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Shira Melamed
Director, Midreshet
Torat Chessed

Quarantine is a word that we have all become accustomed to.

If once, the concept was foreign, maybe perhaps even a bit historic, today it is part of our everyday vernacular.

Today's Covid protection protocols require a person to quarantine at even the most minimal exposure.

This week's Parsha might have seemed out of date or irrelevant in the past. But while reading it this year, it resonates differently. We are taught of purity, impurity and the need to quarantine, to separate. These val-

ues are crucial and are here to teach us instructive lessons.

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that they must separate and isolate when impure or not well.

לֹא־תִגַּע וְאֶל־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תָבֹא עַד־מָלֵאת יְמֵי טְהָרָה י"ב:ד'

She shall not touch anything holy, nor may she enter the Sanctuary

וְהַסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּגַע שִׁבְעַת יָמִים י"ג:ד'

The Kohen shall quarantine the [person with the] lesion for seven days.

וְהִזַּרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִטַּמְאָתָם י"ד:ל"א

And you shall separate the children of Israel from their uncleanness

Whenever we are impure, the first thing we must do is create distance between ourselves and those around us.

As Jews, we know and understand the importance of looking out for another.

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Tending and caring to those around us is an integral part of our 613 commandments. ואהבת לרעך כמוך זה כלל גדול בתורה אמר רבי עקיבא

Rashi instructs us that the mitzvot of ben adam l'chavero require loving the one I am helping. Not only do we have commandments to help all those around us, we are literally commanded to love. (רש"י שבת לא, א)

The Maharal expands the idea by conditioning the performance of *all* of the 613 mitzvot on loving a fellow Jew. Full Faith in Hashem requires a certain modesty, it requires the ability to see beyond one's own needs and desires. It requires the ability to love another. מהר"ל נתיבות עולם נתיב). (אהבת ה'הע פרק א

The self-sacrifice involved while quarantining is merely an extension of the Torah's expectation of us. We are expected to make the world a better place and love one's neighbor like oneself.

However, this week's Parsha puts much focus on another reason for quarantine. Yes, of course, we must do it for others, but

we also must quarantine for ourselves.

When we are not at our best, when we are impure, the Torah tells us that the first thing we must do is stay away. We must build ourselves again on our own, without noise or critique from the outside.

It is human nature to fall.

כי שבע יפול צדיק וקם ורשעים יכשלו ברעה (משלי כד:טז)

Even the tzadik will repeatedly struggle. The difference between a Tzadik and a rasha is that the Tzadik will invest to regain his elevated stature.

The Torah teaches us in Tazria-Metzora that we separate ourselves when we are impure, in order to pause, reflect and grow.

Life is a perpetual rollercoaster, and we are constantly in motion. Even during a world pandemic, we continue to work, cook, clean, tend to children, make deadlines, fit in family and friends; without noticing, we sometimes lose ourselves along the way. We all have moments when we are not the



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best version of who we are meant to be. The danger exists, when we do not have the time to notice.

David Hamelech tells us

אשרי איש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים (תהילים א:א)-

“Praiseworthy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. “

The Talmud in Masechet Avoda Zara explains the risk in simply walking with others who are not positive influences on me

אם הלך-סופו לעמוד. ואם עמד- סופו לישוב. If he walks (with them), he will eventually stand (with them). If he stands, he will eventually sit.

If we do not “quarantine” or pause and reflect when we are not our best selves, we ultimately miss an opportunity for meaningful growth.

Hashem tells us to go into quarantine when we see the first sign of leprosy so that we have the time to reflect in isolation. We are forced to stop walking with those who encourage negative behavior, and who influence us to develop destructive habits that are difficult to break.

In a world where Covid related quarantine is commonplace, we must continue to separate from those around us, for our love for mankind. But we must also focus on the opportunity that comes with simply stopping. We cannot look at our actions, reflect, build ourselves into what we were meant to be, if we do not make the time to do so. We all have an overwhelming amount of untapped potential, we simply need to make the time to discover it. ■



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