

ILLNESS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY?

I would like to focus on one particular aspect of disease which is very much feared and plays a prominent role in the astronomical cost of health care in this country: the disease of cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, cancer is the second most common cause of death in the U.S. and was responsible for approximately 600,920 deaths during one recent year. The estimated total number of new cancer cases this year is estimated to be at least 1,688,780 and the amount of money spent treating it will top 157 billion dollars. All of this is in addition to the incalculable human pain and suffering that cancer inflicts.

The paradox of cancer is that it is based on the essential core of life, the ability of cells to reproduce themselves. Cancer occurs when the normal controls that govern this very reproductive ability fail and a single cell begins to reproduce beyond the normal rate. As such, it grows out of proportion to the rest of the body and draws away vitality and nurture from other cells and organs. Left unchecked, the eventual results are fatal to the body, including to the cancer growth itself.

Let us now take a look at this phenomenon as it applies to human society in general.

Each human being can be compared to a single living cell within the macroorganism of a community or of humanity. In some respects every person is an independent conscious being with an individual purpose and destiny, yet

each must also recognize that they are part of, dependent on, and play a role in the larger body of community. When the notion of individual autonomy grows completely out of proportion to its purpose and function, it similarly causes untold harm to the larger body.

Every person must have an individual ego, which is the essential psychological component of life, but when this very same ego becomes arrogant and grows out of proportion to the macroorganism, it ends up destroying everything, including itself.

We live in a time when the pendulum has swung radically in the direction of the individual and what is in their personal best interest, to the detriment of the broader community interest. Perhaps this is a case where the physical disease is actually a reflection of the larger society's psychological dysfunction.

Many of the ills of contemporary society can be laid at the feet of a morbid sense self-absorption and egocentricity among too many individuals. The antidote to this arrogant egotistical malady is a greater degree of recognition of the true and ultimate ego, Almighty G-d, and the submission of our personal ego to Him. The term for this in our tradition is "Kabbolas Ol Malchus Shamayim – accepting the sovereign yoke of Heaven" and that is what the "Shema Yisroel" prayer is all about.

Admittedly, there is not much we, as laymen, can do to reach a cure for the dreaded disease. But we can work towards a cure for the societal/psychological illness. Perhaps we can begin by making it a habit to recite the "Shema" twice a day as we are commanded to do in the Torah.

SCIENCE AND DIVINE CREATION

Jewish Brazilian theoretical physicist Marcelo Gleiser was recently awarded the \$1.5mm Templeton Prize. The Templeton Prize is granted to one who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life's spiritual dimension.

Dr. Gleiser focused on the distinction between science and “scientism”—or what many call the religion of science. He also emphasized that atheism is in fact anti-scientific, though science does not prove the existence of a Divine Creator.

This gives me an opening to address the issue, as well.

It is vital for us to understand that the scientific method deals only with matters calculable by cause and effect and therefore, in principle, cannot deal with the subject of creation.

The definition of cause and effect is of a cause proportional to the effect. This makes it possible to predict an effect resulting from a particular cause, and vice-versa.

As an example, let's examine automobile crash-testing.

Federal Transportation Safety Administration engineers test-crash cars in a lab at a particular speed, after which they measure the resulting damage. Based on this information they calculate what the resulting damage would be from an accident occurring at an increased speed or by a car of greater weight (velocity multiplied by mass). The reason such a calculation is possible is because the effect, or damage, will always be directly proportional to the cause, meaning the weight and speed of the car. Conversely, the Agency is able to analyze a real crash after it has occurred and determine the speed and weight of the cars involved.

Again, this is because the result, i.e. the damage, will always be proportional to the cause, i.e. the speed and weight of the cars.

Creation, however, signifies just the opposite: that the cause, referring to the “Creator,” has no proportionality whatsoever to the effect, that is, the creation. It is therefore impossible to predict or “know” the Creator by analyzing the creation.

For this reason, empirical science can never discover or disprove a Divine Creator. Moreover, such a claim is just as foolish as stating that you can’t see an idea because it is too dark.

Now we can understand why our Sages tell us that the great insight discovered by our patriarch Abraham was that there was a Creator of the world. In those times (as is often the mainstream attitude today as well) no one could conceive of anything which could not be attributed to cause and effect. Abraham, however, conceived of a transcendent, infinite Divine Being who was not limited to the system of cause and effect and who could therefore create the world *ex nihilo*, that is, something from nothing. This single revolutionary idea is the core of all Jewish knowledge and history.

It is interesting to note that aside from the Biblical account there are no other ancient traditions regarding the origins of the world predicated on the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.

The implications of this one modest idea are truly vast. As stated above, all Jewish knowledge and the thousands of years of Jewish history flow directly from this one idea.

Now that you have “the idea,” go forth and study!