

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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### TAZRIA-METZORA

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## THE SERIOUSNESS OF GOSSIP AND ITS PURIFICATION

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**T**he Sages affirm that whoever speaks ill of others is struck with leprosy (Arachin 16a), and that the word *metzora* suggests, phonetically, the words *motzira* ("bringing forth evil" – Arachin 15a; Vayikra Rabba 15a).

What does this consist of? When a man speaks ill of others, he resembles someone who sows seeds in the earth. After a certain time, the earth brings forth several dozen times more than what was sowed in it. The same goes for the person who speaks ill of others when recounting his stories, as well as for the one who thinks about what he has heard. And when the latter, on his part, begins to recount what he has heard, he adds a little to it. This is the reason why the Sages have said that gossip kills three people: The one who utters it, the one who hears it, and the one who is being spoken of (Arachin 15b). Each person who hears it amplifies the story when recounting it, until we arrive at "the tongue that speaks boastfully" (Psalms 12:4).

This is perhaps the connection between Parsha *Tazria* and Parsha *Metzora*. We know that women have a propensity for verbal expression, as the Sages mention several times. For example, they have said, "ten measures of speech came down into the world, and women took nine of them" (Berachot 48b). Consequently, in the same way that a woman conceives ("sows") and later gives birth, the one who speaks ill of others first *tazria* ("sows") and then brings great sins into the world, for as we just stated, lies eventually add themselves to malicious words. The one who does this deserves so great a punishment that he is struck with wounds and leprosy (*metzora*). One

can therefore perfectly understand the connection between Parsha *Tazria* and Parsha *Metzora*.

And if we are correct, we may note that it is written, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and tell them..." (Leviticus 21:1). The words "speak" and "tell" are translations of the same basic Hebrew word, which give rise to the observation that this was stated in order to put the great on guard concerning the lesser (Yebamot 114a). This signifies that great men and Tzaddikim should put their generation on guard against the temptation to speak ill of others. Even when one recounts minor things – unimportant stories – that from the outside do not give the impression of being mean spirited, they should be avoided at all costs. Even if a matter consists of words that have the taint of gossip (technically called the "dust of evil speech"), it too is to be avoided at all costs, for the Gemara affirms that everyone falls into this trap (Bava Batra 165a). This "dust" risks developing into "the tongue that speaks boastfully," for the act of sowing implies birth and development.

What should someone do, therefore, who sincerely seeks to rectify this sin, like the leper on the day that he purifies himself? It is written, "Zot [This] shall be the *torah* [law] of the leper on the day of his purification" (Leviticus 14:2), meaning that he will be purified by means of *zot* (the Torah, which is called *zot* – Menachot 53b), and by the Shechinah (which is also called *zot* – Zohar III: 56b, 62a). If he dedicates himself to the Torah, comes closer to G-d, and believes in Him, he will then be purified of all his wounds and leprosy both in this world and the world to come

# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## RABBI AKIVA BEN YOSSEF

**R**abbi Akiva was among the greatest of the great, as it is written, "Are you like Akiva ben Yosef, whose renown fills the entire world?" It was thus that one day, Rabbi Dosa ben Hyrcanus, whose eyesight had dimmed though age, called out to the great man (whose precept we present today in order to comment on it). He was the first that we know of who endeavored to systematically classify the immense knowledge base that is the Oral Law. It is to him that we owe the first manuscript of the Mishnah, and it is to him that we may attribute *Tosefta*, *Sifre*, *Sifra*, and the historical work *Seder Olam Rabba*.

Just as important as his scholarship was his teaching abilities, as well as his work for the good of the community. His piety, fear of sin, love of G-d, and submission to the Divine Will always came to the fore in both major and minor things.

His life's destiny was incredible. His father was an idolater who had converted to Judaism. The son grew up in ignorance and earned a living in keeping sheep, until eventually a young noble woman won him over to Torah study. He left his father's home to follow his greatly loved wife, yet in poverty and penury.

There was perhaps never a man who had to fight and battle to acquire knowledge as much as Rabbi Akiva did. Although no longer young, he had to begin by the most rudimentary of lessons, learning how to read and write at the same time as earning a living for his wife and children. No one ever had to show as much patience and perseverance as Rabbi Akiva. He learned for 16 years with his teachers, without ever speaking, until eventually he raised his voice to utter a decisive statement, finally triumphing over his own teacher.

Probably no other man was involved in such prodigious teaching activities as Rabbi Akiva. Around him were 24,000 followers, men young and old that he would instruct in the fields. Perhaps no other man lived through such terrible events as Rabbi Akiva. His disciples were taken before his very eyes, the man that he had thought was the Messiah (Bar Kochva) succumbed in combat to the Romans, and Israel suffered a defeat the likes of which it had never previously undergone, nor undergone since. All seemed lost, but Rabbi Akiva didn't lose his faith in G-d. This confidence gave him the courage to begin his teaching activities anew, at an advanced age, and to develop men who would become the pillars

of Judaism. His work, blessed by G-d, nevertheless aroused the anger of the Romans. He was thrown into prison and gave his life for the sanctification of the Divine Name. When he was being executed by the most horrific means of torture, he proclaimed the unity of G-d and praised his Creator for his being able to give witness, through his death, to his infinite love for the Master of the world.

The precept that the great Sage left us (See Perkei Avoth, *The Rights of Man*, above) forms the beginning of a series of statements that gives us some perspective on the depth of his thought.

After the return of the captives from Babylon, when the Men of the Great Assembly founded a new Jewish state, they uttered a profound statement: "Make a fence around the Torah" (Perkei Avoth 1: 1). The Torah resembles an exquisite garden where the most precious trees, the most useful plants, and the most beautiful flowers grow, thrive, and flourish. Tame and wild animals, wicked and dishonest men, and children and thoughtless people would quickly wreck the garden if a protective did not encircle it.

As he lay lifeless on the ground, bleeding from a thousand wounds, Rabbi Akiva revealed to our people that he was the man worthy of grabbing hold of the principle uttered by the Men of the Great Assembly

## EISHET CHAYIL

### MILK AND MEAT

1. After having eaten meat, one must abstain from consuming milk products for six hours. One begins counting the six hours after having *finished* eating meat. One should accustom children to wait six hours between meat and milk.
2. It is permissible to eat meat after having consumed milk products provided that one's hands have been carefully washed and that one's mouth has been rinsed and cleaned by eating bread.
3. It is preferable that a microwave oven not be used both for meat and milk products. According to Halachah, it is nevertheless possible to use a microwave oven both for meat as well as for milk, one after the other, provided that the food is covered.

# PERKEI AVOTH

## THE RIGHTS OF MAN

by Rav M. Lehmann ז"ל

**R**abbi Akiva used to say, “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]. It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d], as it is stated: ‘For in the image of G-d He made man’” (Perkei Avoth 3:14).

חביב אדם שנברא בצלם – “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d].” It is not written, “Beloved is the Jew,” but rather, “Beloved is man”. In the following passages of our Mishnah, Jews are being referred to, but in the passage above, it is undeniable that the term “man” refers to everyone who goes by that name, regardless of skin color, stature, race, nationality, religion, culture, or other differences.

All men, be they black or white, oriental or occidental, prince or beggar, scholar or ignoramus, possess the supreme advantage of having been created in the image of G-d. Directly from this stems the principle that all men have the same rights, that their lives should be sacred to us, and that their property be sacrosanct. G-d created man in His image and made him master over all creatures. A very clear line therefore separates man from animal. The lives of animals, fish, birds, etc., is at our disposition, at our use and our discretion. It is otherwise for man. He has rights that are his solely by virtue of his existence. His life, possessions, and liberty should not be harmed. He has the right to our friendship and our love, for he is like us, created in the image of G-d.

What is the nature of the resemblance that man has with G-d? It is by the examination of this question that Maimonides begins his massive work *The Guide to the Perplexed*. He refutes the idea that there exists a question here of any corporal resemblance. No notion whatsoever of corporality can be brought with respect to G-d. It is solely a question of a spiritual resemblance, and it is here that man’s advantage over the other creatures exists: G-d breathed into man the breath of His Spirit. Animals also possess a soul, and their soul possesses certain attributes and characteristics. Nevertheless, does that mean that human and animal souls are identical? “The lion, mighty among animals” (Proverbs 30:30), writes King Solomon; man is also mighty, but whereas the lion uses its might solely to catch prey, man is capable, thanks to his might, to perform the greatest of actions. The might of the lion stems from the makeup of its body – the strength of its muscles and its dexterity – but the might of man stems from the soul that G-d breathed into him. Whereas animals, according to their makeup, possess certain characteristics originating from their souls, all these characteristics, and even more, are found combined in man. He can even combine in himself conflicting ones. Of his own free will, man can lean towards virtue or vice. He can conquer his inborn natural tendencies, dominate them, and control them. It is quite the opposite with animals, which can only follow their natural instincts.

However, that which greatly surpasses all these

capabilities is the advantage that man has by virtue of his G-d-given ability to reason, as well as by being able to give life to his thoughts through speech and thus to share these with his fellow man. And it is precisely the quality of his thoughts that elevates him so high.

Unfortunately, there are but few men that recognize their resemblance to G-d. It is thus that King David laments, “Only in shadowy darkness does man make his way; it is futility for which they are in turmoil. He amasses [riches], but does not know who will harvest them” (Psalms 39:7). Here Rabbi Akiva exhorts us: Be only conscious of your illustrious origin so that you always remain worthy of your Heavenly Father Who created you in His own image! One should therefore not run after vain things, not amass treasures that, in any case, one cannot carry into eternity. All that a man should desire is to be close to G-d, to be joined to Him for eternity.

חביבה יתרה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם – “It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d].” It can happen that, without knowing it, someone may possess a treasure buried in his garden or hidden within the walls of his home. Of course, it is possible that at any moment he can discover this treasure. Nevertheless, for as long as he remains unaware of it, everything goes on exactly as if the treasure didn’t exist.

Very often, the ignored treasure consists of a child’s exceptional gift, a gift that one discovers when it is too late to develop it. This can be the case of a boy endowed with a magnificent voice, yet surrounded by a family that lacks the ability to appreciate it. Another boy can be leaning towards drawing, yet is constantly criticized because he draws on books or on walls. Yet another would be capable of undertaking advanced studies, but his parents make him spend his youth as an apprentice with a carpenter or locksmith. All these talents for singing, drawing, and studying are lost because they weren’t detected on time. Someone who is important, who can make a difference, is only valued once he is appreciated. Rabbi Akiva also provides us here with another very important lesson: “Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]. It is even a greater love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image [of G-d].”

Man created in the image of G-d should serve his Creator. He should perfect his immortal soul and aspire to the loftiest of goals. All men carry in them the image of G-d; it is permanent and cannot be lost. Man’s Divine spark is never extinguished; the soul breathed into man by G-d does not die. The greatest of sinners can find in this magnificent concept the energy to change his life. He can begin a new life founded on remorse and penitence. Even if, through reprehensible acts, he abused and perverted the Divine image within him, he may again put to good use the resemblance he shares with G-d in order to attain, through his most strenuous efforts, the highest degree of perfection.