake up call to pay attention to a character flaw and improve attitude and behavior towards others. "When unpleasant things happen, consider carefully your own behavior" (B'rachot 5a). As it says: "Let us search and examine our ways and return to G-d" (Eicha 3:40). ■



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