



The Path To Follow METZORA

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Sins of the Past

It is forbidden to relate information about a person's past misdeeds or the misdeeds of his family, even if you do not intend to belittle him, and you will not cause the listener to think less of him, as he has now corrected his way.

This is forbidden because a person is usually embarrassed if his misdeeds are recalled in his presence. Hence you might ultimately cause him anguish if the information becomes widely known.

Mr. Spiegel is now a grandfather and his entire family is strictly observant. In his youth, Mr. Spiegel did not observe mitzvot, but no one could tell this now. If Ezra tells Mattis that Mr. Spiegel is a baal teshuvah, Ezra is guilty of speaking Lashon Harah. This could prove embarrassing to Mr. Spiegel or to his family and therefore must be kept a secret.

– Guard Your Tongue, pp.53-54

PRIDE LIES AT THE HEART OF EVERY SIN

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

Parsha Metzora deals with the leper, a person who slandered others by speaking Lashon Harah about them. The Torah states that the leper's punishment is to dwell outside the camp and be declared impure.

Man lives in a social setting, even if it only consists of the company of one other person. Here a person is speaking harshly of a third Jew. Have we ever thought about how a Jew comes to speaking ill of others? Why doesn't he deal with his own concerns and leave others alone? How does he arrive at such a low point that he speaks Lashon Harah about other people, especially about other Jews, who are created in the image of G-d?

In several places throughout the Gemara and Midrashim, our Sages have said that pride lies at the heart of every sin. People tend to think that the world belongs to them, and it is true that the Sages have taught that every person should say, "The world was created for my sake" (Sanhedrin 37a), since the world was created only for Israel. However to jump from this to believing that you alone have a place in this world – that you alone are important while others are totally worthless – is completely mistaken.

Pride is so abhorrent to Hashem that He says, "Every man who is proud of spirit, I and he cannot both dwell in the world" (Sotah 5a). A person who is completely infused with pride, who is so conceited that he will never yield to others, is capable of sitting among people and speaking ill of them. Someone who feels that he is indispensable, while others are worthless, is a person who will speak Lashon Harah. Hence his punishment is to be humbled like someone who has been forsaken. He must live alone, outside the camp, until his sin has been forgiven.

We may also learn this principle from Shabbat HaGadol, named in memory of the miracles that were done for the Children of Israel before leaving Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped lambs, as it is written: "If we were to slaughter the deity of the Egyptians" (Exodus 8:22). While in Egypt, the Children of Israel received the order to "draw out and take a lamb" (ibid. 12:21). In other words: Remove your hands from idolatry, and take a lamb and slaughter it. Their idol will have absolutely no power over you, and neither it nor the Egyptians will harm you. The Children of Israel took lambs on Nissan 10, which was a Shabbat (Seder Olam), and tied them to the foot of their beds. The Egyptians asked them what they were doing to their idols, and the Children of Israel answered that on Nissan 14 they would slaughter them. The Egyptians were furious when they heard this, angrily grinding their teeth because their idols had been reduced to scorn. However they didn't harm the Children of Israel in any way, which constituted a great miracle. Hence this particular Shabbat is called "Shabbat HaGadol," for that day, the tenth of Nissan, was a gadol (great) Shabbat. Following this, Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to take the blood of these lambs and place it on their lintels and doorposts. Now everything is revealed to Hashem, and nothing is hidden from Him, not even our innermost thoughts. Therefore why did the Children of Israel have to place the blood of lambs on the lintels and doorposts

of their homes? Did the Holy One, blessed be He, need a sign that there were Jews within a given house? Does this mean that Hashem didn't know who slaughtered a lamb and was worthy of being delivered because he trusted and believed in Him, not fearing the Egyptians? The answer is that, as we know, Hashem wants people to serve Him wholeheartedly. Serving Him superficially is not what He wants.

This is why Hashem first struck Egypt with the plague of blood. This alluded to the fact that the Egyptians harmed their own souls, for it was blood that gave them life – blood given to them as a gift from Hashem – which they denied. This was also an allusion to the Children of Israel that when a person harms his own self, meaning the blood that gives him life, he will be struck as the Egyptians were. As for us, because of our many sins the vast majority of our service of Hashem is superficial, manifested only by outward signs. Who knows what our service of Hashem is like on the inside? This is why the Children of Israel received the order to place blood on their lintels and doorposts. In fact the Holy One, blessed be He, didn't want the Children of Israel to serve him just superficially by taking a lamb, attaching it to their bed in the sight of the Egyptians, and then slaughtering it, just like someone swaying in prayer before the entire community, while his heart is elsewhere. Above all, the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to pass over the houses of the Children of Israel and see the purity of their hearts, observing that they were serving Him wholeheartedly in addition to outwardly. This is why they received the order to place blood on their doorposts, an allusion to their service through blood, a service of the heart.

This is how a person must serve His creator, in a completely unselfish way. He must also serve Him wholeheartedly and sincerely. In fact a person must resemble a burnt-offering in this regard, serving Hashem with complete devotion, inside and out. As King David said, "Because for Your sake we are killed all the time" (Psalms 44:23), just like a burnt-offering that is entirely destined for Hashem.

Hence we must all pay great attention to the way in which we serve the Creator and perform mitzvot. We must not allow self-interest to get involved, for this leads a person to feelings of pride and vanity. As we have said, pride is what actually pushes a person to speak ill of others, for he considers himself as being important and others as being worthless. In that case his deeds will not be acceptable to Hashem, Who will have no desire to dwell together with him in this world. This also describes the tactics of the evil inclination, which attempts to get a person to introduce wrongful tendencies into his performance of mitzvot, teaching him that this is how things are done. If he believes that, he will get caught in the evil inclination's trap and be unable to free himself, losing all that he has gained. Simply put, we must serve the Creator like a burnt-offering, which was entirely consumed on the altar. Self-interest should not get involved with our service of Hashem, Whom we must serve for His sake, and His sake alone.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Why Travel Abroad?

There lived in Eretz Israel a Kohen who was so poor that he could no longer feed his wife and children. He tried various ways to earn a living, but all without success.

He thought to himself, "I'll travel abroad! I heard that people earn a very good living there." Although he tried to make money in various ways, this idea kept coming back to him, until he eventually decided, compelled by the situation, that he had to leave for elsewhere. He called his wife and told her of his decision, and then he added: "You may have to wait a long time until I return, since I may have to be away for a few months until I can make some money. Now you know that people usually come to see me regarding their skin lesions, to know whether they have leprosy or not. People will continue coming here because there aren't any other Kohanim in the area, so I need to teach you the signs you have to know in order to determine what is pure or not."

Despite her pain at her husband being forced to leave Eretz Israel, she did what he asked and began to learn the signs of leprosy.

The Kohen said to her, "Know that the Holy One, blessed be He, created a special source for each hair in the body. Every single hair has a small cavity in the skin from which it draws its nutrients. If you see a dry, colorless hair, it means that its source has dried up. This is one of the signs of leprosy."

His wife exclaimed, "Your ears should listen to what your mouth is saying! If the Holy One, blessed be He, created an individual source for each hair to draw its nutrients, then what about you? You also have to provide for the needs of your family! Will He not give you what you need? Have faith in Him, and He will provide for you here!"

Sometimes a person comes to a point when his faith in Hashem is tested. He is tried to see if he can overcome hardship, as was the case for this Kohen, who was tested by means of his livelihood. He didn't know how he was going to survive, and he thought that his only solution was to leave Eretz Israel and earn a living abroad. His wife's remark enlightened him, for Hashem had already provided for his sustenance and He didn't want him to look for it elsewhere. Yet before sending it to his very door, Hashem wanted this Kohen to have faith that He would save him.

The Holy One, blessed be He, nourishes everything, great or small, and nothing can prevent Him from saving someone. However a person must uproot harmful influences on his own; he must tear out everything that leads him to believe that his fate lies entirely in his own hands. He must realize that there is none else but Hashem, and he must place his trust in Him.

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita cites our Sages as saying: "Anyone who speaks Lashon Harah will be visited by the plague of leprosy" (Arachin 15b). The Sages interpreted the term *metzora* ("leper") as *motzi shem ra* ("one who brings up an evil name"). What does this mean? When someone speaks Lashon Harah about others, he is like one who plants seeds in the ground, for he will reap dozens of times more than he planted. Such is the one who speaks Lashon Harah: He says something to people, who then believe his words and recount them to others, adding things in the process. The person in question also adds more to the original account. It is possible that this is why the Sages said, "Lashon Harah kills three: The speaker, the listener, and the person spoken of," for each of them adds to the story. Hence Lashon Harah is described as "the tongue that speaks great things" (Psalms 12:4), for it adds to sin and heightens it.

Poorer than a Dog

It is written, "This shall be the law of the leper" (Leviticus 14:2).

The Sages have said, "Whoever relates Lashon Harah, and whoever accepts Lashon Harah, and whoever gives false testimony against his neighbor deserves to be thrown to the dogs. For it is said: 'You shall throw it to the dog' [Exodus 22:30], which is followed by, 'Do not tisa [accept] a false report' [ibid. 23:1], which may be read as *tashshi* [i.e., do not mislead]" (Pesachim 118a). We may use this to explain a surprising teaching of our Sages: "Rav Papa said, 'None are poorer than a dog, and none richer than a pig'" (Shabbat 155b). This seems difficult to understand. To explain, we may say that although everyone has heard Hashem's Torah, not everyone views its prohibitions as being equal. Some people are very careful with regards to certain prohibitions, such as not to eat pork for example. If such a person were to see his friend eating pork, he would distance himself from him. In fact he would not even want to associate with him, and he would be ashamed to speak with him. On the other hand, there are some prohibitions that are much more serious, yet people view them as being unimportant, prohibitions such as not speaking Lashon Harah. It follows that the prohibition against eating pork is one of the Torah's "richer" prohibitions, for many pay attention to it, whereas the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah is one of the "poorer" prohibitions, for almost nobody pays attention to it. Our Sages taught, "Whoever relates Lashon Harah...deserves to be cast to the dogs," for in referring to one who constantly barks like a dog, Rav Papa states: "None are poorer than a dog." This means that no prohibition is poorer than the one against Lashon Harah, and none is richer than the one against eating pork, which almost everyone observes.

– Peninei HaGra

An Elixir of Life

It is written, "This shall be the law of the leper" (Leviticus 14:2).

The Midrash states that this is the law of one who slanders people by speaking Lashon Harah, resulting in leprosy. The Sages recount (Vayikra Rabba 16:2) that a certain peddler went from town to town proclaiming, "Who wishes to buy an elixir of life?" Rabbi Yanai heard this and said to him, "Come here and sell it to me." The peddler replied, "Neither you nor people like you need it." The peddler went up to him, took out the book of Psalms, and showed him the passage: "Who is the man who desires life?" (Psalms 34:13). The peddler then said, "What is written afterwards? 'Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully' [v.14]." The peddler, who sold all kinds of elixirs, proved to people that the act of guarding one's tongue also protects a person from evil, just like a remedy heals and prolongs life. By guarding his tongue, a person avoids disputes, hostility and rage, everything that damages the body, wears out the nerves, and shortens life.

Rabbi Yanai was surprised by what he heard, saying that he had always interpreted the verse, "Who is the man who wants life" as a reference to life in the World to Come, where he would be greatly rewarded for having guarded his tongue. It never entered his mind that it also applied to daily life in this world, until this peddler came by and made everyone realize it. Guarding one's tongue is not only a mitzvah for which we are rewarded in the World to Come; it is also a simple remedy for health, something that prolongs life. It prevents a person from becoming angry and upset, things that damage the body and shorten life.

– Kochav MiYaakov

He Shall be Brought to the Priest

It is written, "He shall be brought to the priest. The priest shall go forth outside the camp" (Leviticus 14:2-3).

If the priest leaves the camp to go and see the leper, why must the leper "be brought to the priest"?

We know that a person who speaks Lashon Harah about another transfers the merit of all his Torah learning and mitzvot to him.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Kindness Surrounds One Who Trusts in Hashem

The Midrash states, “ ‘Judgments are prepared for scorners, and flogging for the back of fools’ [Proverbs 19:29]. ... This may be compared to the case of a lady of rank who, upon entering the king’s palace, saw whips hanging and was terrified. However the king said to her, ‘Fear not! These are meant for the male and female slaves, but you are here to eat, drink and be merry.’ Similarly, when Israel heard the Scriptural section on leprous afflictions, they were afraid. Moses said to them, ‘These are meant for the wicked nations, but you are intended to eat, drink, and be merry,’ as it is said: ‘Many are the afflictions of the wicked, but kindness surrounds one who trusts in the L-RD’ [Psalms 32:10]” (Vayikra Rabba 15:4).

A parable will help to explain: A butcher merited a great mitzvah, for he raised an orphaned boy in his home. When the boy grew up, everyone could see how gifted he was with numbers. The butcher would give him some small bones to play with, and the boy would sit by a candle and start counting with them. In fact when the boy grew up, he was able to do the butcher’s accounting, including his daily expenses and revenues. He learned more and more as he grew older, until he found favor in the eyes of a rich man, who took him as his son-in-law.

During Chol HaMoed, the rich man went out for a walk with his son-in-law, and to his great surprise he saw the young man suddenly bend down and begin picking dry bones from a garbage bin. “What’s gotten into you?” he asked his son-in-law. “Why are you rummaging through the garbage?” The young man innocently replied, “I was looking for some bones to count with.” His father-in-law responded, “You used to do that when you were living in your father’s home. Now you don’t have to count with bones, especially those found in the garbage. I’ll give you pieces of gold and silver to do your counting with.”

The moral of the story is that some people do their “counting” using bones, which is quite crude. To wake them up from such games, they are sent physical suffering, which leads to repentance. Other people do their counting using silver and gold objects, or other precious things. To wake them up from these games, they are sent a financial loss, which brings them back to the right path.

The afflictions (i.e., bodily sufferings) that come upon a person are meant to shake him from his sluggishness and lead him to repentance. This, of course, depends on the just how deeply he has fallen asleep. A person in a deep spiritual sleep must suffer a great shock, meaning a serious affliction, in order to wake up.

A person who is only napping just needs a slight nudge, a mild annoyance, in order to wake up and repent.

– From the Parables of the Maggid of Dubno

This is alluded to in the verse, for it is stated: “This shall be the torat [law] of the leper” – it is the end of the leper’s Torah, for he spoke Lashon Harah. “He shall be brought to the priest” – his Torah shall be transferred to the merit of the priest, meaning to the tzaddik against whom he spoke. In general, people speak Lashon Harah about the tzaddikim, the leaders of the generation, men who are called “priests.”

– Ketav Sofer

Living Water

It is written, “Into an earthenware vessel over living water” (Leviticus 14:5).

Why the need for living water here, as opposed to other cases where things are immersed in water?

It is because the leper is lowered and humbled in his own eyes, and he may become depressed and lethargic. Hence living water is required here, for it will reinvigorate him. He must be encouraged and strengthened with the waters of Torah knowledge, for the Torah is called “a spring of living water.”

– Ma’ayana Shel Torah

At the Nicanor Gate

It is written, “The priest that purifies the man who is to be purified... at the door of the Tent of Meeting” (Leviticus 14:11).

Here Rashi states, “At the Nicanor Gate.”

The Torah permitted the leper to do something that no other impure person was allowed, namely to stand at the Nicanor Gate of the courtyard. He was allowed to spread out his hands and feet towards the courtyard in order to put the blood of the guilt-offering on his thumb.

Because he had just repented and purified himself of his sins, he was given a new opening through which to approach Hashem. As the Sages have said with regards to ba’alei teshuvah, “The Holy One, blessed be He, left them an opening beneath the Throne of Glory.”

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Metzora completes the subject of leprous afflictions by describing the details of the purification process. It describes the leprous afflictions of a house and its purification process, and it completes the subject of the impurity of the body through a bodily discharge.

The parsha begins with the law of the purification of a leper’s body and his connection to Hashem’s Sanctuary, and it continues by the leprosy that afflicts a house, even when quarantined, and the way in which it is to be purified. After the harmful impurity that extends to the body of man, the parsha ends with laws regulating bodily discharges outside of childbearing, and the way in which they are purified in the Sanctuary. This includes a man who has a bodily discharge or a seminal emission, as well as a woman who has a bodily discharge outside her monthly period.

EISHET CHAYIL

A Mother’s Wisdom

A wealthy man wanted to help an avrech with a large family to move into a larger apartment. The avrech, however, did not want to accept help under any conditions. The wealthy man therefore decided to speak directly to the avrech’s mother. He presented all the reasons for why he felt that her son should move, adding that since it was possible for him to move without going into debt, why shouldn’t he take advantage of the opportunity? The mother replied, “The reasons that you give may be valid or not. What is clear, however, is that my son isn’t the only one living under these conditions. If he moves out, other avrechim will try and do the same. In that case, one of them might go into debt solely because of my son, and I’m not prepared for that to happen.”

A TRUE STORY

An Excerpt from the Archives of the Krakow Chevra Kadisha

After the death of our revered teacher, the author of Megaleh Amukot, a young man living in Krakow went to see the administrator of the Chevra Kadisha because he wanted to purchase the burial plot adjacent to the grave of the Megeleh Amukot. This young man was not known as a famous Talmid Chacham, which is why the administrator rejected his request, one that seemed marked by a sign of pride and vanity. The Gaon and Tzaddik who had just left this world was among the greatest names of Torah. He had written many works, and it was impossible to give the plot adjacent to his grave to someone who was unknown, a common man, this being contrary to Halachah.

Yet the young man did not give up, and when all the administrators went home, he went to speak to one of the oldest ones who remained there. He implored him to give his approval for this purchase, for his soul ardently yearned for that place close to the Gaon and Tzaddik. "No price will seem too much for me," he repeated to the elderly man who was over 80 years old. "I will give you whatever price you ask."

"Do you agree to pay 1,000 silver rubbles?" the old man asked with a little sarcasm. The answer did not take long: "Yes!" the young man declared, and he took out the money from his wallet and handed it to the old man. This elderly administrator told himself, "What's preventing me from taking this money? I don't have much longer to live. I'm old and this man is young, hardly 20 years old. From now until the time he passes away, there will be other administrators, and who among them will come to me and claim this money?" Now the next day, the bitter news spread that this young avrech had suddenly died. The Chevra Kadisha was called upon to take care of his burial, but since no one was aware of the secret agreement that he had concluded with the old man, the administrators chose a burial plot that seemed appropriate to them. The night following the burial, the young man appeared in the dream of the old administrator that had sold him the burial plot adjacent to that of the Megaleh Amukot, demanding that he transfer his body to the grave that he had purchased.

This dream, which the old man paid no attention to in the beginning, occurred again the next day and the day after that. The young man warned the Chevra Kadisha's administrator that if he did not obtain the adjacent plot, he would convene him to the Celestial Court.

This severe warning greatly worried the old man, who did not know how to get out of this predicament. It was to the point that, in his fear and distress, he went to find the Rav of the city and told him everything that had happened and asked him for advice. The Rav was astounded when he heard the story. He severely reprimanded the old man for what he had done, and demanded that he give him the money he had received so that he could give it to charity. This would allow the avrech's soul to rest in peace. Nevertheless, the Rav absolutely refused to give him permission to transfer the dead man's body to the unused burial plot adjacent to the grave of the Megaleh Amukot. The old administrator was overcome by fear. What was he now going to do? The Rav gave him his cane and ordered that he go to the grave of the young man and summon him to Din Torah at the Rav's home three days hence in the afternoon. Since the old man feared for his life, he obeyed. To his great surprise, the dead man accepted to present himself to a Din Torah as the Rav had asked.

When the old man arrived at the Rav's home at the prescribed time, he saw that in the room in which the Rav studied was a partition that had been set up, behind which the dead man was to be. The Rav was seated on the other side, and with him was the Chevra Kadisha's administrator. The spirit on the other side of the partition presented his grievances: "I obtained the rights to the burial plot and purchased it with my own money. No one has the right to chase me away from it." The Rav asked the dead man to identify himself by name, but he responded that this was forbidden for him to do. To calm the dead man, whose voice could be heard coming from the other side of the partition, the Rav said, "As a result, if it is forbidden for you to identify yourself and to give your actual name, we cannot grant your request. The money has thus been distributed to the poor for your soul to rest in peace. And now, go and rest in peace." However the dead man refused to give in. He repeated that the administrator had not kept his word, and he demanded that he rectify his mistake.

Upon hearing these words, the Rav was filled with great consternation. He finally had the idea of saying, "If such is the case – if your soul is so great that it is forbidden to reveal your identity – then take action yourself and make your body role from its present resting place to the burial plot that you asked for and purchased with your own money on the day before your death." The Rav promised him only that he would make the Chevra Kadisha aware of this decision so that the plot adjacent to the grave of the

Megaleh Amukot would not be given to anyone else. The next day, when the members of the Chevra Kadisha of Krakow went to the cemetery, they found a new grave that they did not recognize and which they had not dug. The administrators then convened to discuss the situation and decided to erect a headstone upon it, and since they were unaware of the dead man's name, they decided to inscribe the following words upon it: "His Neighbor will Testify for Him." This story spread far and wide.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

The Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Alsheich of Sefat

Rabbi Moshe Alsheich Zatzal was among the greatest disciples of Rabbi Yosef Karo Zatzal (the author of the Shulchan Aruch) and Rabbi Yosef Taitatzak. Rabbi Moshe was a marvelous orator who lived in Sefat, the city of Kabbalists. The holy Arizal always loved to hear his sermons, saying that his words epitomized truth. It is said that Rabbi Moshe once gave a sermon on Parah Vayeitzei in which he listed the hundred ways that Laban deceived Jacob. The Arizal, who was in attendance, began to smile when he heard this. When he was asked why he was smiling, he replied: "During the whole sermon, the wicked Laban was sitting nearby and nodding his head, as if to say: 'True, that's how I deceived him.' Yet when he heard another way in which he deceived him, he again smiled and said, 'That's a marvelous way, one that I didn't even think of!'" The Alsheich wrote that during the night he would study Torah with great concentration, while during the day he would deal with issues of Halachah. He only spoke in public on Shabbat, and his Halachic decisions were printed in a book of responsa. He was unable to edit his books, and they remained as he initially wrote them. Even so, his holy book Torat Moshe was accepted by the entire Jewish people.

Rabbi Moshe Alsheich was a friend of the Kabbalists Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, Rabbi Galanti, and the holy Arizal. Among his numerous disciples was the Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital, on whom he bestowed semichah. Rabbi Moshe Alsheich said that he did so on authority of his teacher Rabbi Yosef Karo.

Rabbi Moshe Alsheich died on Nissan 13, 5353, and his body was laid to rest in the old cemetery of Sefat. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Rabbi Meir and the Sages

During the time of our Sages, people used various remedies that are no longer used today. One such remedy consisted of a mixture of wine and oil, a combination so well mixed that was impossible to distinguish between the oil and wine. It was given to people with stomachaches.

Rabbi Meir, a disciple of Rabbi Akiva, said that this mixture could be prepared on Shabbat, even if a person's life was not in danger. Rabbi Meir taught this to his disciples.

The other Sages, however, believed otherwise. They said that it was forbidden to prepare this mixture on Shabbat if a person's life is not in danger. As it turned out, Rabbi Meir was not feeling well one Shabbat, for he was having a stomachache. Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar and Rabbi Meir's other students visited him and said, "Rabbi, we see that you are suffering. We are going to prepare this remedy for you, a mixture of wine and oil that will make you feel better."

Rabbi Meir exclaimed, "No! I don't allow you to prepare it for me on Shabbat!"

Surprised by his statement, Rabbi Meir's students said: "But Rabbi, that is what you taught us – that it is permissible to prepare this mixture of wine and oil on Shabbat for someone who is ill, even if not gravely ill. Have your words become obsolete during your own lifetime? Will we not follow your own teaching?" Calmly and with humility, Rabbi Meir said: "It is true that this is my opinion. However my colleagues are of a different opinion, for they say that it is forbidden. Although I think otherwise, I have always trusted their opinions, and since they have prohibited it, I will be strict with myself and not use this mixture on Shabbat."

– Adapted from Shabbat 134a