



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Metsora

HAMELECH

A Few Questions

This week's *parashah* discuss 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 required by Torah law, to think before he speaks, and not to disclose any negative information



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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.]

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.



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Get to Know Him Better

We are living in challenging times. A tiny virus is rampant, transforming the way people live their lives. Hashem brings hard times to the world in order for the *Yidden* to be aroused to *teshuvah* (Yevamot 63a with Rashi).

We just celebrated Pesach and the miraculous exodus from Egypt. Rashi (Shemot 7:3) explains that one of the main reasons for the ten plagues was so that we, the Jews, become aware of Hashem's knowledge and power, so that we come to fear Him.

When bringing punishment, Hashem has a policy of being gradual. First, He brings it upon the nations. If we do not take it to heart, He brings harm to our possessions. If we still do not get the message, He has no choice, so to say, than to strike our bodies. This is the approach which He took with *Iyov* and this is the approach He takes with the *metsora*. (See Medrash Tanchuma, Parashat Behar 3; Yalkut Iyov 892; Rambam Hilchot Tumat Tsora'at 16:10; Derashot HaRan 6)

Watch Your Words

We really must contemplate what is happening in the world around us and try to understand what Hashem wants of us. Shuls have been closed for weeks already and people are required to wear masks over their mouths and to stay out of each other's *dalet amot*.

What is Hashem telling us? It seems to me that specifically over the last few years, there is too

much strife and dissent within Torah observant communities. Everyone thinks that their side is the correct one and that they have every right to trample upon and badmouth those who disagree with them.

Although we do not have actual *tsora'at* today, Hashem has found the means to show us that we are sore in this point. He is having us act as the *metsora*, isolated and distant. Just as the *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed due to baseless hatred, so too, our miniature *Batei Mikdash* – the shuls and *Batei Midrash* – have become desolate. Who is to say that it is not due to a similar expression of disharmony?

Tana Devei Eliyahu teaches that Hashem begs of us: Is there anything I lack which I must request of you? I only ask that you respect one another and admire one another!

It is our sacred duty at this time to do all that it is in our power to increase *Ahavat Yisrael*. In this merit may we all be healthy and once again sanctify Hashem's Name in our Houses of Prayer.

May we be cognizant of our speech and vigilant to say only that which meets the standards of Hashem's regulations, creating a clean and sterile society which breeds only *achdut* and brotherhood. May we learn to say only that which is beneficial and beautiful.

**Chodesh Tov,
Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,
Mordechai Malka**