

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

The Sages understood tsara'at, the theme of this week's parsha, not as an illness but as a miraculous public exposure of the sin of lashon hara, speaking badly about people. Judaism is a sustained meditation on the power of words to heal or harm, mend or destroy. Just as God created the world with words, so we create, and can destroy, relationships with words.

The rabbis said much about lashon hara, but virtually nothing about the corollary, lashon tov, "good speech". The phrase does not appear in either the Babylonian Talmud or the Talmud Yerushalmi. It figures only in two midrashic passages where it refers to praising God. But lashon hara does not mean speaking badly about God. It means speaking badly about human beings. If it is a sin to speak badly about people, is it a mitzvah to speak well about them? My argument will be that it is, and to show this, let us take a journey through the sources.

In Mishnah Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (2:10-11), we read the following: Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.

He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring.

However, the practice of Rabban Yochanan in praising his disciples seems to stand in contradiction to a Talmudic principle: Rav Dimi, brother of Rav Safra said: Let no one ever talk in praise of his neighbour, for praise will lead to criticism. (Arakhin 16a)

Rashi gives two explanations of this statement. Having delivered excessive praise [yoter midai], the speaker himself will come to qualify his remarks, admitting for the sake of balance that the person of whom he speaks also has faults. Alternatively, others will point out his faults. For Rashi, the crucial consideration is, is the praise judicious, accurate, true, or it is overstated? If the former, it is permitted; if the latter, it is forbidden. Evidently Rabban Yochanan was careful not to exaggerate.

Rambam, however, sees matters differently. He writes: "Whoever speaks well about his neighbour in the presence of his enemies is guilty of a secondary form of evil speech [avak lashon hara], since he will provoke them to speak badly about him" (Hilkhos Deot 7:4). According to the Rambam the issue is not whether the praise is moderate or excessive, but the context in which it is delivered. If it is done in the presence of friends of the person about whom you are speaking, it is permitted. It is forbidden only when you are among his enemies and detractors. Praise then becomes a provocation, with bad consequences.

Are these merely two opinions or is there something deeper at stake? There is a famous passage in the Talmud which discusses how one should sing the praises of a bride at her wedding: Our Rabbis taught: How should you dance before the bride [i.e. what should one sing]?

The disciples of Hillel hold that at a wedding you should sing that the bride is beautiful, whether she is or not. Shammai's disciples disagree. Whatever the occasion, don't tell a lie. "Do you call that a lie?" the Hillelites respond. "In the eyes of the groom at least, the bride is beautiful."

What's really at stake here is not just temperament -- puritanical Shammaites versus good-natured Hillelites -- but two views about the nature of language. The Shammaites think of language as a way of making statements, which are either true or false. The Hillelites understand that language is about more than making statements. We can use language to encourage, empathise, motivate and inspire. Or we can use it to discourage, disparage, criticise and depress. Language does more than convey information. It conveys emotion. It creates or disrupts a mood. The sensitive use of speech involves social and emotional intelligence. Language, in J. L. Austin's famous account, can be performative as well as informative.

The argument between Hillel and Shammai is similar to that between Rambam and Rashi. For Rashi, as for Shammai, the key question about praise is: is it true, or is it excessive? For Rambam as for Hillel, the question is: what is the context? Is it being said among enemies or friends? Will it create warmth and esteem or envy and resentment?

We can go one further, for the disagreement between Rashi and Rambam about praise may be related to



a more fundamental disagreement about the nature of the command, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). Rashi interprets the command to mean: do not do to your neighbour what you would not wish him to do to you (Rashi to Sanhedrin 84b). Rambam, however, says that the command includes the duty "to speak in his praise" (Hilkhos Deot 6:3). Rashi evidently sees praise of one's neighbour as optional, while Rambam sees it as falling within the command of love.

We can now answer a question we should have asked at the outset about the Mishnah in Avot that speaks of Yochanan ben Zakkai's disciples. Avot is about ethics, not about history or biography. Why then does it tell us that Rabban Yochanan had disciples? That, surely, is a fact not a value, a piece of information not a guide to how to live.

However, we can now see that the Mishnah is telling us something profound indeed. The very first statement in Avot includes the principle: "Raise up many disciples." But how do you create disciples? How do you inspire people to become what they could become, to reach the full measure of their potential? Answer: By acting as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai when he praised his students, showing them their specific strengths.

He did not flatter them. He guided them to see their distinctive talents. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "well that never loses a drop", was not creative but he had a remarkable memory -- not unimportant in the days before the Oral Torah was written in books. Elazar ben Arakh, the "ever-flowing spring," was creative, but needed to be fed by mountain waters (years later he separated from his colleagues and forgot all he had learned).

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai took a Hillel-Rambam view of praise. He used it not so much to describe as to motivate. And that is lashon tov. Evil speech diminishes us, good speech helps us grow. Evil speech puts people down, good speech lifts them up. Focused, targeted praise, informed by considered judgment of individual strengths, and sustained by faith in people and their potentiality, is what makes teachers great and their disciples greater than they would otherwise have been. That is what we learn from Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

So there is such a thing as lashon tov. According to Rambam it falls within the command of "Love your neighbour as yourself." According to Avot it is one way of "raising up many disciples." It is as creative as lashon hara is destructive.

Seeing the good in people and telling them so is a way of helping it become real, becoming a midwife to their personal growth. If so, then not only must we praise God. We must praise people too. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**T**he Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, 'When you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance.'" (Leviticus 14:34) The disease known as leprosy has engendered dread in the hearts of people, especially in times gone by when it was apparently more widespread and exceedingly contagious. In biblical times, the priests (kohanim) would determine whether a skin discoloration or scab was indeed leprous – and, if so, the hapless leper would be rendered ritually impure and exiled from society. From the biblical religious perspective, this tzara'at emanated from a serious moral deficiency, generally identified as slander.

An especially problematic aspect of these laws of tzara'at is the fact that not only individuals but even walls of houses could become infected by this ritually impure discoloration. Do walls have minds, souls, consciences or moral choices which allow for punishment? And stranger still, the Bible describes the phenomenon of "leprosy of houses" in almost positive, gift-of-God terms: "The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "when you come into the Land of Canaan which I give to you as an inheritance and I shall give you the plague of leprosy in the houses of the land of your inheritance." (Leviticus 14:34)

How are we to understand this biblical reference to the "divine gift" of the leprous walls? And third, for individuals, the tzara'at malady is expressed as a white discoloration, whereas for walls, white spots are not at all problematic, the only thing they attest to is mold! Green and red are the dangerous colors for walls (Lev. 14:36 ,37). Why the difference?

Nahmanides, the twelfth-century commentary who is an especial champion of the unique importance of the Land of Israel for the people of Israel, sees the phenomenon of the leprous walls as an expression of the intensely concentrated moral sensitivity of our holy land: the sanctity of Israel, home of the Divine Presence (Shekhina), cannot abide within its boundaries a home in which slander is spoken. Hence the walls of such a house in Israel will naturally show the effects of words of gossip which can destroy lives.

Maimonides sees another benefit to the "leprosy of the homes" – an explicit warning to cease and desist from speaking slander: "This is a sign and a wonder to warn people against indulging in malicious speech (lashon hara). If they do recount slanderous tales, the walls of their homes will change; and if the inhabitants maintain their wickedness, the garments upon them will change" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Impurity of Tzara'at 16:10).

Rashi suggests a practical application for the

“gift of the leprous walls”: “It was a happy tiding for them when the plague (of leprosy) came upon (their homes). This is because the Amorite Canaanites had hidden treasures of gold in the walls of their homes during the forty years when Israel was in the desert, and because of the leprous plagues the walls were taken apart and [the treasures] were found” (Rashi, Lev. 14:34).

I would suggest that Rashi’s commentary may be given a figurative rather than a literal spin. The walls of a house represent a family, the family which inhabits that house; and every family has its own individual culture and climate, scents and sensitivities, tales and traditions. A house may also represent many generations of families who lived there; the values, faith commitments and lifestyles which animated those families and constituted their continuity. The sounds, smells and songs, the character, culture and commitments which are absorbed – and expressed – by the walls of a house, are indeed a treasure which is worthy of discovery and exploration. The walls of a home impart powerful lessons; hidden in those walls is a significant treasure-trove of memories and messages for the present and future generations. Perhaps it is for this reason that the nation of Israel is called the house of Israel throughout the Bible.

From this perspective we can now understand the biblical introduction to “house-leprosy.” This hidden power of the walls is a present as well as a plague, a gift as well as a curse. Do the walls emit the fragrance of Shabbat challah baking in the oven or the smells of cheap liquor? Are the sounds which seep through the crevices sounds of Torah study, prayer and words of affection or are they experiences of tale-bearing, porn and anger? The good news inherent in the leprosy of the walls is the potency of family: the very same home environment which can be so injurious can also be exceedingly beneficial. It all depends upon the “culture of the table” which the family creates and which the walls absorb – and sometimes emit.

With this understanding, it is instructive to note the specific colorations – or discolorations – which render the walls ritually unclean: “And he (the kohen – priest) shall examine the leprous plague penetratingly embedded in the walls of the house, whether they are bright green or bright red...” (Lev. 14:37). Can it be that green is identified with money and materialism (yerukim in modern Hebrew, an apt description of American dollars), and red identified with blood and violence? A home which imparts materialistic goals as the ideal and/or insensitivity to the shedding of blood – remember that our sages compared slander or character assassination to the shedding of blood – is certainly deserving of the badge of impurity! And is not the Palestinian flag waved so ardently by suicide bombers, red and green and white (white being the initial sign of leprosy).

And finally, Rashi suggested that there was an

Amorite-Canaanite treasure which the inhabitants placed in the walls of their homes in Israel while the Israelites dallied in the desert rejecting the divine challenge of the conquest of Israel. Might not this interpretation be suggesting that the indigenous seven nations, as well as present-day Palestinians, do indeed have a treasure which they impart to the children through the walls of the houses? This treasure is the belief that the land is important, that the connection to the land is cardinal for every nation which claims a homeland and respects its past. The land must be important enough to fight and even die for, since it contains the seed of our eternity; only those committed to their past deserve to enjoy a blessed future.

I am certainly not suggesting terrorism against innocent citizens and nihilistic, Moloch-like suicide bombing, which perverts love of land into a rejection of life and destruction of fundamental humanistic values. The Torah declares the ritual impurity of Red, Green and White! But many Israeli post-Zionist leaders are forgetting the indelible linkage between a nation and its land as an expression of its commitment to eternal ideals and the continuity between its past and future. Tragically we all too often only begin to appreciate the importance of our homeland when the Palestinian suicide attackers threaten to take it away from us by their vicious attacks. But perhaps sacred lessons can even be learned from purveyors of impurity. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin’s book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week’s parsha is truly one of the most difficult subjects for people in our time to contemplate, understand or from which to gain knowledge and inspiration. The entire subject of these mysterious diseases, which manifested themselves on the human body, in clothing and even in houses and buildings is technically discussed in the Mishna and also in various places in the Talmud itself. However, the fact that the subject is discussed does not really reveal the underlying pathology of these diseases nor does it help explain it to us in a purely rational fashion.

We are all aware that the Talmud connects the disease to the sin of slandering others and improper speech. Nevertheless, the mystery of the cause, diagnosis and cure for the condition remains a troubling and hidden matter. It is beyond my ability to add any new insights into this age old discussion by the great scholars of Israel. I think, though, that we simply have to accept that there are physical diseases that manifest themselves because of spiritual failings, whatever those failings may be and however they are interpreted.

We are all aware that there are psychosomatic

diseases that can and often do become actually physical. Medical science has not yet been able to determine why such phenomena occur. Well, just as there are, so to speak, mentally caused diseases, the Torah informs us that there are also spiritually caused diseases that actually effect one's body, clothing and even one's home. There are many events and occurrences in life, both personal and national, that defy logic or any form of human understanding.

The Torah does indicate to us the areas of our lives where our human vulnerabilities exist and are apparent. Certainly our bodies, our health, our appearance and our general physical well-being rank as some of the most vulnerable of all human conditions. Our bodies are so delicately formed and perfectly balanced that even the slightest malfunction of any of its parts immediately causes pain and requires our attention.

The Torah expands this idea to include spiritual imbalances and shortcomings. We are usually never conscious of these matters and if, in fact, they are pointed out to us by others, the usual reaction is one of resentment. So, through the mechanism of physical symptoms as described in this week's parsha, the Torah reminds us that we need to examine and purify ourselves spiritually and not merely physically.

Our bodies, our clothing, even our dwelling places require inspection and sanctification. Even though the physical manifestations of these shortcomings are no longer apparent in our time, the underlying lesson is still present in all of our actions and attitudes.

The realization that we can be woefully deficient in behavior, unless we are constantly monitoring our relationship to our unique value system, is essential for living a truly Jewish and observant life. We are responsible for discerning those weaknesses within us even if they are not physically apparent. Perhaps this is the message to us from this week's parsha. ©2024 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The process of purifying the metzora (a person afflicted by a rare skin disease) is described in the portion of Metzora: "This shall be the law of the metzora in the days of his cleansing: he shall be brought to the priest [v'huva el hakohen]" (Leviticus 14:2).

In the next sentence, however, the priest is described as going out of the camp to the metzora: "v'yatza hakohen el mi'chutz la'machaneh" (14:3). But hasn't the metzora already come to the Kohen?

Perhaps v'huva is not to be taken literally. It's not that the metzora actually comes to the priest but that he feels within himself the readiness to be purified. In this

spirit, the Shem mi'Shmuel argues that "only after the metzora has decided to bestir himself, to take positive action leading to repentance and purity, shall 'the priest go forth out of the camp' to purify him."

The idea of spiritual readiness introduces an important lesson: Many in need seek help from God or professionals or friends, but little can happen until one is self-motivated to take the first step. This is true in virtually all areas of rehabilitation. Those who struggle with various addictions – drinking, gambling, drugs, eating disorders – can only turn matters around when they are personally ready to take action.

Note that the Talmud sees Channah as the prototype of how to pray (Berachot 31a). One wonders why the matriarchs were not considered suitable. In truth, the matriarchs never prayed on their own behalf – when they felt a need for prayer, they expected their husbands to pray for them (Rashi, Genesis 16:5; see as well Genesis 25:21, 30:1). Only Channah takes the initiative on her own (I Samuel 1:10–13). She therefore becomes our teacher as the paragon of prayer.

The Talmud tells the story of Elazar ben Durdaya. A sinner, he turned to the mountains and hills, the heavens and the earth, the moon and the sun, asking them to pray for him. They each responded that they were consumed with their own needs. In exasperation, he concluded, "The matter depends on nothing other than myself." And God concurred (Avodah Zarah 17a).

His story may be the basis of the classic song "Sinnerman." Sinnerman asks the rock, and then the sea, and then the sun for protection. They respond, "You need to help yourself." Finally, Sinnerman turns to God, and the Lord says: "Sinnerman, you should have been a prayin'."

And that is the message of v'huva. The metzora, racked with pain, feels an inner calling to rise up and help himself. Then, and only then, does the priest come forward so that purification can begin. ©2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Immersion in the Mikva

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Anyone who has become *tamei*, and anything that has become *tamei* (except for earthenware and food), can become *tahor* again through immersion in a mikvah. The laws of immersion (*tevilah*) are recorded in the Mishnah. However, the Torah uses different words to describe it. The verb used for a person purifying himself with water, such as a leper, is *rachatz* (wash). The instructions for the immersion of an impure item use the verb *chibes* (launder or clean). The *Rishonim* clarify that any time there is a reference in the

Torah to washing or cleaning, it is talking about immersion in a mikvah.

One who is required to immerse in a mikvah must recite the blessing of "*Al Ha-tevilah*" ("Who has commanded us regarding immersion"). The reason that we use the expression "*al ha-tevilah*" (literally, on immersion) and not "*litbol*" (to immerse) is because *litbol* implies that immersion is an obligation. That would be incorrect. Immersion in and of itself is not an obligation; one is permitted to remain in a state of impurity (*Rishonim*).

What if a person forgot to recite the blessing? He still emerges spiritually pure after the immersion, since we rule that a mitzva is fulfilled even when its blessing is omitted (*Geonim*).

Ezra's edict, that a man who had a seminal discharge was obligated to immerse in a mikvah, is no longer in effect. If a man does choose to immerse after a seminal emission, should he recite the blessing? This is debated by the *poskim*. Generally, however, the blessing upon immersing in a mikvah is only recited when a woman has immersed after giving birth or completing her menstrual cycle.

As a general rule, blessings are recited before a mitzva is performed (*oveir le-asiyatan*). However, there is a disagreement as to whether this principle applies here. Some argue that even though an impure person is permitted to make blessings, it is preferable for her to immerse first so that she can recite the blessing while pure. Others insist that the general rule should be followed, and the blessing should be recited before the mitzva is performed. Common practice attempts to integrate both these views. Generally, a person immerses once (emerging pure), then recites the blessing in a state of purity, and then immerses a second time. This way, the blessing precedes the second immersion and may be considered to be done *over le-asiyato*. All in all, a rather clever solution. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

We instinctively think of nega'im as born of lashon hora, "evil speech," and we're not wrong. But there is another birther of the condition, one that is evident in the very word metzora: tzarus ayin, "miserly eye" -- selfish narrowmindedness, begrudging others one's possessions.

That is particularly evident in the fact that, in the case of nig'ei batim, the tzara'as that afflicts walls of a house, the owner, before the house is declared tamei by a kohein, is told to take the home's vulnerable vessels outside, exposing them to public view. What's more, the Torah's concern for the owner's possessions stands as a lesson to him about caring for others' needs.

Jews, as a people, are famously generous. We may be frugal, but that bespeaks something positive, our

recognition of the worth of even small things. When it comes to charity, though, U.S. Jews per capita are more philanthropic than any other ethnic or religious community.

But tzarus ayin can manifest itself in a realm apart from charity. The Kli Yakar sees in the phrase "asher lo habayis" -- "that is to him the house" (Vayikra 14:35) -- an indication of a miser's mindset: he thinks the house is truly his, when, in reality, it, like all we may think we "own," is only temporarily in his control, on loan, so to speak, from Hashem.

Chazal created an entire class of imperatives based on that reality: birchos hanehenin, "blessings to be made before indulging." When we recite a brachah before enjoying food or even fragrance, we are acknowledging that what is about to benefit us is from Hashem.

It's ironic that a society like ours today, so blessed with such plenty, is not more careful when it comes to acknowledging our blessings. "Bruchanoi" may be somewhat reminiscent of the first three words of a brachah, but only somewhat. And quickly mumbling a brachah as some sort of irksome incantation without thinking about what its words mean is no replacement for summoning the gratitude the brachah is meant to express.

Even generous eyes can be miserly. Ours shouldn't be. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"He shall sprinkle on the one being purified from the tzara'as, seven times, and purify him; and send the live bird upon the face of the field." (Vayikra 14:7) There is much symbolism in the korbanos of the Metzora. The Klei Yakar explains that birds are chosen because tzara'as comes about due to three primary flaws in one's character: speaking lashon hara, arrogance, and a love of money. Birds represent these because, like the baal lashon hara, they twitter incessantly. They can fly high, as the arrogant fellow imagines he is above everyone else, and in Mishlei we are told not to toil to become rich, for in the blink of an eye it can "grow wings" and fly away.

One bird is slaughtered, and the live bird is dipped in its blood. Then it is cast out upon the field. There are many messages here.

The bird is sent out onto the field, and not to a city, so the tzara'as doesn't infect people there. This sounds strange since it's a spiritual disease, not a physically contagious one, but the point is to remind the person how easy it is to spread negative speech.

At the same time, the bird is allowed to soar freely, indicating to the Metzora that soon he will be free to reunite with his friends and family. The bird is set free and not sent into a trap, to show that the person is not destined for destruction, unless he succumbs to the

same behavior again.

Then there is another message which is so subtle, yet powerful. The live bird was dipped in the blood of the slaughtered one, and sprinkled on the Metzora. One would imagine it would be on the top of his head, or perhaps his lips. The Chizkuni, though, tells us the blood was dabbed on the back of his hand. What an unusual place! What could the symbolism of this be?

Perhaps we can understand that the hands are formed to do constructive work. The jointed fingers and opposable thumbs work together to grasp things, and the wrist and elbow enable movement like turning and lifting. So too, a person's intellect and speech can be used to produce delicate and elegant thoughts and words to build up other people.

The back of the hand, however, is less sensitive than the fingertips or palm. It is unable to grasp things and do anything productive. In fact, the only thing the back of the hand is usually used for is dismissing someone or something as unimportant. This is why we speak of a "backhanded compliment," meaning it's really a criticism of the person.

We'd like to suggest the message to the Metzora was that he had wasted the Divine gifts which set Man apart from the animals, by failing to use his mind and mouth constructively. He made those tools worthless at best, but more likely he turned them into weapons. Therefore, the blood is put there to remind him he is supposed to use his gifts to accomplish good things and not toss them away for naught.

After WWII, Rabbi Eliezer Silver visited the DP camps. At one camp, he noticed a fellow who was not taking part in the religious services and did not cover his head. "Why are you acting irreligiously?" asked the visiting Rabbi.

The man replied, "When I was in the concentration camps, I saw someone who smuggled in a siddur. He used to take food from other starving prisoners just to let them pray from it! When I saw that I decided I could not remain observant."

"My poor child!" cried Rabbi Silver. "You focus on the fellow who charged to use the book? Why not focus, instead, on the holy people who gave up their life-sustaining food for a few precious moments of davening from a siddur?!" ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Purifying the Metzora

The metzora's redemption must begin with his return to Hashem. When he has purified his heart, he must undergo the process in our parasha. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification, he shall be brought to the Kohein. The Kohein shall go forth to the outside of the camp and the Kohein will look and behold the tzara'at affliction shall be healed from the metzora. And the Kohein will command and there shall be taken

for the man being purified two living, pure birds, cedar wood, a crimson (tongue of) wool, and a hyssop. And the Kohein will command and the one bird shall be slaughtered into an earthenware vessel over spring water. The live bird he shall take and the cedar wood and the crimson (tongue of) wool and the hyssop and he shall dip them and the live bird into the blood of bird that was slaughtered over the spring water. Then he shall sprinkle seven times upon the person being purified from the tzara'at and he shall purify him and he shall set the live bird free over an open field. The person being purified will immerse his clothing, shave off all his hair, and immerse himself in the water and become pure and afterwards he may come to the camp but he shall dwell outside of his tent for seven days."

All of this is only the first step. He has yet to enter his own tent and is still forbidden to resume his normal activities. He must endure several changes in his status before he can be confident that he will not resume his negative behavior. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that there are two different terms to describe his affliction: tzara'at (the skin disease mistranslated as leprosy) and nega (a mark on the skin which could be a bruise, pock-mark, or a boil). HaRav Sorotzkin asks why the Torah insists on using the term *torat hametzora*, the law of one afflicted with tzara'at, instead of *torat hamenoga*, the law of the person afflicted with a nega. The Torah wished to stress that this was the law of the *motzi shem ra*, one who spreads gossip and destroys reputations. *Motzi shem ra* can be abbreviated by the word *metzora*. One could ask why the Torah wishes to emphasize this aspect of the disease, when in *Mesechet Eir'chin* several other reasons are given why a person might become afflicted with tzara'at. Gossip and destroying another person's reputation is the most common as well as the most destructive behavior.

We are told, "and he shall be brought to the Kohein" while at the same time we are told, "and the Kohein shall go out to the outside of the camp." HaRav Sorotzkin explains that, in truth, the metzora may not be brought into the camp so the Kohein must go out to meet with him. The Kohein, however, does not go to the tent of the metzora that is outside the camp but instead the metzora is escorted to the Kohein at another location outside of the camp. After the metzora is brought to the Kohein, the Kohein and the metzora go to the metzora's tent where the Kohein will examine him. HaRav Sorotzkin indicates that this is necessary because the one of lesser significance is brought to the one of greater significance. Had the Kohein proceeded directly to the home of the metzora, the metzora would assume that he was more important than the Kohein Gadol and this would encourage his arrogance, which caused his initial misbehavior.

The two birds that are chosen do not belong to the normal birds that were brought for sacrifice. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that these birds are

not for the purpose of sacrifice and need not ever be set aside by the metzora. Both birds should look alike, be the same size and same approximate value, and they should be gathered at the same time. These requirements are not entirely necessary, they are used for the mitzvah only. HaRav Hirsch tells us from Masechet Shabbat, that the bird which is to be set free is called a tzipor d'ror, a bird which cannot be tamed and domesticated. The birds meet opposite fates; one will be slaughtered and the other set free. Hirsch also demonstrates that the blood of the slaughtered bird is spilled over spring water, an act which is analogous to the ashes of the Sotah sacrifice (the offering of a woman accused of adultery) and those of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer (the ashes of which are mixed with spring water and used to purify all forms of tum'ah).

Once the process with the birds and the sprinkling had been completed, we see that the metzora had to shave off all his hair including his eyebrows and any torso hair, and he had to immerse himself in a mikvah, a ritual bath. This is similar to the procedure for purification prior to anointing that was done by the original Kohanim as well as any nazir, a person who abstains from using grapes in any form and from cutting his hair or shaving for a period of thirty days in order to raise his level of holiness and closeness to Hashem. He had to sit outside of his tent for seven days and could not have relations with his wife at this time. He had to ease his way back into the society which he had damaged. On the eighth day, the metzora brought two lambs and one ewe with three tenths of fine flour for a minchah offering which is thoroughly mixed with one "log" of olive oil. One lamb was brought as a guilt offering, and was slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the Altar. The Kohein then poured a "log" of oil into his left palm and sprinkled the oil seven times before Hashem. The remainder of the oil was then placed onto the right earlobe and upon the right thumb and on the right large toe of the one who was being purified. The metzora was not yet purified and stood at the Nikanor gate and stretched his head, hand, and foot into the opening there to receive the oil. The oil is a sign of anointing as we have seen by the Kohanim and by the Nazir. The metzora had undergone two shavings of his hair and two immersions in the mikvah in order to reach this moment. He had taken control of his life and had worked hard to diminish his egoism which caused his initial problem. This anointing with the oil was an indication of his desire to raise himself spiritually much as the nazir had done by his intentional separation from wine and grapes and from cutting his hair. After this procedure the metzora could now reenter the full service to Hashem and could enter the Temple grounds once again.

We can understand from the process of the metzora's redemption that there is a fine line which we must all be careful to control and not cross. Let us learn to control our own egos, and may we then not be victims

of our own lashon hara. We are all capable of leading better lives and being closer to the ideals which Hashem has placed before us. ©2024 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Edited by Dovid Hoffman

Towards the end of Parshas Metzora, the pasuk says: "You shall separate the Children of Israel from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination if they contaminate My Mishkan that is among them." (Vayikra 15:31). The simple reading of this pasuk is that when Bnei Yisrael are tameh (impure), they should not, in a state of impurity, go into the holy places where they are forbidden to enter, lest they die from that impurity. However, homiletically, the sefer Yismach Yehudah cites the following interesting vort from a drasha of Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer (a great grandson of the Chasam Sofer, who was the Chief Rabbi of Cracow, Poland, in the early part of the 20th century):

Sometimes we talk to our children or to our students or to our congregants until we are blue in the face. We wonder, does it make an impression? Are our words taken seriously? Do people change? Perhaps this is most relevant for professionals who do this for a living. Do all the things that we say, year after year, really help? Do speeches help? Do drashos help? Does mussar (chastisement) help? Does lecturing to our children really help?

Rav Kornitzer suggests that we need to bear in mind that it may not help now, and it may not help six months from now or a year from now. But, at some point, at some time in the future, maybe the lesson will hit home.

I don't know how Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer explained the mashal that he gave, but today it is easy for us to imagine what this is like. Namely, the "mussar" is in the "cloud." Where is all this data? It is in the "cloud." Where is the "cloud?"? There is not a cloud in the sky! But we know this concept that something can be not in front of us, yet when we need to access it, it is somehow there for us to access. It is the same with mussar and with lecturing our children. It is there. It hasn't penetrated yet, but it can penetrate.

He references the pasuk "And these matters that I command you today shall be upon your heart (al levavecha)." (Devorim 5:6). It does not say b'soch levavecha (within your heart) because sometimes it has not yet penetrated the heart. However, at least it remains al levavecha -- upon your heart. One day, maybe, just perhaps, it will penetrate the heart and will be b'soch levavecha.

This is why the pasuk says "...v'lo yamusu m'tumosam" (Vayikra 15:31), which means you talk to people and you tell them what is right. Even though it

might not help now or even ten years from now, they will not die from their impurity. How many people do we know that return at the end of their days? They don't die in their state of impurity because at the end of their days, they in fact realize that what they were told so many years earlier was correct, and they in fact do come back.

Ironically, I was recently speaking with someone in Eretz Yisrael who told me the following interesting incident that happened only a few days ago. (This was April 2016.) I believe this story brings home the point that I am trying to make:

A fellow in Eretz Yisrael has a distant relative who was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. The relative's father was a rav and a shochet, who tried his best to educate his son in the proper Torah path, including sending him to a yeshiva. The boy only lasted in the yeshiva for two weeks. He hated it. He left the yeshiva and eventually left Yiddishkeit. He never got married. He does not have a wife or children. He is a man alone in the world. From what I gather, he must be in his late sixties or early seventies.

For whatever reason, this relative got an inspiration: I want to go to Israel. I want to daven at the Kosel HaMaaravi. He takes his Bar Mitzvah tefillin, which he has not put on in a half century, and has plans to visit the kosel, put on his tefillin, and daven there. He hooks up with some Federation tour and goes with this tour and their tour guide on the Federation tour to Eretz Yisrael.

The person who is relating the story finds out that his long-lost cousin is coming to Israel and he decides that he will get in touch with him, take him around, and give him a real tour of Eretz Yisrael. They meet in a certain place. The Israeli says to his American relative, "Have you been to the Kosel yet?" His cousin responds, "No, I have not been to the Kosel yet." The Israeli said, "Great. So let's go now!" The American says "No, not now. Maybe later."

"What's the problem?" his Israeli cousin presses him. "This is why you came. You want to put your tefillin on and daven at the kosel." The cousin is hesitant. Finally he says "I can't go!"

"Why can't you go?" The long-lost cousin finally explains "I can't go to the Kosel with a cross."

The Israeli cousin is incredulous: "What are you doing with a cross?" The American explains that while he was on the Federation tour they went through the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. "I have a very good Christian friend back home in America. I wanted to buy him a cross from Israel as a present. I asked the rabbi who is leading the Federation tour if it was okay to buy a cross for my Christian friend in America. He told me it was." He bought the tselem (cross) and put it in his bag, and is now walking around Jerusalem with a tselem in his bag. He tells his relative "I cannot go to the Kosel with a cross in my bag."

This Israeli cousin told my friend this story and

his friend told it to me. He then commented: This fellow has not had any connection to Yiddishkeit in maybe sixty years. He is putting on tefillin now for probably the first time in more than fifty years, or even more! But he still has a sensitivity, a feeling, that a person does not go to the Kosel HaMaaravi with a tselem in his bag.

This is an example of "...You shall not die in your state of impurity." The person left Yiddishkeit, he had a bad experience in yeshiva, he did not want to have anything to do with Judaism, and he has not kept who knows what for all these years, but there is something in the Jewish heart that remains "al levavecha" -- upon your heart. It was ON the heart. It was "in the cloud." After all these years, it finally penetrated that you do not go to the Kosel with a tselem in your bag.

This is a lesson to all of us, whether you are a rav, a rabbi, a rebbi, a teacher, or even a parent. If you preach and preach and preach and it does not seem to make a difference, yes, it does! "You shall warn... and they shall not die in their state of impurity." ©2024 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

As we prepare for Pesach (Passover), the following two perspectives conveyed by Rabbi Avi Weiss might help facilitate the discussion: Although written as questions, the Ma Nishtana can be viewed as a declarative statement. After all, the first two questions deal with matza and marror (bitter herbs), symbols of servitude, while the next two deal with dipping foods and reclining while eating, symbols of freedom. This teaches us that the message of Egypt is never to despair. After oppression comes redemption, day follows night, light disperses darkness.

Another approach to the Ma Nishtana is the realization that the pathway to learning is to question. It is told that Isidor I. Rabi, a Nobel prize winner in physics, was once asked: "Why did you become a scientist?" He responded, "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'Nu? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference -- asking good questions -- made me become a scientist." (Donald Sheff, letter to the New York Times, January 19, 1988) Hence, the seder begins with questions. Rabbi Joel Cohen suggests that perhaps not coincidentally, the seder concludes with questions as well: "Who knows One (G-d)? Who knows two (the tablets)?" Having responded to the children's questions during the seder, we in turn conclude the evening by asking them -- "have you learned the message well?"

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