



The Path To Follow TAZRIA

230

April 5th 08
29 Adar II 5768

Publication
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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

He Lowers the Proud to the Ground

It is written, "His clothes shall be torn, and his head made bare" (Leviticus 13:45). It may be that the Torah commands this to be done because the sin of Lashon Harah stems primarily from pride. Thus if a person considers himself to be important, he might think of denigrating others, for if he knew his own shortcomings, he would not seek out the shortcomings of others. The proof is that for the leper's purification, the verse states that he must take a branch of cedar, hyssop, and some scarlet yarn, explained by Rashi to mean: "He must humble himself from his pride, just as the tola'at [which is a worm] and the hyssop." According to this explanation, the verse is saying that the leper's garments are to be torn and his head made bare in order to humble him and make him appear reprehensible to others. As such he will not harbor pride in his heart, nor will he speak ill of others.

– Shmirat HaLashon

ARROGANT SPEECH (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "This shall be the law of the leper on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the priest" (Leviticus 14:2). The Sages have said, "Whoever speaks Lashon Harah increases his sins even up to the three [cardinal] sins: Idolatry, incest, and the shedding of blood" (Arachin 15b). This is surprising, for the din is that one should die instead of transgressing these prohibitions, and if a person has transgressed them, he is liable to death. Therefore how can leprosy afflict a person because of Lashon Harah and arrogance? Why would his punishment be leprosy in that case? If his sin is more serious than the three cardinal sins, his punishment should be death! Furthermore, with regards to Lashon Harah it is not stated that a person should die instead of committing this sin. We shall attempt to explain. When a leper reflects upon his sorry state, he will realize that his present condition is very grave, since it is written: "The leper with the disease, his clothes shall be torn.... He shall dwell alone. His dwelling shall be outside the camp" (Leviticus 13:45-46). This means that he has to live outside the camp, far from his family and friends. He will feel tremendous shame because everyone will realize from his punishment that he spoke Lashon Harah. In that case the leper will certainly prefer to die instead of living in this way. It is even possible that he would agree to being judged as if he had transgressed the three cardinal sins. Therefore his punishment is certainly severe, for everyone will point at him and say that because his body was afflicted with leprosy, he now has to live alone outside the camp. His humiliation and pain will certainly be worse than if he had died.

Furthermore, the Sages have said that the leper who purifies himself must bring birds as an offering. This alludes to the fact that the leper babbled like birds that chirp (Arachin 16b). That is, he spoke Lashon Harah. Just how great is the shame he endures, since the Torah compares him to a bird and a worm, a reference to the scarlet yarn that he must offer, its dye coming from a worm. The leper is also compared to hyssop, which has no consciousness whatsoever, having been created only with the characteristics that Halachah is concerned with. So too for the leper, who instead of being at a higher level than the animals, conducts himself like an animal by speaking Lashon Harah. After all, the leper possesses consciousness, intelligence, and the ability to speak (which lifts him above the animals and enables him to do his Creator's will), in addition to other inborn attributes. The leper therefore fulfills the verse, "Man has no superiority over beasts" (Ecclesiastes 3:19). He will endure tremendous shame by the punishment and suffering he incurs on account of the Lashon Harah that he spoke.

If we expand upon this issue, we will see that being punished by a leprous affliction for speaking Lashon Harah (and for being arrogant), as well as all that ensues from it, comes to him from Hashem measure for measure. In fact there are several reasons that lead a person to speak Lashon Harah and act arrogantly. The first reason is because a person wants to seem more important by diminishing others, which is why he treats them arrogantly. Regarding this sin, the Sages have said that such a person has no share in the World to Come (Yerushalmi, Hagigah 2:1; Bereshith Rabba 1:5).

The second reason is because when a person speaks Lashon Harah about others, he derives great pleasure from humiliating them. He also derives pleasure for speaking against them, almost as if he has been given a crown of victory upon returning from battle. The third reason is that by speaking Lashon Harah, he raises himself up by putting others down. Such a person suspects that others have offended his honor. He therefore feels that he should avenge himself even more, contrary to the verse: "You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge" (Leviticus 19:18).

The fourth reason is because Lashon Harah may stem entirely from personal motivation, for in this way one may try to prove that his words are more just and true than those of others. He will therefore try and completely contradict what others say by speaking ill of them, contrary to the statement: "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls" (Proverbs 24:17).

However Hashem, "the searcher of hearts and minds...the righteous G-d" (Psalms 7:10) knows fully well that this is nothing but sin. Therefore He punishes one who speaks in this way measure for measure, doing to him what he planned on doing to others. Hashem will punish him with a leprous affliction for having raised himself up by putting others down, and henceforth others will be raised as he is lowered and humiliated. For the tremendous pleasure that he derived from humiliating others, he will be stuck with leprosy. He will no longer be the master of his own fate, for the priest will decide whether he will be treated leniently or strictly. He is also afflicted for having suspected others of offending his honor and for having tried to disparage them. The result will be that he himself will be disparaged. Above all, he will be struck with leprosy for having spoken Lashon Harah about others for personal reasons, namely that his words were contradicted and his credibility harmed.

From here it follows that the leper's afflictions correspond, measure for measure, to the Lashon Harah that he spoke. Because of his pleasure and joy, because of his suspicions that others offended his honor, and because of his fears that his words were twisted, he will be afflicted. Thus the letters of the term negah ("affliction") are the same as those of oneg ("pleasure"). The word neguah (an offense to his honor, an offense by his words) also comes from the same root as negah.

On the expression, "The priest shall see" (Leviticus 13:3), Rabbi Chaim Eizik wrote: The priest shall see. The term vera'ah [shall see] is written more than 10 times with regards to the priest. However only once is it written that the priest vera'ahu [shall see him]. This means that it is not enough for the priest to see if the affliction has changed; he must also see if the demeanor of the leper has changed. He must notice if his character has improved during the time that he was isolated from everyone else, even from other lepers. He must also notice if this brought the leper to think about repentance. This affliction is a punishment and rectification for his sin, and if his affliction has changed, it is a sign that the leper has improved somewhat. Yet it has to go further than that. The change in the leper has to be noticeable, for his character must be completely improved.

This can be fully understood according to what we have said, for a leprous affliction and its rectification are very serious subjects. It is therefore not enough for a leper's offerings to rectify his sin. The priest must see that he has been completely healed of his illness, which caused his leprosy. The priest must see that the leper is spiritually healed. Hashem has certainly given him the ways and means to repent, but it must still be seen if he has wholeheartedly repented. In fact some people only repent superficially, and even if we think that they have repented, the evil in their heart has not been completely uprooted, for something else lies in their mouth and in their heart, something that can get worse later on. Hence a person who says, "I will sin and repent, sin and repent," no opportunity is given for him to repent (Yoma 85b), which is why he will commit more serious sins. We should never trust in ourselves. Instead we should go to the tzaddik, who will show us the way to repent more and more each day. As the Sages have said, "Whosoever has a sick person in his home should go to a Sage, who will invoke mercy for him" (Bava Batra 116a).

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Lashon Harah: Lifting Yourself Up by Bringing Others Down

The maggid who revealed himself to the Beit Yossef said to him, “He who speaks Lashon Harah about others, his merits are removed and given to the person he has spoken about. This is the absolute truth, and if people realized it they would rejoice in discovering that Lashon Harah was spoken about them. They would rejoice as if given a gift of gold and silver.”

We need to understand the meaning of this punishment. How is it fair that the merits of the person who speaks Lashon Harah are given to the one about whom he speaks? With regards to no other sin do we find that other merits are lost as a result. What is the reason for this special punishment regarding the sin of Lashon Harah?

Rabbi Dessler Zatzal explained that what draws a person into speaking Lashon Harah is his erroneous way of evaluating himself, namely by comparing himself to others, not by evaluating his own worth. When a person finds himself among others, he evaluates his gestures, words, and clothing by questioning how others will react to them. He wonders how he will appear to others, and whether they will approve. Thinking in this way diminishes a person, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Such dependence on the views of others originates from an erroneous belief. In fact we tend to think that a virtue is considered as such only when others recognize it, to the point that a person who is scorned seems abhorrent. Because of this erroneous viewpoint, a person is liable to take pleasure in compliments that he is showered with, all while knowing deep down that he does not possess the virtues for which he is being complimented. Evaluating oneself in this way is wrong!

It is from here that a taste for speaking Lashon Harah develops. By recounting that others have done wrong, the speaker highlights his own superiority, since a person will not point out shortcomings in others if he himself possesses them. When this person speaks Lashon Harah, it is as if he were saying: “So-and-so has this shortcoming, but I don’t have it at all.”

One who speaks Lashon Harah wants to raise himself up and highlight his own importance, not by his own virtues, but by lowering others. Even if he doesn’t explicitly say so, he still thinks it, even if unconsciously. He is seeking honor for himself at the expense of shaming others.

Since the goal of such a person is to build himself up by destroying others – to raise himself upon the ruins of others – he will be punished measure for measure, meaning that others will be elevated at his expense! His merits will therefore be transferred to the one about whom he spoke Lashon Harah, and the liabilities of that person will belong to him. Thus he will be redeemed from his sins by being punished measure for measure. What he wanted to do to others will be done to him.

– Siftei Chaim

A Pearl From the Rav:

The Pride of Man

How can the leper get better? He is brought to the priest (Leviticus 13:2), meaning that he must come before the talmid chacham, and then he must dwell outside the camp, as it is written: “He shall dwell in isolation. His dwelling shall be outside the camp” (v.46). This seems difficult to understand, for suppose that the leper is a talmid chacham, knowing the laws of leprosy and realizing that he has been afflicted with it. Why does the Torah command him to be brought to the priest, even against his own will, since he already knows everything about his condition?

It seems that this is a case of punishment that is measure for measure. In other words, just as he was struck with leprosy for having grown proud, his rectification and punishment consist of humbling himself and being stripped of his garments of pride to come before the priest. Now we know that the crown of Torah is greater than the crown of priesthood, as the Sages have said: “‘It is more precious than pearls’ [Proverbs 3:15], i.e., it is more precious than the High Priest who enters the Holy of Holies” (Horayot 13a). The Sages have also said, “A mamzer talmid chacham takes precedence of over an ignorant High Priest” (ibid.). Therefore even if the leper is a talmid chacham, meaning that he is greater than the priest, he must still yield to the priest. Being stripped of his pride constitutes his atonement.

As we mentioned earlier, the leper must dwell outside the camp (Leviticus 13:46). Why so? The Sages cite Hashem as saying, “Every man who is proud of spirit, I and he cannot both dwell in the world” (Sotah 5a). This is why the leper who conducted himself with pride cannot live in the camp of Israel, for the Shechinah dwells there. He must leave the camp and stay there until he is cleansed of his sin.

Your Light Will Break Out Like the Dawn

It is written, “It has all turned white; he is clean” (Leviticus 13:13).

The Sages have said, “The son of David will not come until the whole world is converted to the belief of the heretics. Rabba said: What verse [proves this]? ‘It has all turned white; he is clean’” (Sanhedrin 97a).

When the world turns to evil, it is clear that the days of Mashiach are near. This movement towards evil stems primarily from the fact that Heaven is trying to lead Israel to repentance. Hence a ruler as despotic as Haman will be sent to them, a man whose cruel decrees will bring them to repentance. When the world will have given itself over to heresy – when there will no longer be any shame before G-d or man, and when the anguish of the Jewish people will have reached its peak – this will lead to purity. The Jewish people will cleanse their hearts and the kingdoms of evil will be uprooted, giving way to Mashiach the son of David.

– According to the Chatam Sofer

His Life is Not a Life

It is written, “He shall dwell in isolation. His dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:46).

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Leprous Afflictions

The Sages have said that a leper is considered as being dead (Nedarim 64b). The reason is not because of the burden of his illness, nor because of his suffering, since all the suffering in the world cannot compare to death, as we read: “The L-RD has severely punished me, but He has not given me over to death” (Psalms 118:18). The reason is because the leper must “dwell in isolation. His dwelling shall be outside the camp.” When Moses was told, “Go, return to Egypt, for all the men [who sought your life] are dead” (Exodus 4:19), this was a reference to Dathan and Abiram. Yet were they really dead? The Gemara states that although they were alive, they are described as dead solely because they had become poor (Nedarim 64b). This statement surprises the Ran, for maybe they were leprous, not poor? He replies that we cannot say that they were leprous, for in the incident involving Korach we read: “The earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up... in the midst of all Israel” (Deuteronomy 11:6). If they had been leprous, they would not have been dwelling in the midst of the camp.

A person who is isolated and deprived of human contact cannot interact with others and do good for them. Hence he is considered as being dead.

– Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Tazria continues the subject of Israel’s purity in regards to bodily impurities and the impurity of childbirth. It also deals with afflictions that affect the body and garments, and the impurity that they cause. The parsha begins with the laws of childbirth and its impurity, which is purified in the Sanctuary. It continues with the laws of leprosy, describing various kinds of afflictions and the way in which people must be purified. From the afflictions of the body, the parsha goes on to discuss afflictions that affect garments.

EISHET CHAYIL

My Greatest Pleasure in Life

Rebbetzin Pines came from a wealthy home, and throughout her life she was used to living in comfort, to wealth and privilege. Nevertheless, she was always imbued with a noble spirit, never hesitating to engage in difficult and denigrating work if it meant that her husband could continue learning Torah without interruption. This was her only objective, one that she saw as her goal in life. It was in this way that she built her home over the years, one that produced other incredible homes of Torah. One day her daughter Devorah Sternbuch came to visit them in their old age, and during her visit she suggested that they go outside for some fresh air. Her elderly mother refused, however, explaining that “my greatest pleasure in life is to hear the sound of your father’s Torah, which fills all the rooms in the house. Every minute of it is precious to me.”

– Hi Tithalal

A question arises deep within the heart when we read this week’s parsha: In previous times, when people were better than today, they were sometimes struck by leprosy. Yet today, when so many people speak Lashon Harah, nothing happens to them!

The holy Alsheich says that this happens in our time precisely because the holiness of the world has diminished. We can no longer trust that people will be so repulsed by their impurity that it will manifest itself outwardly, on their skin. The Rambam describes the process of declaring the leper to be pure or impure as follows: “Although anyone can check the marks, only a priest can declare whether they are pure or impure. How? If the priest is not an expert, the expert sees the mark and tells the priest, ‘Declare it to be impure,’ and the priest says: ‘Impure.’ [Otherwise the expert says] ‘Declare it to be pure,’ and the priest says: ‘Pure.’ This is because every controversy and affliction is to be resolved by their mouth. Even if the priest is a minor or is simpleminded, the expert tells him and he decides if he must quarantine or release him” (Hilchot Tumat, Tzara’at 9:2).

Let us try and imagine the scene: Rabbi Akiva Eiger or the Vilna Gaon are standing next to the leper and examining his leprous affliction. In their great wisdom, they conclude that it is either pure or impure. However this decision, in and of itself, does nothing. Only the priest (either a small child or a simpleminded man) who stands there and repeats what they say is able to decide the destiny of the afflicted man. How can this be possible?

The Alsheich says that the secret lies in the first word of the parsha, namely adam (“man”). The leprous affliction is not an outbreak on the skin, but rather a stain of impurity that manifests itself on a delicate and pure site – “man” – a lofty creature created in the image of G-d. It is precisely in man that leprosy appears because he is a lofty being. When he sins and renders himself impure through Lashon Harah, a dark stain can easily be seen in the whiteness of his soul, until it finally comes to the surface. Thus a stain can only be seen in a pure and righteous soul that is horrified by the impurity of evil speech, the reaction to this impurity resulting in leprosy. As for a crude and darkened soul, we cannot perceive any additional stain from the impurity of leprosy.

The Alsheich adds that this is why the stain of leprosy can only be treated by the Creator of souls, the Holy One, blessed be He, or by the priests who are His messengers.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Shlomo Jacobowitz

One of the noblest figures among the Chassidim of Strikov in Poland was Rabbi Shlomo Jacobowitz Zatzal, better known as Rabbi Shlomo Moreh Hora'ah ("Rabbi Shlomo who teaches Halachah"). One of the greatest rabbis and dayanim of Lodz, he reached the summit of his greatness during his final days, as he was lying on his sickbed. It was not without reason that the great figures of Chassidut and masters of Mussar taught that the greatness of a person manifests itself precisely in times of trial, when everything he does stems from discretion, not obligation. This is when a person's true nature is revealed.

The Strikover Rebbe recounted the following story with great emotion: In the Lodz ghetto, during the difficult days of the war, people could barely find any bread or water. Retaining the image of G-d in oneself under such conditions reveals an exceptional person. At the time, Rabbi Shlomo Moreh Hora'ah was on his sickbed, plagued by extreme weakness. A doctor visited him and said, "There is one medication that can heal you: The fat of an unkosher animal." Despite the fact that they would be risking their lives, Rabbi Shlomo's friends were obligated to take enormous risks to find this medication for him. Rabbi Shlomo, the elderly chassid, was on his sickbed when it was brought to him. Yet being the tzaddik that he was, he did not even look at it. Not only that, but he turned his head to the wall and stroked his long white beard with his hand. Rabbi Shlomo was speaking to himself, murmuring in the depths of his heart: "Will I, Shlomo Jacobowitz, place forbidden meat in my mouth? Will I, Shlomo Jacobowitz, taste such a thing? Was it for this that I worked all the days of my life? Was it for this that I exerted myself during all these years, to put a forbidden thing in my mouth?" Rabbi Shlomo did not even look at the medication, and for the next three days he kept thinking to himself: "Was it for this that I lived 70 years!" At the end of those three days, Rabbi Shlomo rendered his soul to his Creator.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

On Their Shoulders

It is written, "They placed the Ark of G-d upon a new wagon" (II Samuel 6:3).

Our Sages have said (Sotah 35a) that since King David stated, "Your statutes have been my songs" (Psalms 119:54), thereby describing the Torah as "songs," he was punished by forgetting the verse: "Upon the shoulder they will carry it" (Numbers 7:9). This indicates that the holy Ark must be carried on the shoulders of the Levites, not in a wagon. Yet David ordered it to be placed in a wagon! How was David punished "measure for measure" by this?

The answer is that if a person wants the words of the Torah to be fulfilled in him, meaning that they be influential and lead to action, he must not receive them lightly. Instead he must put an effort into receiving them. He must have a powerful desire to carry the world on his shoulders, as the Sages have said: "Words of Torah are firmly held by one who kills himself for it" (Berachot 63b). The Torah that we obtain lightly (without putting an effort into it, as if we were playing a game) has no permanence, as it is said: "The Torah that I studied in hardship has endured with me."

The Ark should therefore have been carried on the shoulders of the Levites, not in a wagon. This teaches us that we must feel the yoke of the Torah ("the mitzvot were given as a yoke around our necks"), not to treat it lightly.

Because of his great love for Torah and mitzvot, King David called them "songs." It was as if he had received them while singing, meaning lightly, without sensing the yoke or burden of Torah. Hence he was punished "measure for measure" by forgetting the verse, "Upon the shoulder they will carry it." This teaches that we must receive the Torah as a yoke and carry it upon our shoulders as a burden.

– Avnei Ezel

A TRUE STORY

The Prophet Eliyahu

It is written, "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised" (Leviticus 12:3).

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Kluger Zatzal was once invited to be the Sandak at a circumcision. The gaon, whose time was very precious, was surprised to see that the parents were taking their time before the ceremony and making all the guests wait. As it turned out, family members were entering a nearby room and emerging from it with a distressed look on their faces, being ominously silent. Rabbi Shlomo was surprised to learn the reason why: In that room there was someone who was very ill, on the point of dying in fact, and the family was waiting for him to pass away before naming the child after him. The gaon immediately ordered the circumcision to proceed without father delay. He himself went into the room to see the sick man and said, "Mazel Tov." He then added, "It's impossible for me to disturb the angel of healing so he comes and heal you. However when the child is circumcised, the angel of circumcision [the prophet Eliyahu] will come, and at the same time I will ask him to heal you." This is exactly what happened, and within three days the sick man recovered and went to the Beit Midrash.

The Chafetz Chaim said, "Rashi, at the beginning of Parsha Vayera, says that the angel Raphael, who was sent to heal Abraham, also saved Lot, for the task of healing and saving are the same. This seems difficult to understand, for why was a special angel not sent to save Lot in that case? The answer is that Lot was not worthy of being sent a special angel from Heaven to save him. However since an angel had already been sent to heal Abraham, he was given the additional task of saving Lot at the same time."

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Repenting For Days Gone By

One day a disciple of Rav Saadia Gaon went to see him in the middle of the night, only to discover him rolling in the snow. Standing there confused and trembling, the disciple said to him: "Rabbi, do you really need to repent by afflicting yourself like this?"

Rav Saadia replied, "In my heart I know that I haven't committed a sin that requires such self-affliction. However I learned this from a man in whose home I stayed as a guest. Though at first he didn't know my identity, he still treated me with the same respect as anyone else.

"Later on, when news spread that I had arrived in town, all the people came to my host's home to honor me and put themselves at my disposal. When my host realized what was happening, he also began to bestow great honors upon me in all kinds of ways and to the utmost of his abilities, and possibly beyond.

"When I was about to leave my host's home, he threw himself at my feet and wept. He begged me, 'Please, may our teacher be willing to forgive me!' I said to him, 'You've done everything you could for me. What else could you have done?' He replied, 'I ask that you forgive me for how I treated you at first, when I didn't realize who you were and didn't honor you sufficiently. If I only knew that my guest was Rav Saadia Gaon, I would have done everything to honor you as best I could!'"

Rav Saadia Gaon concluded this story by telling his disciple, "See! If a person could feel this way for the honor of a human being, even throwing himself at my feet and tearfully begging me to forgive him for not having honored me sufficiently, how much more does this apply to the Creator? I know Him a little more each day, and with each passing day I serve Him better. Since my fear and love for Him increase, I should weep even more than my host did for me. I must afflict myself in beseeching the Holy One, blessed be He, to forgive me for the inadequacy of my service and the insignificance of my fear and love of Him in days gone by!"