

Failure to Farg'n **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

ו"א

Parshat Tazria

In every language there are certain words which are virtually untranslatable. Explain, if you will, the French word *chic* in English. You'll take several sentences (or, at least, a sentence with several clauses) to do it. But every speaker of French will understand the word immediately. And no, the English use of the word *chic* doesn't quite carry the same meaning.

There is a Yiddish word, *farg'n*. It means to experience pleasure at some else's success without feeling the slightest twinge of jealousy. A speaker of Yiddish will need no explanation; s/he will immediately understand when told that one has *farg'ned* with another.

Well, what does all this have to do with this week's Torah reading? We read (Leviticus 13:55), **After the mark has been scrubbed, the cohen shall examine it. If the mark has not changed its appearance – even if it has not grown – it is *tamei*.**

Imagine that you and your closest friend bought lottery tickets and that the tickets varied in only a single digit. The morning after the drawing, your friend comes to you in great excitement shouting that s/he has won millions of dollars in the lottery. Your immediate reaction is - - - ? Are you delighted that your friend has become wealthy? Or are you crestfallen because your ticket was so very close to having won? Can you *farg'n* with your friend or are you simply jealous because you came so close?

And if your friend suffered a great loss, will your response be one of total sympathy or will you experience (even if you don't express it) a sense of relief that it didn't happen to you? That, too, is an issue of *farg'ning*.

Failure to Farg'n

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The plague of *tzara'at* (traditionally, but incorrectly, translated as “leprosy”) described in this week’s Torah portion is, our sages tell us, a spiritual affliction, not a physical disease, although it is observed in its physical manifestation. One experiences the affliction of *tzara'at* due to a lack of concern, a lack of empathy, with others. This is the reason, our sages tell us, why the consequence of *tzara'at* was isolation from the community. One who fails to relate as part of the community will be physically isolated from the community until s/he learns better.

After scrubbing (the passage we are discussing concerns a mark of *tzara'at* found on a cloth, but, except for the burning which is the mode of disposal of the affected cloth, the principle described is applicable to human patients as well), if the cohen finds that the mark has not “changed its eye” (the literal meaning of the expression traditionally rendered “changed its color” or “changed its appearance”), even if it has not grown, it is *tamei*; it has a severely disrupted spiritual polarity.

The Hebrew word which we render *affliction* or *plague* is נגף, *nega*. The Hebrew word for *pleasure* or *delight* is נגה *oneg*. The name of the letter *ayin* means *the eye*. If one’s eye stands at the beginning, so that it cannot be affected by the success or misfortune of another, one is in the state of *oneg*, pleasure and delight. But if one’s eye, one’s perception, is determined only at the end, only after seeing what’s happening, if one feels jealousy at the other’s success or relief at the other’s misfortune, then one is in the throes of *nega*, the affliction of *tzara'at*. After the scrubbing – the isolation – the cohen examines the mark. If its eye, its *ayin*, has not changed, then the isolation must be deepened; the cloth must be burned.

To an eye which will feel neither jealousy at not having experienced another’s success nor relief at not having experienced another’s loss, may we speedily be led.

Shabbat Shalom.