



## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR FATHERS DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE IS DELUSIONAL

### *Avos Perek 1 Mishna 8*

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We've seen it before: No matter how absurd something may seem, there will be those who will believe in it. The mind is a very fertile place and, given the proper tools, it can become entrenched in any sort of position. How often do we see arguments flair up between otherwise sane and caring parties? All of a sudden some subject arises and the two take sides. At that point we may see each party stating a set of facts that contradicts the other's, yet each will swear that his interpretation is the only correct one. Are we seeing otherwise normal folk becoming blatant liars? Or is there something else happening here?

Rabbi Dr Abraham Twerski describes an experiment that took place in the 1950s. Its purpose was to find out whether a person could actually testify under oath that something is true even if it is known to be false. The psychiatrist involved hypnotized a perfectly normal young man and told him that there was a communist conspiracy to infiltrate the major news networks and spread communist propaganda to the American people. After coming out of his trance the young man alerted the authorities to this danger. Those he contacted were aware of the experiment and told him that without names and addresses he couldn't be taken seriously. The fellow eventually told of meetings he had attended and provided dates and locations, as well as names of people who were in attendance at the meetings. He gave elaborate descriptions of all these people and described specifically what they had said. Whenever he was pressed for more proof, he gave even more particulars.

***“The mind is a minefield, and it can play huge tricks on us if we aren't careful”***

Later, after the hypnotic suggestion was removed, he was unable to recall any of the names or places he had mentioned. All these conversations had been filmed, and when he saw and heard his own testimony about these people and their crimes he was totally baffled.

This demonstrates that if a person has an idea that he believes to be true, he can manufacture evidence to support it and will insist on the truthfulness of what he said.

Our *Mishnah* tells us:

*“When serving as a judge], do not act as a lawyer; while litigants stand before you. Consider them both as guilty...”*

In the courtroom of our own mind we should follow the directives of this *Mishnah*. All too often, when faced with a wake-up call from Hashem, when something happens that calls into question our own devotion, we tend to become lawyers, defending our actions. Once we have convinced ourselves of our own worthiness we cannot see what it is we may be doing wrong.

In *Parshas Tazria* we learn that if someone sees a discoloration of his skin he must go to the *Kohen* to determine whether it is a spiritual skin eruption caused by his own sins. The Gemoro tells us that if the afflicted man removes the discoloration, then he is no longer considered unclean. This is fascinating: This whole subject of the spiritual eruption of one’s skin – something caused by an allergy to doing bad – is actually an empty threat. All someone had to do is either refuse to go to the *Kohen*, or simply remove the scab on his own. This possibility, however, is part and parcel of the man’s problem. If Hashem sends you a warning, a physical wound that stares you in the face, yet you refuse to accept that it is happening, then nothing can help you, and the whole process of going to the *Kohen* will be in vain.

When we are sent due notice that we must change our ways, the first thing we must *not* do is to become self-pleading lawyers who prefer to blame everything and everyone else; rather, we must look to our very own selves.

In the case of *tzaraas*, the afflicted one went outside the camp for a period of self-examination. Only when we are able to be truthful to ourselves can we hope to rid ourselves of our wrongdoings. As we stand before the inner court of our mind, let us see our guilt. If we hide from it, it will never be cured. There will always be two sides arguing in our head, but we must accept that both may well be basing themselves on ill-conceived notions that we have allowed to become central to our thinking.

Cultivating the ability for self-realization is no small thing. In truth, it may be the hardest trial we will ever have to undergo. But if we persevere and allow ourselves to see the truth, then, “When they are dismissed from you, consider them both as innocent, provided they have accepted the judgment upon themselves.”

When we see our truth as it actually is, we can admit our wrongdoing. We can accept that we need to change, and we can recognize that what we thought was true was in fact self-delusion. Then it is time to get on with life. The most soul-destroying thing we can do is to allow the wrong done in the past to fester and corrupt our tomorrows. Carrying the sins with us and feeling worthless will not help us connect with Hashem. In fact, just the opposite will occur; we will be creating a barrier.

When the *tzaraas* was cured, when the *Kohen* said the person was now pure, he returned to the camp and became fully part of the community.

Yes, the mind is a minefield, and it can play huge tricks on us if we aren’t careful. Yidden seek to be holy; that is what we are. Sometimes we are thwarted by self-delusion, and that is how we end up with painful bitterness. When the message comes, therefore, let us not scrape it away. Let us recognize our guilt, accept it and find true purity.