



Tazria-Metzorah 5777

April 28, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Talk the Talk

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

The parshios of Tazria and Metzorah discuss the laws regarding someone who is afflicted with *tzara'as*, commonly translated as leprosy, at length. What is not discussed in the Torah, however, is the reason someone is afflicted with this disease. Rashi, in his classic commentary on the Chumash, cites a passage in the Gemara (Erachin 15b) which explains that this disease is a punishment for people who speak *lashon hara* (slander). Fascinatingly, the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan; 1838-1933) points out that this disease is still relevant today, not in a physical sense, but through a spiritual blemish upon the soul.

Simply, the reason why speaking *lashon hara* is so severe is because of the harm caused to the one whom you are speaking about. A closer look at the rest of the parsha, though, will allow us to obtain a deeper insight into the problem of speaking *lashon hara*. After the *tzara'as* disappears, the afflicted person is commanded to appear in front of the *kohein* (priest) with two live birds. One of the birds is slaughtered, and the second bird is dipped into the blood of the first bird; the blood is then sprinkled on the person being purified. The reason birds are used in the purification process, says Rashi, citing the Talmud (Erechin 16b) is because the chatter of *lashon hara* was the cause of the *tzara'as*, so one must bring birds, which constantly chirp and chatter. The obvious question is that birds don't harm anyone through their tweeting; how do they resemble someone who spoke *lashon hara*?

The answer to this question is that the issue with speaking *lashon hara* is not just because of the harm you

cause others; it is also about the harm you cause yourself. To properly understand this idea, we need to examine the makeup of a human being. Back in Bereishis (2:7), the Torah tells us that Hashem formed man of dust of the ground. He then blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being. Onkelos, in his Aramaic translation of the Torah, translates the phrase "and man became a living being" to mean that man was granted the power of speech. This teaches us that the attribute that separates humans from animals is the power of speech. Since the power of speech defines a human being, when someone uses his speech for idle chatter, this desecrates and debases this unbelievable gift; this is the severity of speaking *lashon hara*.

To develop this idea further, we can explain that the word *adam* (man) is similar to two other words: *adama* (ground) and *adame* (I will emulate). Mankind is formed of earth, but is also created in the image of G-d. The two extremes coexist, as stated in aforementioned verse; a person is a combination of body and soul. The body is totally corporeal and only desires pleasures from the physical world. On the other hand, the soul, which is located in the mind, desires spiritual pleasures. The purpose of man in this world is not merely to allow the soul to obtain its spiritual pursuits, but to submit the body to the soul and allow the soul to transform the physical into the spiritual.

The Nefesh Hachaim (by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin; 1749-1821) explains that through speech, which is less physical and tangible, the soul within a person can express itself.

Stories For The Soul

Talk Yourself into It

Rabbi Shmelke of Nikolsburg (1726-1778) once arrived in a town where he was greeted by a large throng of his followers and admirers. Prior to meeting the crowd, he asked for a few moments of solitude. He entered a small room and secluded himself there. One of his chassidim (adherents) was curious to know what was taking place in this room, so he put his ear to the door and listened. He heard the Rebbe declare, "Welcome our esteemed leader; welcome holy Rebbe. It is such an honor that his eminence has come to our community. His presence in our town is a blessing."

The chassid was quite shocked as the Rebbe showered himself with accolades. Gathering up his courage, the fellow admitted to his eavesdropping and requested an explanation for Reb Shmelke's strange behavior.

Reb Shmelke said, "I knew what my chassidim were going to say. I have heard all the praises. While it pains me to hear them, for I am undeserving of such honor, I know only too well how easy it is to fall into the trap of arrogance. I fear becoming a victim of the terrible trait of vanity. When one says such praises to himself, they sound utterly foolish, and reflect no vanity whatsoever. I, therefore, said them to myself enough times for me to realize how nonsensical they are and how silly they sound. Thus, when my chassidim say the same thing to me, they have no impact."

Our Sages teach that one of the causes of the spiritual ailment of *tzara'as* is arrogance and hubris. Easy to fall prey to this trait, we must ensure that we do not succumb.

Kollel Happenings

RESPONDING TO ANTI-SEMITISM AT MAY 3RD TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Scott Levin, Regional Director for the Anti-Defamation League, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the proper response to anti-Semitism. Wednesday, May 3rd, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM ON MAY 28TH

Join the communal completion of an entire tractate of Talmud in the course of one hour of Torah study! Men, sign up and study a preassigned section of Tractate Kiddushin with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up and attend a special study session. Visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: We now begin a 5-part series of related Q&As.

Q: Usually, the *bracha* (blessing) on a mitzvah is recited prior to the performance of the mitzvah. When do we recite a *bracha* specifically after the performance of the mitzvah?

A: 1. When kindling the Shabbos lights, the *bracha* is recited after the kindling (according to most customs). 2. When washing for bread, one washes and then recites the *bracha*. 3. When immersion in a *mikvah* (ritual bath) is required

by halacha, according to Ashkenazic tradition, the *bracha* is recited after the immersion. 4. According to all, a convert makes the *bracha* after the immersion. (Sources: Orach Chaim 158:11 and 263:5, Yoreh De'ah 200 and 268:2)

This week's question: What is the reason that the *bracha* (blessing) recited when washing one's hands for bread is said only after the washing, not prior to it?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles - Part V

Other major Torah authorities of the time also communicated with the Rema, including Rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In the latter half of the 16th century, the Council of the Four Lands was formed. The Council of the Four Lands was a communal organization consisting of four areas of Jewish settlement: Greater Poland, Little Poland, Ruthenia and Volhynia. This body was a central governing body of the Jewish communities, and members of the smaller communities met to discuss

issues ranging from taxation to religion to culture. The Rema was actively involved in the Council of the Four Lands, as well.

The Rema was not only a master of the revealed Torah; he was also well-versed in the hidden wisdom of Kabbalah. In addition, he studied history, astronomy and philosophy, although he expressed that it is meant as an occasional, secondary area of study, that one must first master Torah and halacha, and that one must steer clear of the heresy that can be found in secular studies.

A Taste of Torah

Continued from front

Speech is thus the vehicle for one's soul to express itself; this is why someone who doesn't appreciate this gift and uses it to speak *lashon hara* is akin to a chirping bird, having debased and animalized his power of speech, and is therefore punished so severely.

Today we are lacking a Temple. The Jerusalem Talmud teaches that any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt is regarded as having had it destroyed in its time. The Talmud (Yoma 9b) tells us that the First Temple was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins of idolatry, immorality, and murder. During the Second Temple era, however,

people observed the laws of the Torah; why, then, was it destroyed? The Talmud answers that it was due to *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). The Talmud concludes that we can infer that this sin is equal to the three cardinal sins. The Chofetz Chaim states that *sinas chinam* includes *lashon hara*, for the aforementioned Talmudic passage in Erachin states that *lashon hara* is equal to the three cardinal sins.

It is thus vital, in our time, to strengthen ourselves and to appreciate the power of speech and avoid *lashon hara*, which is constantly destroying the Temple whose rebuilding we await.