



From the desk of
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1

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Metzora

HAMELECH

Man Was Born to Talk

In the purification process of the *metzora*, two birds are taken. One is slaughtered. The other is dipped in blood and water and sent away.

Why are birds included in the process? The *metzora's* sin was *lashon harah*. Birds chirp incessantly. One who talks all the time is bound to stumble and speak poorly of others. (See Rashi 14:4)

As soon as man was created, he was a *nefesh chaya*, which Targum renders "a speaking spirit."

A person could say good things or not-so-good things. The two birds represent these two parts of speech, one which is encouraged by the good inclination and one which is encouraged by the evil inclination. *Baalei Tosafot* explain that we are to slaughter the evil inclination and allow the good inclination to prevail.

Chatam Sofer explains it differently. Slaughtering one bird resembles not giving in to one's cravings and instead, immersing himself in Torah – *mayim chayim*. Sending away the other bird signifies sending away ill use of the tongue.

You've Said Enough

We are all familiar with "chatterboxes." Almost every family has at least one. Once a conversation with them begins, you never know when it may or may not end.

In Parshat Shemot we have an allusion to the one woman who misbehaved in Mitzrayim. All the women were models of *tzniut* and *kedushah* and loyalty to their husbands. Jewish women were

unapproachable and although Mitzrayim was an impure land, full of terrible practices, Jewish women took no part in those evils.

Only one woman was violated. Why? Because she was too friendly to the passersby. She thought that it was a nice thing to do, to say a friendly "Good Morning" to one and all, regardless of gender.

Her name was Shlomit bat Divri. The name says it all. "Shlomit" – she said "Shalom" to everyone. "Divri" – She was talkative. To the Egyptian taskmaster, that was an open invitation. In the dark of night, the taskmaster evicted her husband from his bed, sent him to slave labor, and the taskmaster returned to the Jew's home, under the heavy veil of darkness, pretending to be her husband. And thus, a blasphemer was born.

She never meant any harm. She thought it was her husband. But she talked too much. That was her sin. And led to much worse.

Women and Speech

Chava also spoke too much. She never should have gotten into a conversation with the sneaky serpent. (Bartenura to Avot 1:17) Beruria, wife of R' Meir, kicked R' Yosi of Galilee because he spoke too much to her. He said four words to her when he could have sufficed with two! (Eruvin 53b). Do not speak too much to women; it leads to adultery! (Nedarim 20).

Hashem thought to Himself (*kivayachal*): from which part of Adam should I create his mate? Not from the head, so she won't be haughty, not from the eye so she won't be too curious, not from the



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ear so she won't be inclined to eavesdrop, not from the mouth so she won't talk excessively, not from the heart so she won't have jealousy, not from hands so she won't steal, not from the feet lest she go outdoors all the time.

"No, I'll create her from a private, inner organ."
 (Bereshit Rabba 18:2).

Ten units of chatter were placed in the world.
 Women took nine. (Kidushin 49b)

How to Talk

Ben Ish Chai points out that דבור equals 212. The gematria of סם חיים is 168 and חול equals 44. Good *dibur* is either *Divrei Torah* – which is "*Sam Chaim*" – the elixir of life or "*chol*" – mundane matters.

Kli Yakar (Bamidbar 13:2) says that since women have a tendency to chatter, they must be ever more careful not to say the wrong thing.

A person has to think before he speaks. Pesachim 3b teaches to keep one's mouth clean from foul language even if it means that you must say more words.

Eiruvim 53-54 teaches to minimize speech with women. What about when these two ideas clash? Ben Ish Chai says: Keeping your mouth clean is more important. Say it the long way even when speaking to women. Chatam Sofer says: The *malach* told Eishet Manoach not to eat "*tamei*". Why did he not say "that which is not *tahor*" as Hashem said to Noach? Because he was talking to a woman, so he tried to keep it short.

So there may be a difference of opinions amongst the Rabbis which rule had precedence. But all agree that you must watch what you say.

Measured Words

There was a man who had a hard time with his talkative wife. He did not know how to get her quiet. One day, she got sick and they went to the doctor. The doctor put a thermometer under her tongue and told her to keep her mouth closed. For the first time in years, the woman was quiet for two minutes straight.

The husband was astounded, "Where can I purchase this amazing instrument?" he exclaimed.

A Weighty Decision

In another story, a couple went on a sea voyage. It was a stormy day and the captain announced: Each passenger is to take his heaviest piece of luggage and throw it overboard!

Frantically, everyone began throwing suitcases overboard to save their lives. This husband just stood there doing nothing. The captain screamed at him, "What are you doing?! Everyone is throwing things overboard! You must also!"

He replied, "I cannot decide if I should throw my whole wife overboard or just her tongue!"

Your Words Are Numbered

On a serious note, Ben Ish Chai teaches that each person has a limited amount of words to say in the world. When he uses up his quota, he dies. Words of Torah are not part of the *cheshbon*.

May we learn from the *metzora* and his birds to control our speech and only say good things!

Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka