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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Shemot

The Secret of Exile and Redemption

Our *parasha* states that when Moshe admonished a Jew for striking another, the Jew responded, "Who has appointed you as an officer and judge over us? Do you propose to murder me like you murdered the Egyptian?" And Moshe feared and said, 'Indeed the matter is known.'

Teaching of Our Sages

In *Shemot Rabba* (1:30) our Sages teach us that Moshe was wondering what sins the Jews had committed that they were the most oppressed nation of all the other nations. Once he heard the Jew's response, he said, "They are guilty of speaking *lashon hara*, evil speech – how will they be deserving of redemption?" That is why Moshe said, "Indeed the matter is known." In other words, Moshe was saying, "Now I know on account of which sin they are being enslaved." This *midrash* is cited by Rashi in our *parasha* (2:14).

Questions:

- 1- The commentators ask why Moshe Rabbeinu was so bewildered as to why the Jews were in the Egyptian exile, until he witnessed the aforementioned episode. For our Sages reveal to us that both the Egyptians and Jews unfortunately worshipped idols in Egypt. Therefore, why was Moshe so surprised about the Jewish Nation's *galut*? Isn't the sin of idolatry a good enough reason to be enslaved?
- 2- Furthermore, why did Moshe justify the *galut* when he saw that there was *lashon hara* amongst the nation?

The Days of *Shovevim*

We will begin by stating that the period of time spanning the *parshiot* from *Shemot* until *Tetzaveh* in a year containing two months of Adar is known as *Shovevim Ta"t* [שובבים תי"ת]. *Shovevim Ta"t* is comprised of the first letters of each of the *parshiot* spanning from *Shemot* until *Tetzaveh*. These are holy days, whose purpose is to rectify the *pegam ha'brit*, infraction pertaining to matters of modesty that resulted following Adam's sin. This is why the Jews went into exile in Egypt, to rectify this flaw. As such, these are days which are similar to days of judgment. There are those who fast and others who try to learn the *halachot* of family purity during this time. There are other *tikkunim*, acts of rectification, that are performed during this time. **However in present times** people are weaker and therefore it is difficult to fast without it having an adverse effect on one's Torah study or his work. Since the *Sefer Yetzirah* (1:3) teaches us that the *brit halashon* [the tongue] parallels the *brit ha'maor*, the *brit milah*, therefore if one has blemished his power of speech and takes effort in rectifying it, he also rectifies his *brit ha'maor*. Therefore the Vilna Gaon advised in his famous letter that until one's last day he should afflict himself, but not with fasts and other physical afflictions which weaken the body; rather, he should



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control his speech. He writes that this is a greater spiritual remedy than all the fasts and afflictions in the world. He writes further that for every moment man controls his speech, he merits the Hidden Sublime Light that is stored away for the righteous in the World to Come; this is greater than any *malach* or living creature could ever imagine. The Gaon continues by quoting the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 34:13), "Who is the man who wants life and loves days ... guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit." This is how you will atone for sin and be saved from purgatory, as the *pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 21:23), "One who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards himself from misfortune." *Maran HaChida* writes in his *sefer Lev David* (*perek* 24) that the *sefer Birkat Tov* writes in the name of kabbalists that the sin of *lashon hara* is the worst of all and it is the cause of this final exile, which is the longest and most difficult. He furthermore writes that here is no solution to this other than Torah study. The Gaon continues that since the final exile has been caused by *lashon hara*, it is necessary for us to rectify this sin, and by repenting we will merit redemption. For if we do not do so, how will the redemption ever arrive? This is the reason for the length of this bitter exile that has lasted so long. For we must rectify the sin due to which we languish in exile - *lashon hara*. But we still have not repented, etc. Furthermore, the *brit halashon* and the *brit ha'maor* go hand in hand. Therefore if someone's speech is not what it should be, it can generally be assumed that he also is guilty of infractions relating to matters of modesty. This is also a severe infraction and prevents the redemption.

The Exile in Egypt Was to Fix *P'gam Habrit* and *P'gam Halashon*

Now we can explain Moshe Rabbeinu's words. Moshe knew that the exile in Egypt was because of the sin of Adam Harishon. He also knew that the *brit halashon* parallels the *brit ha'maor*. He thought that the Jews had already rectified this infraction and that the time for the redemption had arrived. But when he saw that they were still plagued by the sin of *lashon hara* and that they still had not rectified the *brit halashon*, he understood that they were still unworthy of redemption. Their enemies would still have the power to afflict them and dominate them (see Rabbeinu Bachaya *Shemot* 2:14).

Our Sages (*Devarim Rabbah Shoftim*) furthermore teach us that that there was a difference between the generation of Shaul and that of Achav. In the generation of Shaul there were small children who were great in Torah; they knew how expound the Torah in 49 ways to rule on an item that it was impure and another 49 ways to rule on an item that it was pure. Nevertheless they fell in battle since they were guilty of speaking *lashon hara*, and therefore the Divine Presence had departed from them. This is as opposed to the generation of Achav, who sinned worse than any previous generation had before them and they worshipped idols. However, they were victorious in battle and not one Jewish soldier was killed - why? Because they did not speak *lashon hara*. This is as we find when Ovadiah hid the prophets. Despite the fact that Achav had killed all the other prophets, Ovadiah nevertheless hid these and none of them informed the king. This was to the extent that Eliyahu thought that he was the last prophet alive.



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This is how Moshe Rabbeinu understood the secret behind the exile in Egypt and why the Jewish Nation was still unworthy of redemption at that point. For they could have remained in freedom even if they were guilty of idolatry, as long as they maintained peach with one another and did not speak *lashon hara*. But *lashon hara* guarantees retribution, Heaven forbid.

There is No Rectification for One Who Regularly Speaks Lashon Hara

The Sefer Yalkut Sheva relates that there was a man who had three daughters. One was lazy, the other a thief, and the last spoke *lashon hara*. No one wished to marry them and they remained single. One day man came along and proposed a match: he had three sons and he wished them to marry the man's three daughters. But the girls' father informed him that because of their faulty deeds they were not suitable for his sons. He then proceeded to tell the man about their wicked acts. Yet the potential *mechutan* was persistent saying, "Nevertheless, I want my sons to marry your daughters, and with Hashem's help, I am convinced that I will succeed in fixing the problems." So what did he do? Once they were married, he brought the lazy daughter servants and maids and instructed them to do whatever she wanted. He then gave the daughter who was a thief all the keys to his vaults. She would steal from one vault and leave it in the other one. Realizing the meaninglessness of her actions, she stopped stealing all together. As far as the daughter who spoke *lashon hara* was concerned, each day he would rise early and speak with her, but she would not say a word. Sometime later, the father of the girls came to visit them. First he visited his lazy daughter. He asked her how she was enjoying marriage. "You should be blessed for marrying me off to such an individual father. For he has done very great things for me. He has given me servants and maidservants and they do everything for me!" The father was happy and he praised Hashem. He then visited his daughter the thief, who was also very happy, saying that she had been given access to all of the man's fortunes. But then he went into the room of the daughter that spoke *lashon hara*. When she saw her father she started to cry, explaining, "The normal way is for a father to marry his daughter off to one man – but I have been given to two husbands! If you do not believe me, hide; shortly my father in law will come and you will see..." This is what the father did. Meanwhile the father in law came in as usual to speak with her. But she responded sharply, "Do not touch me and shame me!" Startled, the father in law responded, "Have I, Heaven forbid, come here to do anything bad?" Hearing the exchange, the father came out off hiding and murdered the father in law. When he killed him, the father in law screamed, and his sons entered, killing the girl's father. Witnessing her father's death, the girl shrieked, and the sons killed her too. From here we learn that *lashon hara* kills three people. We see from here that even though the father in law found a way to help the lazy daughter and the thief, but there is no way to help someone who habitually speaks *lashon hara*.

Words of Mussar

We have learned a lesson from Moshe Rabbeinu – exile and redemption depend upon man's speech. Therefore especially now during this period of *Shovevim*, the period when man must expend effort to



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rectify his *p'gam habit and lashon*, we must all make an effort to minimize speaking meaningless words and certainly refrain from speaking *lashon hara*. For man's job in this world is to "make himself like a mute," as our Sages have taught us. As the Vilna Gaon wrote, each moment that an individual refrains from speaking is inestimably precious, and by doing so he merits the Concealed Light that no *malach* can perceive. On the contrary, one who is wise will accept upon himself, not to fast from eating, but to fast from speaking, even for a number of hours. This atones and rectifies every flaw caused by *p'gam ha'bris*. This will bring us closer to the redemption, when we will, speedily in our days, merit greeting Mashiach. *Amen ve'amen*.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka