



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א

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,
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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Parashat Metzora

The Torah's Perspective on Democracy and Freedom of Speech

Questions on the *Parasha*:

- 1- There are three items which the Torah mentions regarding a *metzora* which must be understood: a) It is well known that the shade of white represents the trait of kindness and purity. This is as it states in *Yeshaya* [1:18], "If your transgressions are like scarlet, they will become white like snow; if they have become red like crimson, they will become like wool." This is similar to the crimson colored strip which turned white as a symbol of atonement on Yom Kippur. Yet regarding the *metzora* all white leprous marks were signs of impurity. Why?
- 2- We must also understand why the Torah requires the *metzora* to shave off all the hair on his head and body. Imagine if the one afflicted with *tzaraat* was a distinguished elderly man with a flowing beard. Due to his *tzaraat* he was forced to leave the camp and was called "impure" so that others did not come close to him. Now that he is pure, however, he must shave off all his hair. This will undoubtedly cause him much embarrassment when approached by others who will ask him what happened. How will he ever be able to regain his former standing?
- 3- What is the reason that he must sit outside the camp in solitude and must be called "impure?"

Freedom of Speech as Opposed to the Freedom to Live

The answer lies in the fact that our holy Torah is true and from Heaven, and it provides us with the correct path in life. Sadly, in our generation the concepts of democracy and freedom of speech have become sacred deities and cannot be restricted in the slightest. On the foundation of freedom of speech do modern-day media and newspapers spread their news. If they can print or spread a new expose about a particular individual it is considered the most interesting thing possible and their ratings and sales increase manifold. The sharper their slander the better it is according to their warped perceptiveness. This is as David HaMelech said in *Tehillim* [64:4], "[The wicked] who have sharpened their tongues like a sword, [and] drew their arrows – [which is like] a bitter word." So too, in *Tehillim* 140:4, "They have sharpened their tongues like a snake, etc." [Also see *Yirmiyahu* 9:7.] Despite the fact that it is without a doubt that they wreak havoc and destruction on the family of the individual they are writing about, however, because of the sacred cow of freedom of speech and the public's given right to know everything, it becomes permissible to spill their blood in public. Is this the way to build the ideal society which democracy professes to build? The Torah therefore comes to teach us that man is required to know that he must guard his tongue from even speaking the truth, so that he does not breed hatred amongst men and needless strife. The sacred cow from the Torah's perspective is unity amongst the nation, and increasing love amongst them. This is to the extent that the Sages refer to the sin of *lashon hara* as the worst of all the sins, and the punishment is too great to bear. For man's greatness is measured by self-control and the ability to govern the words that leave his mouth. Man's status is elevated over that of an animal because of his power of speech. Only by exercising self-control in this area will it be possible to live in an ideal society in which there is love and unity amongst the population – this is freedom to live. Our intention is not to minimize or ignore public transgressions that have occurred and which need to be dealt with. Rather, it is the way in which they are being dealt which is the problem. Why must the approach be one that immediately wreaks such incomparable destruction, especially given the fact that, in most cases, the media exaggerates the matter and blows it way out of proportion? Yet by the time the truth is discovered, the damage has already been done. Additionally, why are the family members at fault and deserving of having their names ruined for no reason? If it was the Torah view that was followed, the matter would be dealt with the utmost secrecy so as not to damage the accused's integrity. We can bear witness in our generation that when anyone assumes a public role, there are those who instantly begin to search for any picture, statement, etc. which can smear his name. Is this the ideal society? Especially now with the technological



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advancements that give an individual the ability to immediately spew anything he wishes to the entire world; at which point the issue spirals out of control and causes widespread damage.

Three Unique Things about the *Metzora*

We can now understand the three things that are unique to a *metzora*:

A) the symbol of the sin of *lashon hara* is specifically the white leprous mark. This is to impart a lesson to those individuals who feel they are doing nothing wrong, because, after all, they are only speaking the truth and not lying. In other words, their actions appear to them as being "white" and sin-free. The Torah therefore teaches that his white mark is impure, because despite the fact that he spoke the truth, his sin it too great to bear.

B) The Torah also instructs the *metzora* to shave off his hair until he appears like a new-born baby. This teaches us just how severe the sin of *lashon hara* is, and that it is unequaled amongst all sins in the Torah. Besides the fact that it is equal to the three most severe sins, the Heavenly *Maggid* revealed to the *Beit Yosef* [*Maggid Meisharim, Vayakhel*] that it also causes a person to lose all of his merits and gain the sins of the one he spoke about. Subsequently, one who speaks *lashon hara* loses all of the merits he so struggled to earn throughout his life and is left bare, like a new-born baby. This is why the Torah commands him to shave off his hair, to stir him and others to be cautious and refrain from speaking *lashon hara*.

C) The Torah specifically ordered the *metzora* to dwell in solitude outside the camp, and to be called "impure, impure!" so that he not sit amongst friends. This is because anyone who speaks *lashon hara* generates *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred and strife. This is the opposite of what men are meant to accomplish in their Divine service, because the entire Jewish Nation is one soul and body. Therefore, when he causes a division amongst Jews, he causes harm to the Jewish Nation [see the *Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4]. In *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Rabbah* [26], Eliyahu HaNavi states that Hashem says the following to the Jewish people: "My children, I have not withheld anything from you. What do I ask of you? I ask only that you love each other and respect each other." In *Hilchot De'ot* [6:3], the Rambam writes: "There is a mitzvah for every man to love each and every Jew like himself, as it states, 'Love your fellow like yourself.' Therefore he must speak praiseworthy things about him ... [just as he] wishes to be honored. Anyone who is honored by his friend's disgrace has no portion in the coming world."

Story about the Chafetz Chayim

To illustrate just how much even a few words can cause dissent and hatred, I would like to cite a story I saw in the *sefer She'al Avicha Va'yagedcha* [part two, pg. 45]: R' Moshe Aharon Stern *zt"l*, the *mashgiach* of the Kaminetz Yeshiva in Yeushalayim told me story about the Chafetz Chayim *zt"l*, one that he heard as a young man in the US, in a *shiur* from R' Yaakov Kaminetzky *zt"l*. One time, the Chafetz Chayim and another great individual set out on a long journey for the sake of an important mitzvah. Their destination was quite a distance away, and their trip took several days. When they arrived, they immediately began to search for a place of lodging where they would be able to regain their strength after the strenuous trip, and to eat something. After they found an inn that was managed by a G-d fearing woman whose strict standards of *kashrut* satisfied the specific demands of the Chafetz Chayim and his companion, they sat down to partake of the meal that they were served. During the meal, the hostess entered and asked them, "Is the food to your liking?" The Chafetz Chayim answered immediately, "The food is very good." However, his traveling companion answered, "Yes, the food is good enough, although it lacks a little salt. However, as a whole it is satisfactory." The moment the hostess left the room, the Chafetz Chayim grabbed his friend's beard and head and a heart-rending sigh emanated from his throat. "Oy vey!" exclaimed the Chafetz Chayim. "All my life, I have been careful not to speak or hear *lashon hara*, and here I have truly transgressed, for I have heard and accepted *lashon hara*! I regret having traveled with you, and it was certainly not a mitzvah for me to have travelled together with you." When this great man saw how the Chafetz Chayim was filled with anguish, he trembled but also wondered what the Chafetz Chayim was so upset about. But since the Chafetz Chayim was a very great man, he therefore asked, "What did I say, R' Yisrael Meir? What *lashon hara* did I speak?" Answered the Chafetz Chayim, "Indeed, it was not the hostess who cooked the meal, rather it was the cook she employs, and she is a widow. When the hostess heard your



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comment, she immediately went to the kitchen and started to lay blame on the unfortunate cook, saying, 'Why did you not put salt in the dish!' The cook will expectedly answer that she did, at which point the hostess will raise her voice claiming that the Rabbis who are dining at her table said that she did not, and how could she therefore claim the opposite? An argument will ensue with each side heatedly staking its claim and insisting the other was wrong. Until finally the hostess will say, "If you are so brazen as to accuse these Rabbis of lying then I don't want you as a cook!" and she will then dismiss her from her position!" The companion of the Chafetz Chayim, who as mentioned, was a great man, was listening intently, and his intrigue was growing by the second, wondering how the Chafetz Chayim could imagine that something of such magnitude could occur as a result of mere few words. "R' Yisrael Meir, you are surely exaggerating," said the friend. "If you wish to see that I am correct," answered the Chafetz Chayim, "let the two of us enter the kitchen and see what is taking place there." They rose and entered the kitchen. There they found two women, angry and emotional, wiping tears from their eyes. And all this after a vocal debate which had resulted in the hostess informing the cook that she had been fired. Everything was exactly as the Chafetz Chayim had described it. When the friend saw what had happened, he obviously made every effort to correct the situation. He even paid a lot of money to the hostess, so that the widow could be rehired, and to restore peace between the hostess and the cook.

Words of Mussar

We can learn from all that has been stated that an ideal society can exist only when an individual can learn how to control his speech and to create an atmosphere free of all hatred, a society in which it is pleasing to live and to be part of. Controlling one's speech is the true expression of man's greatness, as Shlomo HaMelech said [*Mishlei* 27:21], "A man [can be measured] according to that which he praises." The sacred cow of Western culture which has been dubbed "democracy" and "freedom of speech" is nothing but destruction and the ruination of society and man's life. For every story, even the smallest, can wreak physical and spiritual tragedy and ruin, both to the person spoken about and to others as well. This is what Shlomo HaMelech stated in [*Mishlei* 21:23], "One who guards his mouth and tongue, guards his soul from troubles." Praiseworthy is the one who exerts every effort to improve society and love between Jews; he will merit both in this the world and the next. Amen.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka