

## **Parshat Tazria: Seeing with Both Eyes: Cultivating Depth Perception for Honest Relationships**

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What is striking about tzara'at, the skin affliction described in detail in this week's sedra, is that it must be visually diagnosed by a kohen. In fact, the words רָאָה הַכֹּהֵן - the priest shall *see* - is an expression that punctuates the description of each variation of the affliction.

The mishnah in tractate Negaiim 2:3 teaches that the kohen's sighting of the skin lesion is crucial:

A priest who is blind in one of his eyes, or whose brightness of vision dulled, may not examine the *negaim* (lesions), as it says: "According to all that appears to the eyes of the priest" (Leviticus 13:12).

כֹּהֵן הַסּוּמָא בְּאַחַת מֵעֵינָיו, אוֹ שֶׁכָּהָה מְאוּר עֵינָיו, לֹא יִרְאֶה אֶת הַנִּגְעִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (וַיִּקְרָא יג:יב), לְכֹל מַרְאֵה עֵינֵי הַכֹּהֵן.

The verse in Leviticus emphasizes that the diagnosis of tzara'at is completely dependent on the kohen's vision. Additionally, based on a very literal reading of the words עֵינֵי הַכֹּהֵן - the eyes (plural) of the kohen, the mishnah legislates that a kohen whose sight is limited to one eye can not render a valid diagnosis. Why should this be so?

The difference between one eye (monocular) and two eye (binocular) vision is in depth perception, the visual ability to perceive one's surroundings in three dimensions and to gauge distance. Monocular vision is poor at determining depth on its own. In binocular vision, since each individual eye sees a slightly different image from a different angle, the input from each eye is calibrated to enable the perception of depth.

It seems then, that depth perception is crucial to rendering an accurate diagnosis. Without depth, a kohen cannot see the full picture and his perception will only be surface deep.

While tzara'at is no longer diagnosed, the importance of binocular vision in assessing another's flaw is something that can be applied to any relationship.

Human beings are inherently flawed. And while we can become adept at concealing our flaws from strangers, it is much more difficult to hide them from those with whom we are in relationship. In fact, the closer the relationship, the more apparent are the flaws.

In the first flush of a new relationship, particularly a romantic one, we can be overcome by a temporary blindness to the flaws of the other. They are simply not apparent. But given time, and proximity, flaws will invariably start surfacing. This is the most vulnerable stage in a relationship. Novelty and excitement are replaced by sober reality, and in that stark light, flaws loom large and ugly.



But they needn't remain that way. The reason they may appear so ugly is that we perceive them with monocular vision. We see the flaw as it presents itself without the benefit of depth and context.

But what if we were able to see the other's flaws with depth perception?

It is an observable truth that the characteristics we find most attractive in those we love can be the very characteristics that sometimes drive us insane.

You might have fallen in love with an extrovert for their easy going, expansive personality, but in moments that require empathy, subtlety and tact, that very expansiveness can be a flaw.

Similarly, it might drive you crazy at times that you are in a relationship with a perfectionist, but knowing that the flip side to this perfectionism is deep care and concern, can go some way to mitigate this 'flaw.'

Seeing another's flaws in this way, through depth perception, allows for a more robust and stable relationship by avoiding the extreme poles of blindness to any flaw and of perceiving flaws at face value.

It is only by gazing honestly at the whole person, with depth perception, that we are able to identify flaws that require repair without sacrificing the loving relationship that makes such repair possible.



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