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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
TAZRIA-METZORA

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RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

תַּזְרִיָּא

SOME GOOD ADVICE

Towards the end of *Parshas Tazria*, the Torah discusses the laws of *Tzora'as*.¹ One type of *Tzora'as* is a spot on the skin that has changed color, and causes *Tumah* to the individual affected. Though *Tzora'as* can affect a person's skin, it is not a physical malady like other diseases. *Tzora'as* shows up in response to seven different sins,² and the laws of *Tzora'as* are designed to force a person to reflect on their actions in a very real and intense way. There are many *Halachos* that must be observed - the person must leave the inhabited area, may not allow anyone near them, must bring a *Korban* after a period of time, and so on.

There is a very interesting aspect of the laws of *Tzora'as*, one that we don't find anywhere else. If one were to find a spot that they suspect is *Tzora'as*, they must show it to the *Kohein*, who makes the determination whether the spot is indeed *Tzora'as*. In fact, even if the afflicted is a learned person, and knows with certainty that the spot is *Tzora'as*, there are no ramifications until the spot is shown to the *Kohein*. Once the *Kohein* pronounces the spot as *Tzora'as*, the other laws come into play, but until the *Kohein* makes the decision, the spot is meaningless. Thus, the *Kohein* serves as an integral part of the process, without his input, no other *Halachos* are observed. One must wonder, why is there a need for another party in this process? Why can't a knowledgeable person determine for themselves whether they have *Tzora'as* or not?

*Sefer HaChinuch*³ (attributed to R' Aharon HaLevi, 1235-1290) explains that to effectively determine the best way to do *Teshuva*, it is essential for a person to associate with others of good character, and ask them for advice and their opinion. Without the clear-sighted input of an outsider, a person may fall back into their destructive habits. Therefore, an indispensable component of the *Teshuva* process is to seek help from a third party.

Similarly, it is very important for us, in our own lives, to speak to a Rebbi, a parent, or a friend, who can give us clarity and guidance. Life is full of opportunities for growth, but we sometimes don't see those opportunities when they present themselves. Asking advice from others is a smart way to avoid mistakes and traps, and to grow as a human being.

1 *Vayikra* Chap. 13
2 *Arachin* 16a
3 *Mitzvah* 169

Without the clear-sighted input of an outsider, a person may fall back into their destructive habits.

Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Asking advice is usually something we do as a last resort - when we realize we can't figure out something ourselves.

Additionally, it's important to develop our own critical thinking. How do we balance our need to think things through against the positive input we can gain from someone else's perspective?

The first step is to find someone that we feel we can trust, will listen to our thoughts, and give us advice with wisdom and without pressure.

Once we have found a person that we are comfortable with, we can discuss *decisions that we have already made*. This will allow us the breathing room for our own thinking, but still afford us the opportunity to discuss our thought process with someone else. (Just be aware of the downside - that we are often more defensive of a decision that we've already made.)

As we accustom ourselves to consulting with others, we are more likely to remind ourselves to do so before a decision is made in the future.

Over time, checking out our thinking with a friend, teacher, or parent will become second nature.

לעילוי נשמת

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LIFE SAVING ADVICE

Azariah* was one of the more popular students in the *Beis Medrash*; everybody felt like he was their best friend. He was one of those guys who always had a smile on his face, and a kind word to share. Azariah and Tzvi were good friends who had known each other for many years. As roommates and *Chavrusas*, they were often seen in each others company. They shared a deep mutual respect, and even their lighthearted banter revolved around giving over-the-top *Kavod* to one another.

At one point, whenever Azariah would come into the room, Tzvi would make a big show of standing up for him, not sitting down until Azariah found his seat. One day, Tzvi was sitting with his friends Yaakov and Mendy, during breakfast.

"Why do you stand up for Azariah when he comes into the room?" asked Mendy.

"It's just a joke," said Yaakov. "Right?"

"Well... kind of," responded Tzvi.

Both friends looked at Tzvi incredulously. Tzvi continued, "It is a joke, but there is a part of me that feels it's the right thing for me to do. You see, Azariah saved my life. Not once, but twice!"

"What?!" exclaimed both friends simultaneously.

"Yup. Not physically, like a lifeguard or something. But with words. You see, there were two times where I was facing really difficult challenges; I just didn't know what to do. Azariah was there for me, he listened to me, and he gave me excellent advice, which I followed. Looking back, if he had not done that for me, I would have made some very bad decisions, decisions that would have totally changed the place where I am now, and the type of person who I am.

"So yes, in a certain sense, he saved my life. Not from losing my life, but from losing the life that I know. It's funny what a small piece of advice can do."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

It's funny what a small piece of advice can do.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Nadav and Avihu independently had the same idea, but had they asked each other advice, they would have determined that they should not bring incense unbidden, and would thereby have avoided being killed.¹
- Shlomo HaMelech was the wisest person to ever live, but part of Dovid's parting advice to Shlomo was, "Strengthen yourself and be a man!"² which specifically meant to be mature, and ask advice from others.³
- Choni *HaM'agel* said that it is better to die than have no friends, because without friends to give proper advice, life is misguided and confused.⁴

1 *Yalkut Shimoni* 524:5

2 *Melachim* 1 2:2

3 *Ralbag ibid* s.v. וחזקת

4 *Magen Avos* on *Avos* 1:6 s.v. וקנה לך חבר