



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

Religious Court of Elad * Batei Hora'ah * Religious Services * Marriage Licensing * Kashrut * Mikvaot * Eiruvim

TORAT

Parashat Tazria-Metzora

HAMELECH

A Few Questions

This week's *parashah* discusses the malady of *tsora'at*. What is interesting about the *tsora'at* mark on the human flesh is that a white mark is indicative of testing positive. On the whole, the color white is usually symbolic of purity and cleanliness, whereas here, we find it as the tell-tale sign of a true leper. What is the meaning of this?

Additionally, in his purification process, the *metsora* must get a full-body haircut. Every last hair must go. That is quite degrading. Why should he have to go through this?

Finally, let us think a bit about his solitary confinement. What is behind that predicament?

Let us learn more about the major cause of *tsora'at*, and through that, arrive at some answers to our queries.

Character Defamation

In our times, ideals such as liberty and democracy are held sacred. "Freedom of speech" is held dear. This translates into everyone thinking that they may say anything and everything that pops into their heads. This has given rise to "news reporting," much of which involves detective work, unearthing the unsavory past or present of public figures and disseminating it to the public in the most juicy terms. The media seems to be dedicated to providing its clients with unfiltered

truths, partial truths and anything but the truth. It is very exciting for reporters to lead the public hot on the trail, picking up "evidence" of character flaws and misbehavior of the object of their choice, often someone holding or running for public office. Statements such as "the public has a right to know" gives them a sense of self-righteousness and undeserved dignity as they proceed to besmirch yet another target, bringing embarrassment and disgrace to entire families.

Mind Over Mouth

All of this is most inconsistent with the ways of the Torah. When it comes to speaking about our brethren, descendants of those who stood together with us at Mt. Sinai, we are told, in no uncertain terms, to guard our tongues. We must watch what we say. We may not impart information, as accurate and precise as it may be, if that will display others in unglowing terms. We may not say or write anything that will breed animosity or strife.

The Torah wants all Jews to live together in peace and harmony. Being that people are not perfect, part of that ideal is accomplished by simply holding our tongues and not saying the "whole truth" about others.

"*Lashon Horah*" is not just a "not nice thing to do." It is very high on the list of severe crimes, inviting very harsh consequences. A person is



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required by Torah law, to think before he speaks, and not to disclose any negative information about others, except under very specific conditions.

The Torah did not prohibit this form of forbidden speech in order to make your life miserable or boring. On the contrary, this guard rail is meant to upgrade the quality of life for the Chosen Nation. Our souls are much too noble as to be contaminated by hearing or reading character defamation. There is nothing so rewarding as the satisfaction which comes upon exercising self-control and not saying everything that comes to mind.

Speech is what sets aside the human race from its animal counterpart. When used appropriately, as intended by the Manufacturer, it elevates mankind to untold proportions, even above the level of angels. However, when misused, it lowers mankind far below the level of beasts; for with derisive speech, man sullies himself and others to an extent that animals cannot get near.

[It is not our intention to minimize the importance of seeing to it that community leaders are of the caliber and meet the qualifications which render them suitable for their positions. We are just pointing out that public defamation is not the appropriate forum for that type of investigation. Usually, what is presented as "news" is full of distortions and exaggerations, as has been proven time and time again.]

A Bland Comment

The Chofetz Chaim once travelled on a mitzva mission with another Torah scholar. They stopped by a Kosher inn to dine. The hostess was excited at the opportunity to provide service for the Gadol Hador. She saw to it that they got served properly. She also approached while they ate and asked if everything is to their satisfaction. The Chofetz Chaim answered in the affirmative. The other scholar said, "It's good, but it could use a bit more salt." At that, the hostess retreated to the kitchen area.

The Chofetz Chaim's face turned white. His companion asked, "What's the problem?" The Chofetz Chaim gasped, "For years, I have tried to be so careful not to speak lashon horah, not to hear lashon horah. Why did I have to come here and hear you speak lashon horah?"

"What lashon horah?" asked his companion, confused.

"Why, you said the food lacked salt! Do you think that this woman does all the cooking herself? She most probably employs a widow. Now, she went to the kitchen and screamed at the widow for not putting in enough salt. The widow defended herself and claimed to have followed the recipe. A fight erupted, insults hurled and the widow got fired. You are responsible for a widow and orphans going hungry!"

"Reb Yisroel Meir," the fellow traveler said, "I think you are exaggerating!"



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“Let’s go see for ourselves.”

At that, they stood up and entered the kitchen. Sure enough, the two women were screaming at each other; tears strolled down the widow’s cheek, as she was just loudly informed of her dismissal.

The fellow traveler quickly explained that the food was indeed tasty and that he had spoken hastily, without thinking. He took out some money from his purse to appease the widow and convinced the proprietress to rehire her.

How Bad is Bad?

Our Sages reveal to us that saying anything negative about a fellow Jew is a hideous sin. This is equivalent to committing the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery and manslaughter. The majority of a person’s suffering in this world and the next is in response to his spoken word. One who speaks lashon harah is prone to contract *tsora’at*.

One who speaks negatively about others loses his mitzvah credits and instead is held accountable for the sins committed by the victims of his speech. (Magid Meisharim, Parashat Vayakhel; Chovot Halevavot, Shaar HaKeniyah chap. 7)

Some Answers

We had asked why *tsora’at* is color white. We can suggest that white indeed symbolizes purity and innocence. One of the hardest things to digest when it comes to *lashon harah* is the

simple fact that such speech is forbidden even if it is the total truth! That is why the *tsora’at* mark is white! It seems so innocent, so pure. Nonetheless it is lethal. It is fatal.

Why do we shave off all of his hair? To show that one who speaks *lashon harah* loses all of his *mitsvot*. He lost all his accomplishments. He must begin again from scratch. It is as if he is a newborn.

Why must he sit alone for a week or two? He is to realize that forbidden speech has the tendency to break friendships and distance people from each other. He must sit alone and feel the repercussions of his deeds. Only by doing that will he be aroused to a full repentance.

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



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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).

Build with Words and/or Silence

In light of recent tragedies, where discord led to threats of manslaughter, Heaven forbid, let us all take these lessons to heart and do our utmost to foster healthy relationships and brotherhood, holding our tongues when necessary, only saying that which is positive and pleasant.

May we merit to rectify the *sinat chinam* and *lashon harah*, which destroyed and dispersed, and soon see the ingathering of all exiles and the return of the Shechinah to our midst, in a rebuilt Yerushalayim with the Beit Hamikdash.

Chodesh Tov and Shabbat Shalom,
Mordechai Malka