



# BUILDING HIS HOUSE

A collection of inspiring essays on  
the topic of Shemiras Halashon

— Rabbi Yehoshua Grunwald —

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Yehoshua Grunwald  
53 Kinsfield Dr.  
Lakewood, NJ 08701

For questions or comments:  
Text to 347-352-9781

# לזכרון בספר ולמזכרת נצח

נשמת מוה"ר אברהם נחמן בן ר' זאב ע"ה

מוקיד רבנן ורחים רבנן ודחיל רבנן  
ואיהו גופיה הוה צורבא מדבנן  
יום ולילה אהב ורדף צדקה וחסד  
ומעשים טובים בכל כחותיו  
שמד פיו ולשונו באופן מופלא  
והיה עניו וצנוע ומוכתר בכל מדות תרומיות  
זכות לימוד התורה מספר זה תהא לעילוי נשמתו  
ויהא מליץ יושד בעד כל עמינו בית ישראל





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## Introduction

There was once a woman who had terrible *shalom bayis* in her home, and, therefore, she went to her rav to seek his advice. She begged him to help her, because all she really wanted was to restore the peace and harmony in her home, and she was willing to do all it takes to get there. So, the rav advised her to treat her husband like a newlywed wife would. The next day, when her husband will be out, she should prepare the most delicious supper, clean the house to sparkling clean, purchase a present, and wear her nicest Shabbos clothing, in an attempt to convince her husband that she is trying her utmost to find his favor.

And so she did. The very next day, she worked very hard cleaning all the floors and counters in the house, and shopped for a special gift. She took out her old cookbooks from when she was a kallah, and found a wonderful recipe for a delicious supper. She wore her nicest clothing and jewelry and had everything ready for when her husband would return.

Finally, her husband walked in, and she faced the biggest surprise. Her husband began crying and screaming. "Enough and enough," he said. "You mean you're trying to bribe me with presents?! It's your behaviors that are repulsive to me, not the dress and the pieces of chicken! This is not what I want! I want real change, change of your behaviors and the way you talk to me, not presents and sweets!"

[Think for a moment. Can you imagine how terrible that wife felt? Can you imagine her pain and her emotions, hearing all that?]

So, she went back to the rav, and the rav said, "I guess there must be a lot more work that must be done. If this is the case,



We would daven heartfelt *tefillos*, but Hashem says: **וּבְפָרְשֵׁיכֶם ... כַּפֵּיכֶם אֶעֱלִים עֵינֵי מַכֶּם גַּם כִּי תִרְבוּ תַפְלָה אֵינְנִי שֹׁמֵעַ וְיָדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מְלֵאוּ** When you spread your hands to daven, I will hide My eyes from you. Even if you were to intensify your davening I will not listen; your hands are filled with blood.

So, what is it that Hashem wants from us, we ask?

And the Navi says:

**רְחִצּוּ הַזְכוּ הַסִּירוּ רָע מֵעֲלֵיכֶם מִנְּגַד עֵינֵי חֲדָלוּ הָרַע** Wash yourselves, purify yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes, cease doing evil.

In essence, Hashem has told us that the reason for the *churban*, is like the *mashal* we mentioned earlier; Hashem says, He doesn't want lip service, He doesn't want presents, and He doesn't want bribes. He wants real change.

So, what is it that we must change? What is it that we must fix?

The Chid"א, Ariza"ל, and others explain to us, based on Chaza"ל, that the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of the the three *aveiros chamuros*, עבודת זרה גילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים. However, the second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of the sin of lashon hara and *sinas chinom*. And, just as the *aveira* of lashon hara is more severe than the three *aveiros chamuros* combined, so too, this *gallus* is longer than the previous *gallus*. Hence, until we rectify this *aveira* of lashon hara, we can't expect this long and bitter galus to end.

The Mahara"ל, in his sefer Nesivos Oilam (Nesiv Lev Tov Ch. 1), writes that the longevity of this *gallus* cannot be blamed on anything else, other than the *aveira* of lashon hara.

Similarly, the Chafetz Chaim is quoted (see Sefer Shemiras Halashon with Orchos Chaim pg. 38, footnote 20) as saying that



there hasn't been a single period in Klal Yisroel that the *aveira* of lashon hara was at least part of the cause of the *tzaros*.

The *passuk* tells us that after the *חטא העגל* Moshe Rabbeinu said *אנא חטא העם הזה חטאה גדולה*.

Why was Moshe magnifying the *aveira* of Klal Yisroel, shouldn't he have been trying to minimize it?

One of our great sages explained this with a *mashal* as follows:

There was once a father that saw his son mischievously running on the roof of a building, so he scolded at his child that he must stop such behavior. A short while later, the father found his son again doing the same on the roof, so this time his father went and also hit his son, and warned him that he must stop doing such a dangerous thing.

Shortly thereafter, the child went again to the rooftop, and this time the child fell off. The child broke a couple of bones, was bleeding, and screaming for help. Some children ran to call the father, and the father came running to help his child. Some of the children thought the father now would surely yell at his child, but the father didn't. Someone actually went and asked this to the father, why aren't you punishing your son for this? To which the father replied, now is not the time for me to punish or rebuke him. Now is the time that I care for him, and show him my greatest love. Now, when he is injured, he can't handle my rebuke, and he also greatly needs my help. After all, he is my son, whom I love so dearly. I only give him rebuke so that he shouldn't fall into such a thing, but now that he has, of course I will take care of him and do everything possible that he should get healed. My entire purpose is that he should be the healthiest and most well-behaved child.



So too, Moshe Rabbeinu told Hashem, that because Klal Yisroel have done such a terrible *aveira* they aren't ready for rebuke, rather now is the time to treat them like a father and lift them up.

And the same is true, once the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed. In fact, this is precisely what the Midrash tells us.

The Midrash (Eicha Rabba, Pesicha, 24) reads as follows:

ובין שנשרף אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא שוב אין לי מושב בארץ, אסלק שכניתי ממנה ואעלה למכוני הראשון, תדא הוא דכתיב (חושע ה, ט): אלה אשובה אל מקומי עד אשר יאשמו ובקשו פני. באותה שעה היה הקדוש ברוך הוא בוכה ואמר אוי לי מה עשית, השריתי שכניתי למטה בשביל ישראל, ועכשו שחטאו חורתי למקומי הראשון, חס ושלום שהייתי שחוק לגוים ולעג לבריות, באותה שעה בא מטטרו"ן ונפל על פניו ואמר לפניו, רבונו של עולם אני אבכה ואתה לא תבכה, אמר לו אם אין אתה מניח לי לבכות עכשו, אפנס למקום שאין לך רשות לפנס ואבכה, שניאמר (ירמיה יג, ז): ואם לא תשמעוה במסתרים תבכה נפשי מפני גוד וגו'. אמר להן הקדוש ברוך הוא למלאכי השרת בואו ונלך אני ואתם ונראה בביתי מה עשו אויבים בו, מיד הלך הקדוש ברוך הוא ומלאכי השרת וירמיה לפניו, ובין שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא את בית המקדש, אמר בודאי זהו ביתי וזהו מנוחתי שבאו אויבים ועשו בו פרצונם, באותה שעה היה הקדוש ברוך הוא בוכה ואמר אוי לי על ביתי, בני היכן אתם, פהני היכן אתם, אוהבי היכן אתם, מה אעשה לכם, התריתי בכם ולא חזרתם בתשובה, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לירמיה, אני דומה היום לאדם שתיה לו בן יחיד ועשה לו חפה ומת בתוך חפתו.

In short, the Midrash tells us, that after the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed Hashem, כביכול, cried terribly for the loss of the Bais Hamikdash, and Hashem said it was like losing an only child on the day of their *chuppa*. Hashem cried for the loss of the Bais Hamikdash and for the *tzora* of Klal Yisroel, His beloved children. Hashem cried with such passion, that He said if you will try to stop me, I will go to a place where you can't enter, and cry there.

As such, in a certain sense, during the time of churban it is easier for us to get close to Him and find His favor. Hashem



has certainly not abandoned us, and waits anxiously for our *teshuva*. He loves us, even more than we love ourselves. He is just waiting for us to show that we truly love Him.

And, how do we show Him that we truly love Him?

By showing true love to every single Yid! With caring for all our brethren, not speaking lashon hara about them, or hurting them in any way, we are showing our love to Hashem.

May we be *zoche* to see soon in our days, all of this come to reality, with complete *teshuva* by all of Klal Yisroel, so that Hashem will see how we really want to change, and may we be, then, *zoche* to see the coming of Moshiach! Amen.

Bearing this in mind, with *Siyata Dishmaya*, I compiled a collection of essays that will hopefully inspire all readers to improve in these areas. They are organized for reading during the Three Weeks, or any other three weeks that one will designate. I am confident, that each reader will see for themselves, how great of an impact a few minutes of reading a day, for three weeks, can have on their life.

Yehoshua Grunwald



## ❧ Day 1 ❧

### The ‘Eyes’ Have It All

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Shlit"א

R"מ Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, Baltimore, MD

At the end of Parshas Tazria, when the Torah states the laws of tzora'as affecting clothing, the *passuk* says, "the Kohen shall look, after the affliction has been washed, and behold (if) the affliction has not changed its appearance (*lo hafach es eino*) and the affliction has not spread, it is contaminated, you shall burn it in fire..." [Vayikra 13:55].

Although the literal and straightforward interpretation of the expression "*lo hafach es eino*" means that the appearance of the affliction has not changed, the Chidushei Ha"rim (R. Yitzchak Meir of Ger [1799-1866]) cites a beautiful insight based on a Gemara [Eruchin 16a]. The Talmud mentions that tzora'as is a punishment for seven specific sins. The most commonly known sin in this category is tale-bearing (*lashon hara*). However, the Talmud teaches that tzora'as is also a punishment for "*tzorus ha'ayin*" [narrowness of the eye]. This term does not merely refer to stinginess and being tight-fisted. A person is described as "narrow of eye" if he never sees the positive. It is the opposite of generosity of spirit. It connotes someone who always sees evil. It is a stinginess that extends beyond one's money to the way in which one views life in general.

If tzora'as is a punishment for "*tzorus ha-ayin*", it would follow that the remedy which would cause the tzora'as to go away is repenting and changing from a 'narrow eyed' (*tzar*



*ayin*) person to a 'good eyed' (*tov ayin*) person. In other words, change from being a disciple of Bilaam the wicked, who was a 'narrow eyed' person, to being a disciple of Avraham who was a generous person, possessing a 'good eye' [Avos 5:19].

If the tzora'as does not improve... if it stays the same size then the garment has no remedy. The garment remains impure and ultimately it must be burnt.

The Chidushei Ha"rim says that the expression "*lo hafach es eino*" has a double meaning. Certainly, on a simple level, the meaning of the phrase is that it did not change its appearance. But, the phrase also connotes the fact that the affliction did not change the 'eye' of the owner of the garment. In order to repent and to have his garment's affliction remedied, his 'eye' must change – from being stingy of spirit to being generous of spirit.

In addition, the Chidushei Ha"rim says that the word "*Nega*" [- affliction], which appears in this *passuk* can actually be considered a rearrangement of the letters of the word "*Oneg*" [- pleasure]. The difference between the word "*Nega*" and the word "*Oneg*" is just a matter of where the (letter) "*ayin*" is placed. (The letter "*ayin*" also connotes 'eye'!) In these two words, the letters '*Nun*' and '*Gimmel*' are stationary. The only difference between the words is whether the '*ayin*' is at the beginning or at the end. This alludes back to our theme that the difference between having an affliction and having pleasure is completely dependent on the placement of the 'eye'. If a person has a 'good eye', with the proper approach and the proper perspective on life – he will have '*Oneg*'. Otherwise he will be stuck with '*Nega*'.

If a person finds one's self incapable of changing his perspective, he will wind up being forced to burn his clothes. "If the affliction has not changed its appearance (*lo hafach es eino*)... you shall burn it in fire..."

Many times, we have quoted the Midrash about the peddler who came into the city proclaiming "Who wants life? Who wants life?" People thought he was selling some kind of elixir of life. The Midrash says that Rav Yannai inquired about this elixir he was selling. The peddler read him the *passukim* "Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see good? Guard your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from speaking calumny, depart from evil and do good, make peace and pursue it." (Tehillim 34:13-14). In other words, one who wishes to live should avoid speaking Lashon HaRah. The Midrash says that Rav Yannai said he never understood this and now this peddler revealed to him this amazing secret for acquisition of *chayim* called: *Netzor Leshoncha Me'Rah* (guard your tongue from speaking evil).

Everyone comments on this *chiddush* of the peddler, which is an open *passuk* in *Tehillim*. We previously spoke out a thought from Rav Nissan Alpert, z"l, that is worth repeating. The *chiddush* of the peddler was not merely this *passuk* itself, but how one punctuates the *passuk*. When we read this *passuk*, the opening phrase is a question: "Who is the person that wants to live a long time...?" Where does the question end and the answer begin?

The simple interpretation of the *passuk* is that the question mark is placed after the words "*Liros Tov*" – Who is the person who wants to live (a long time), loving days and seeing good? The answer is "One who guards his tongue from speaking evil..." The peddler taught that this was not the correct way to read the *passuk*. The question mark belongs after the words "*Ha'Chafetz Chaim*" — Who is the person who wants to live (a long time)? The answer begins with the words "*Ohev Yamim Liros Tov*" – Loving days, seeing good.



The secret to living a long life is to have a positive attitude. If a person looks positively at matters, and sees people and places and events in a good light, then obviously he will guard his tongue from speaking evil. He will not come to speak lashon hara. One of the great myths of lashon hara is that it starts with the mouth or the tongue. The true problem of lashon hara does not begin with the MOUTH, it begins with the EYE.

If someone looks at people with an "evil eye" and sees only their dark side that will prompt the person to talk ill about them. However, if someone always sees the positive side of his neighbor, he will not come to speak lashon hara. Perhaps, he will see something that the person should not be doing, but he will think to himself, "Ah, but the person has so many good qualities..."

The truth of the matter is that Rabbeinu Yona in the Sha'arei Teshuva at the end of the third Sha'ar discusses different aspects of lashon hara. He divides them into six different categories. He defines the last category (III:231) as a *Nirgan*. What is a *Nirgan*? He brings a *passuk* in Mishlei (18:8), in which Shlomo Ha'melech writes: "The words of the *Nirgan* are like blows, and they descend to the chambers." A *Nirgan*, says Shlomo Ha'melech, is a complainer. Rabbeinu Yona elaborates: A *Nirgan* is a person whose lifestyle and pattern of behavior is to invariably complain and see the bad. He always has complaints about the words and actions of his friends. "And even though the friend did nothing against him, he interprets everything in a negative fashion and not in a positive manner."

The root cause of lashon hara is having the personality trait of being a *Nirgan* – the complainer. *Nirgan* brings a person to see the faults in people and things. That is the sickness. The

sickness is not the mouth, the sickness is the eye and how the person perceives things.

This was the chiddush of the peddler. The way to read the *passuk* is: "Who is the man who wants life?" – QUESTION MARK! And the answer is "Someone who loves his days, seeing only good" (*Ohev Yamim Lir'os Tov*). If someone sees the good, he will have a long life because he will be prevented from speaking Lashon hara.

Let's now conclude with one final vort. We all know that the affliction of tzora'as is not caused by a microbe or by impurities in the water supply. As we have mentioned, the Talmud tells us (Arachin 16a), that it is caused by any of seven sins. The most famous of these is lashon hara, improper speech. The one who was afflicted with tzara'as got a very subtle message from Heaven that he had better shape up and watch his mouth. Such a person would have to seek the assistance of a Kohen who would hopefully help him mend his erroneous ways.

Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, comments that when the Torah uses the term '*Adam*' (as opposed to '*Ish*') to denote a person, it connotes a degree of importance and prestige. Therefore it seems peculiar that in the parsha of Metzora, which deals with tzora'as, the Torah should begin by using the term '*Adam*'.

Rav Alpert concludes that the measure of a person — in terms of whether or not he is a distinguished person — is not dependent on whether or not he engages in lashon harah. A person can even be a distinguished person ("*Adam Chashuv*") and yet engage in improper speech. What then separates the normal person who gossips from the "*Adam Chashuv*" who engages in lashon harah? The difference is the latter's desire to change. A person can be a distinguished person and yet stumble in the sin of lashon hara. However, as long as he



retains a desire to improve himself in this area — he is still a distinguished person.

It is difficult to stop gossiping. The normal inclination is not to seek improvement or change in this area. "And he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen" [Vayikra 13:2] means he has to force himself to go to the Kohen to seek remedy for his condition. He does not really want to go, but he goes anyway.

A distinguished person can succumb to lashon hara. It happens to the best of us. But that which separates the 'Adam' from the 'Ish' (the distinguished person from the ordinary person) is that the former does something about it. He forces himself to become better. He forces himself to seek out atonement. He drags himself to the Kohen.

Our obligation is to do what we can, our *hishtadlus*, and then we will be considered distinguished people!



## ❧ Day 2 ❧

### Seeing the Positive

Harav Hagaon Reb Yeruchem Olshin Shlit"א

Rosh Yeshiva, Bais Medrash Govoha, Lakewood

The *passuk* in *Parshas Shelach* tells us of the *aveira* of the *Meraglim*, and how they got punished so terribly. The Gemara tells us that their *aveira* was in essence the sin of lashon hara. Rash"i in Chumash adds, that the *Meraglim* should have learned from seeing how Miriam got punished for lashon hara, and because they didn't, they were so severely punished.

The Chafetz Chaim (hilchos lashon hara klal 5, seif 7) writes, that based on words of the Sefer Yereim we can learn that it is also an *aveira* to speak negatively about objects, when it causes harm to their owners. Seemingly, from the writing of the Chafetz Chaim, this is a *chiddush* that needed its own source, that there is an *aveira* of lashon hara even with such statements.

If that's the case, we can wonder, why then were the *Meraglim* expected to learn from Miriam, when seemingly their incident was so different? Miriam spoke about Moshe Rabbeinu, a person, whereas, the *Meraglim* spoke about Eretz Yisrael, an object. Why were they so accountable, when, perhaps, they simply weren't aware of this *chiddush*?

We find another puzzling thing in the same parsha. The *passuk* states that Klal Yisroel were punished to wander in the midbar for forty years as punishment, midda kneged midda for the forty days that the *Meraglim* spent spying Eretz Yisroel.



Asks Hagoan Rav Chaim Shmulevitz Zt"l, why were they punished for the days of spying? The spying itself wasn't the *aveira*, the *aveira* was the reporting negatively, which was only for a day or less, not forty days?

To answer these questions, we should quote a very interesting note of the Chafetz Chaim. The Chafetz Chaim (hilchos lashon hara klal 1, *Be'er Mayim Chaim* 4, in footnote) writes that we can learn from the wording of the *passuk*, לא תלך רכיל בעמך, that since the Torah used the word תלך – walking, that even walking to say lashon hara, or even to see something to be able to say lashon hara, is also part of the *aveira*. The Chafetz Chaim writes, that later he found that the *Shel"a* also writes the same thing.

This itself needs explanation, we don't find by any other *aveira* that the walking to do the *aveira* is itself part of the *aveira*. For example, there is no source to tell us that walking to a store to buy *treif* food, as preparation for eating it, is considered as part of the *aveira*. So why here does the Torah include the preparation as part of the *aveira*?

I think, that the answer to this question, lies in the words of the Ramba"m. The Ramba"m generally uses the Torah's words when talking about a lav. It would follow, that we would assume the Ramba"m would do the same thing writing about lashon hara. As such, I would think the Ramba"m would write המרכיל תעשה לא תלך רכיל like the wording of the Torah. However, the Ramba"m writes (Hilchos Deos 7;1) המרגל בחבירו עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר לא תלך רכיל בעמך. The Ramba"m used the word מרגל, which means someone who spies on his friend, like the word meraglim. The Ramba"m is לכאורה telling us, that the root of the *aveira* of lashon hara is the spying and looking at the shortcomings of one's friend.

The Sefer Orchos Tzadikim writes that baalei lashon hara are compared to a fly, that doesn't get attracted to the good parts of the meat, rather, only to the filthy parts of it. So too, the baalei lashon hara always seek out the negative aspects of their victims. The Rosh Hayeshiva, Hagaon Rav Shneur Kotler Zt"l, would add, that these flies, don't talk at all, they only look and find the negative, nevertheless, this is what the baalei lashon hara are compared to, because the searching for the negative is the root of the *aveira*.

With this we can answer our questions that we began with. It is only the *aveira* of lashon hara that even the walking for it is part of the *aveira*. The reason is because seeking out the bad is the root and, perhaps, the main part of the *aveira*. We can now understand why the *Meraglim* should have learned from Miriam, because although she spoke about a person and they about land, nevertheless, the root of their *aveira* was much worse. Miriam wasn't at all searching for a shortcoming; she had meant *leshem Shomayim*. She was nevertheless punished for not fully judging properly, which, for her great *madreiga*, was considered an *aveira*. The *Meraglim's aveira* was much worse, they searched for the negative, and they should have learned from Miriam that such behavior is certainly punishable.

We can now also understand why the generation was punished according to the amount of the days traveled, because that was all part of the *aveira*, and, in fact, the root of the *aveira*.

The *passuk* says: מי האיש החפץ חיים אודהב ימים לראות טוב נצור לשונך מרע. Some mefarshim explain, the *passuk* is saying, מי האיש החפץ חיים אודהב ימים Who wants life?

לראות טוב You have to search for good!

This is just as we explained earlier, that the root of the *aveira* is how we look at others!



To illustrate this, it's worth mentioning the following story, which I heard many times from the Rosh Yeshiva Hagaon Rav Shneur Kotler Zt'l, about my wife's great-grandfather, Hagaon Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer Zt'l (1870-1953), a great Talmid Chochom and Tzaddik. Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer was sitting in his home one Chol Hamoed, with his nephew Rav Dovid Finkel, and Rav Issar Zalman asked Rav Dovid Finkel to bring him a pencil and paper to write something down. This was very surprising, because Harav Isser Zalman wouldn't write anything on Chol Hamoed, not even his *chidushei Torah*. Rav Dovid Finkel questioned his mentor, "Rebbe, how can you write something down, it is Chol Hamoed?" Rav Issar Zalman responded that the issue is a matter of great urgency, "almost like a life and death issue".

Rav Dovid Finkel became all concerned and asked, "Rebbe, what's wrong? What is the matter with you?" Rav Issar Zalman brushed him off. "There is nothing really the matter. It is just that for me this is something almost akin to a life-or-death matter."

Rav Dovid Finkel brought the pencil and paper and Rav Issar Zalman wrote down a *passuk* from Mishlei [4:25] "Let your eyes look ahead, and your eyes will direct your path."

Rav Dovid Finkel was perplexed. "This was the life-or-death matter — just to write down a *passuk* that you already knew by heart?"

Rav Issar Zalman explained. "Hundreds and hundreds of Yidden come to visit me and wish me 'Gut Yom Tov' during the course of Chol Hamoed. Some of the people who come are not the most distinguished residents of Yerushalayim. Included among those, are many who I know that they have *aveiros* and evil traits, yet, I have to sit here, patiently, with person after

person and smile. I may get tempted to think about some of the visitors' faults, so I need something to hold me back. Every year, before Chol Hamoed, I write down this *passuk* to remind me of its homiletic interpretation: 'When your eyes look at someone else, turn your eyes inward'. (In other words 'Do not look at HIS shortcomings, look at your own shortcomings'.) This is critically important to me, to have this *passuk* sitting on my desk so that I will not criticize (mentally) those visitors. I absolutely need that. When people come in, I look at this *passuk* and think to myself 'Do not think about them; think about yourself.' This year, I forgot to write down the *passuk* before Yom Tov. For me, it was vital to write down the *passuk* — even on Chol Hamoed!"

Rav Issar Zalman felt that this behavior — of just thinking negatively of the faults of others — was truly akin to a matter of life or death!

We, perhaps, are not on the *madreiga* of Rav Issar Zalman, but we should learn from him the grave importance of not even thinking negatively of others!

Let's conclude with a story about Hagaon Rav Eliezer Silver Zt"l, which was quoted by Harav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel Zt"l. One time, after World War II, Rav Eliezer Silver met a Yid who had left the path of Yiddishkeit, r"l. Rav Silver approached him to discuss it, and asked the fellow why he isn't observant. The fellow explained as follows: that he lived through the concentration camps, and after witnessing one incident he decided that there's no way he will remain religious. He said that there was only one individual in the camp who had a *siddur*, and everyone wanted to borrow the *siddur*. However, the individual would only lend the *siddur* to those that gave



him their ration of food. So, I told myself if someone could be so cruel like that, then I'm not being religious.

Rav Silver responded to him, that true it was so cruel for that Yid to act like that, but how about looking at the other side of the story. Look how many Yidden were *moiser nefesh* and willing to give their ration of food, just to be able to daven from a *siddur*! If you want, you can see the amazing beautiful side of that very story, so why look at the negative?

This is in essence the lesson of *shemiras halashon*: Just focus on the abundance of positive, and not on the minimal negative!



## Day 3

### Words Can Kill

Harav Hagaon Reb Avi Weisenfeld Shlit”a

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Beis Dovid, Yerushalayim

Recently, while I was traveling on a plane, trying to mind my own business, there were two people, call them seatmates of mine, right in my nose, and I just couldn't avoid hearing their conversation. One of them told the other, "You know, I once had a tremendous court case involving hundreds of thousands of dollars, and I needed a top-notch lawyer. So, I searched and searched for a capable lawyer. When I finally found someone capable, he told me that really he was very busy, but he would do me a favor and squeeze me in, as long as I would Zelle him \$25,000 upfront for an escrow account, for money towards paying for working on the case, to be received by the end of the day. Of course, I grabbed the chance, sent him the money, and sent him the necessary information about the case. Three days later, I got a call from the lawyer letting me know that the escrow account only had \$5,000 remaining, and if I didn't add another \$15,000 soon, he would end working on the case. I asked him, how is it possible that so much money was used so fast; how much have you already done for my case so far that it should cost that much? To which he responded, "Well let me explain you something, I charge per minute, and I made phone calls and sent emails on your behalf, ..." I tried protesting, "How can you do this to me?" And the lawyer firmly responded, "You know, we were just now on the phone for 24 minutes, and that's another \$3,000. You now only have \$2,000 left in your



account." I didn't have much of a choice, so I paid him; but that is crazy expensive. Make the calculation, that's \$125 a minute!"

Of course, listening to that conversation, I was just as shocked as you are. But for our purpose, there is such a big lesson to learn from there. Imagine, if you were hiring and using such a lawyer, one thing is for sure, you would be so extremely careful not to spend an extra word when speaking with him. You would sit down before you call, and think well exactly what you want to tell him and how you want to say it.

We must understand that the same is true for lashon hara. Each word of lashon hara can cost us terrible punishment [*ch"v*], and we must spend time and effort to figure out how to avoid each word of it possible. We simply can't afford to do otherwise!

And I think we should give another *mashal*, as well. Imagine there was a wire that carried in it all of the electricity that lights up New York City, and if someone were to, *ch"v*, touch it, we don't want to even think what would happen to him. And, what would happen if there was a wire going to a single light bulb, and someone would touch that, what would happen to him? Maybe he would get a small electric shock, nothing more.

So what do you see? When something has so much energy, and it's used the wrong way, it causes so much more destruction than when you are dealing with only minimal energy that is used the wrong way. So too, we can understand *Chazal* that tell us, that lashon hara causes much more destruction than any other *aveira*. We can understand the logic, it's because the energy and power that Hashem gave to our mouths and our speech, is so powerful, that we can learn Torah and daven and accomplish tremendous with it, that so too, when used the wrong way, the destruction the mouth causes, is so catastrophic!

There is a story told of an old man, 80 years old, who walked into Shul and said that it was his first time since he was 8 years old that he has come to Shul. He explained, that at a young age, he was orphaned, and on the day of his mother's *yahrzeit*, he went to Shul to recite *Kaddish*. He felt a bit uncomfortable among unfamiliar adults; but he did it anyways because he loved his mother. After davening, an old man approached him and asked why he was saying *Kaddish*. So he explained that it was his mother's *yahrzeit*. "You have *yahrzeit* today?" the man said, "what's a *yahrzeit* without schnoptz and herring?" Hearing that, said the now old man, I got so deeply hurt, that I made up with myself, "I will never again step foot into a Shul." "And that's where I am today," he continued, "it's my first time in decades coming to Shul!"

We have to realize the impact that our words can have on others! Words can hurt, and words can kill!

We are all familiar with the story in the Gemara (Masechta Gittin), with Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. Many meforshim ask: why does the Gemara call it a story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, when it was really only about Bar Kamtza? Kamtza was just the name of the person who the host mixed him up with, so why call the whole story by the name of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza?

Listen to the fascinating answer of the *Ein Yakov*. He answers, that the Gemara is teaching us, "Look how one extra syllable, two letters, spoken, can destroy a whole world!" The only difference was the mention or lack of mention, of one syllable, and that created havoc! Because even one word can destroy!

We live in a world, of digital communication, with emails, texting, whatsapp, [and what not,] etc., and people write things that they would never say. Many statements take more courage



to say to another's face, or even to say it by phone, but with digital communication it goes right over. So nowadays, we have to watch our communication with others even more so, than ever before.

Let's now conclude with an unbelievable story. [I don't know if it ever happened or not, but the lesson is worthwhile, regardless.] There was once a wife who was constantly insulting and rebuking her husband. It got to the point that it was not just a nuisance; it was actually a bit abusive. It was very difficult for the husband to handle, so he went to his rav to seek advice. After hearing him out, his rav gave him an idea, as follows: he should go to the store and buy a hammer, some nails, and a big plank of wood. He should then, store it away in a place where his wife won't find it. Then, whenever his wife says a rebuke or negative comment to him, he should go there and bang in one nail. Doing this, he will let out some stress and calm down. It sounded like a great idea, and so he tried it. It actually felt good for him to let out some steam, so he kept it up. This went on for some time, and every time his wife said something nasty to him, he went to the hiding place, took the hammer, and banged in one nail.

One day, before Pesach, while his wife was cleaning for Pesach, she found his interesting objects. Puzzled with her discovery, she asked her husband for some explanation. He wasn't really excited to say anything about it, but when he saw he had no choice, he explained that he was simply following the rav's advice on how to deal with her comments to him.

"You mean I really hurt you with what I have said?" asked his wife. "You didn't have to go to the rav, you could have just told me to stop." "Please, please tell me, my dear husband, how can I rectify this," his wife pleaded.

"You know what," answered the innocent husband, "how about, that from now on, I will hide these treasures elsewhere, and for every time that you give me a compliment, I will pull one nail out of the plank of wood."

"Agreed," said the wife excitedly. And, that's exactly what they did.

A few months went by, and the wife turned to her husband, and said, "Please, my dear, can you please show me where I'm up to?"

So, the two of them went to the dark corner in the cellar, where the husband had been hiding it, and the husband turned on a flashlight. They both looked at the plank of wood and saw that the plank was empty of nails. "Isn't that amazing," proclaimed his wife. "Yes," responded the husband, "but let me show you something; look carefully and you will see that the holes are still there. The holes that you made, with the pain that you caused, will last in my body forever."

Whenever you pain someone verbally, you never know what you have done to them. You may have left a permanent scar on their emotions. You may never see it, you may never remember it, but it may never go away. We must be so careful with our fellow Yid, not to pain him in any way, and especially with our verbal comments. Let's never tell ourselves, that words are nothing, because words can really hurt!

Let's all, not just read this derasha, but rather, actually, put something into practice. Perhaps, I can suggest the following *kabbala*. Quite often, by being *dan lekaf zechus* one relieves himself from the yetzer hara to say lashon hara. There is nothing more derogatory in what you have seen or heard about your friend, once you are *dan lekaf zechus*. Similarly, by trying to understand others, and realizing that others may be more



sensitive than us, we can avoid hurting others' feelings. So, let's all be *mekabel, bli neder*, that besides learning our daily shemiras halashon, we will all work on being *dan lekaf zechus* and try to be more sensitive and understanding of others. May Hashem give us all the *Siyata Deshmaya* to improve in these areas.



## ❧ Day 4 ❧

### Judging Favorably

Harav Hagaon Reb Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlit"á

Rav of the Old City of Yerushalayim

The episode of Yosef and his brothers as described for us in Parshas Vayeshev, is a very difficult one to discuss. Although we cannot fully comprehend the actions of the early generations and determine the precise nature of their sins, however, until this point we always knew who the "good guy" was and who the "bad guy" was. When it came to Kayin and Hevel it was obvious who we should identify with. The same may be said regarding Avraham and Lot, Avraham and Amrafel, Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Esav. Out of each of these pairs it was clear whose side we were on, and whose side we were not on.

When it comes to Yosef and his brothers, this distinction between "good" and "bad" becomes more complex, for both sides of the dispute were *tzaddikim gemurim*! "*Kulam ahuvim kulam berurim*" "All are beloved, all are flawless", all were giants of the world. All of their names are inscribed on the shoulders and heart of the Kohen Gadol (see Shemos 28:12 and 28:29) "in order that that the Holy One Blessed is He, should see the names of the Tribes written before Him and give thought to their righteousness" (Rashi Shemos 28:12). Despite this, there is a terrible feud between them, senseless hatred, ganging up with intent to kill their own brother and in the end selling him into slavery! How can we begin to understand this?



The fact is that what transpired here is well beyond our comprehension, we have no grasp of these giants - not of their righteousness and not of their sins. However, given that this chapter is included in the Torah, we are obligated to study and analyze it, as best we can. We must realize, however, that our understanding will be limited and we cannot hope to comprehend matters fully.

At face value, the very idea of trying to kill such a *tzaddik*, and in the end sell him into slavery, seems preposterous and terrible indeed. On the other hand, if Yosef truly deserved this punishment, how could he have done something so terrible as to deserve it?

The Torah tells us: "then they took him, and cast him into the pit ... and they sat to eat bread" (Bereishis 37:24-25). Why does the Torah need to tell us that they sat down to eat bread? The Torah wishes to provide us with some insight as to what precisely took place. The halacha states: "a Sanhedrin who carried out a death penalty cannot eat that entire day" (Sanhedrin 63a) (This is one of the many halachos derived from the *passuk* "you shall not eat over the blood" (Vayikra 19:26)). What then gives them the right to sit and eat after having just sentenced their brother to death and having carried out the sentence by casting him into a pit filled with snakes and scorpions?

The brothers clearly did not arrive at a halachic ruling that Yosef should be sentenced to death, for otherwise they would not have sat down to eat. Furthermore, following the brothers judging of Yosef, Yehuda arises saying: "What gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover up his blood, come let us sell him to the *Yishmaeilim* - but let our hand not be upon him" (Bereishis 37:26-27). If Yosef was really guilty of a capital crime

then the death penalty cannot be substituted with selling him to the *Yishmaelim* or any other punishment. The Torah tells us: "You shall not accept ransom for the life of a murderer who is worthy of death" (Bamidbar 35:31).

If, on the other hand, they felt that he was not deserving of the death penalty, what right did they have to throw him into the pit? Chazal, after all comment: "'The pit was empty no water was in it' (Bereishis 37:24), from the plain meaning of what is stated 'and the pit was empty' do I not know that no water was in it? Rather, what teaching does the Torah mean to convey when it states 'no water was in it'? Water was not in the pit, but snakes and scorpions were in it" (Shabbos 22a). Even had Yosef not met his death through the bite of a snake or the sting of a scorpion, he would have eventually died of starvation, G-d forbid! Without a clear "*p'sak*" of the Sanhedrin that a person must be killed, it is forbidden to kill that person.

The answer here is that the brothers were not sentencing Yosef to death for involvement in an ordinary capital crime. They were rather judging him as a "*rodef*", a person who is perceived as dangerous and liable to kill another person. The halacha permits killing such a person. However, the halacha mandates that should there be an alternate way of being saved from the situation then it would be forbidden to kill him (see Rambam Hilchos Rotzeach U'Shmiras Ha'Nefesh 1:7). The "*rodef*" may only be killed when there is no other means of escape from him.

It was for this reason that the moment Yehuda made the suggestion to sell Yosef into slavery as a means of ridding themselves of this "*rodef*," they all accepted his suggestion and agreed to follow his advice. If they can accomplish their goal



of getting rid of him without actually killing him, then why kill him, rather sell him into slavery!

What brought the brothers to such a monstrous conclusion regarding Yosef? Although "Yosef would bring evil reports of them to their father" (Bereishis 37:2), is that reason to suspect him of planning some sinister plot? The brothers feared that history was repeating itself, that this was just another chapter in the story of the previous two generations. Avraham Avinu had many sons, yet only one of them was chosen as heir not only to the Holy Land but to continue Avraham's legacy as well - *Yishmael* and the sons of *Ketura* were shunted aside.

The same thing happened in the following generation - of Yitzchak's two sons, only Yaakov was chosen to inherit Eretz Yisrael and to be the spiritual heir, Esav was cast aside. Although Esav shouted in protest (see Bereishis 27:34-38), it did not help him, it was Yaakov who received the Land of Israel and the entire spiritual legacy of Avraham Avinu, while Esav was told "your brother you shall serve" (ibid. 40).

Yosef's brothers felt that he too was planning to oust his brothers from the spiritual legacy of their three forefathers, leaving him alone to inherit, and to take for himself the blessing that Yaakov had received from his father: "Be a lord to your brothers" (ibid. 29). This would mean that at best case the brothers would be his slaves (as appears from the dreams he related to them), and in a worst case scenario they would be cast away from Eretz Yisrael to a faraway land, as Avraham had done to his sons from *Ketura* (see Bereishis 25:6, and Rashi there). The brothers thus viewed Yosef as a very dangerous "*rodef*" who "wished to take their lives - to remove them from this world, the Next World, or both" (S'forno Bereishis 37:18).

Their allegations, of course, were unfounded. Yosef meant no harm, the brothers may have hated him, but he harbored no hatred towards them, rather, he loved them. The reason Yosef brought these reports to his father regarding his brothers, was not to "persecute" them, but rather for their own good. Yosef mistakenly thought that his brothers were guilty of eating "*eiver min hachai*" (portions taken from a live animal) as well as other sins (see Rashi Bereishis 37:2 and Sifsei Chachamim there who explains what brought Yosef to this erroneous conclusion).

He then felt compelled to report this to his father, not G-d forbid, to inflict harm upon them, but in order that Yaakov both in his role as their father as well as that of one of the Gedolei Hador (Yitzchak Avinu was still alive at this point) would set them on the proper path so that they would merit life in the Next World. However, as Yosef erred in his assessment of his brothers' actions, they erred in their assessment of Yosef's - they interpreted his behavior as a wish to persecute them and for this they felt they had the right to kill him.



## Day 5

### The Source of the Challenge

Harav Hagaon Reb Yissochor Dov Kahan Shlit"á

Av Beis Din, Bais Din Maysharim, and Rav, K'hal Rayim  
Ahuvim, Lakewood

#### Uncontrollable Urge

Sometimes we wonder why it is so challenging to avoid speaking lashon hara. Is it harder to resist than virtually all other *aveiros*? Logically, it seems counterintuitive. Chazal teach that a person who speaks lashon hara is a rasha. By indulging in it, a person is essentially broadcasting his own shortcomings. Even after studying Shmiras Halashon, why do so many continue to struggle with disparaging others?

My father zt"l often noted that people's conversations can be divided by class: the lower class talk about people; the middle class discuss objects, and the upper-class deliberate concepts. Thus, when someone engages in lashon hara, they inadvertently reveal that they are focused on others, indicating a lower level of personal growth. Why, then, do we continue to engage in this trivial behavior?

Chazal (Tosefta Peah) point out that lashon hara, like the three severe *aveiros* (idol worship, murder, and adultery), carries a dual punishment—both in this world and the next. If this *aveira* is so serious, why is it so pervasive?

#### Internal Blemish

The problem of lashon hara isn't just a matter of controlling the tongue; it's rooted deep within. Often, people disparage others as a reflection of their own dissatisfaction. Attempting

to elevate oneself by diminishing others is a futile attempt to close an inner gap vis-a-vis his victims. Little does he realize that he is only exacerbating his own failings.

This idea is reflected in the saying, "hurt people hurt people." Those who are insecure or have experienced abuse often seek solace by bringing others down. Sometimes the harm is self-afflicted, arising from jealousy, unmet goals, or a lack of self-acceptance.

Chazal echo this sentiment. The Navi in Yirmiyah (9:7) states: "Their tongue is like a drawn arrow, speaking deceit, ... but inside of him he lays his ambush." The Gemara (Erchin 15b) interprets this as referring to lashon hara, revealing that disparaging words stem from an internal struggle.

Additionally, the Gemara (Shabbos 33a-b) describes those who engage in lashon hara are punishable with the severe death of *askara*. The Gemara explains that this is a fitting punishment because it is similar to their *aveira*; just as this malady begins in the stomach and ends by the throat, the *aveira* of lashon hara starts in the kidneys, continues with the heart, and culminates in the mouth. Metaphorically, the kidneys represent the source of a person's thoughts. Thus, the Gemara in essence is teaching us, that lashon hara stems from internal flaws, and its consequences reflect these internal roots.

Merely controlling one's words is somewhat akin to placing a band-aid on a stomach ache. While this may help reduce lashon hara, it is not the cure. The true solution lies within oneself, addressing the underlying cause.

### **Correlation to the Exiles and Impure Animals**

On a deeper level, we find this concept in Chazal as they depict the exiles that the Yidden endured throughout history.



The Midrash (Vayikra Raba 13:5) likens the four exiles to the four non-kosher animals. The first three exiles correspond to the camel, shafan, arneves, while the last exile corresponds to the pig. This fourth exile is equal to the previous three combined.

The above-mentioned Midrash runs parallel with the Gemara's (Yoma 9b) dictum that the first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed due to the three cardinal sins, while the second was destroyed because of *sinas chinom*, denoting that *sinas chinom* is equal to the collective other three. The Chafetz Chaim in his introduction attests that when the Gemara mentions *sinas chinom* it is referring to lashon hara; hence, lashon hara is as severe as all of the three cardinal sins.

The Vilna Gaon adds a remarkable insight. Klal Yisrael were subject to the first three *galluyos* because they violated the three cardinal sins; even though these *aveiros* are very severe, nonetheless, they are only external faults—their insides were good, as they still were infused with bitachon, which is most fundamental. Therefore, these exiles are compared to the three non-kosher animals which have external signs of impurity—not having split hooves. Our *gallus*, on the other hand, is the consequence of *sinas chinom*, which stems from a lack of bitachon – the cause of all jealousy and hatred, which is an internal flaw, and is therefore compared to the pig, which its sign of impurity is within – it doesn't chew its cud.

This explains the Gemara's maxim (*ibid*) ראשונים שנתגלה עונם – the people of the earlier exiles, whose *aveira* was visible, had their exile's end date revealed, while those of last exile, whose *aveira* wasn't visible, did not have a revealed conclusion. Klal Yisrael during the first Bais Hamikdash committed the three cardinal sins—external in

nature, whereas those exiled from the second Bais Hamikdash were guilty of *sinas chinom* – an internal failing.

The Gemara (ibid) adds טובה צפורן של ראשונים מכריסו של אחרונים – “The nails of the earlier ones are better than the stomachs of the latter ones.” The Vilna Gaon explains that this refers to lashon hara being worse than the three cardinal sins. The Gemara conveys that the *aveira* of the first group, which is represented by the animals lacking split hooves—a fault in their “nails”, is less severe than the *aveira* of the last group, represented by the pig that doesn’t chew its cud—a fault in its “stomach”.

Sefarim explain that chewing the cud symbolizes being satisfied with little. The pig, however, is not content with its lot and that is the source of its impurity. Though it appears to be in its mouth, the source originates in its stomach. Likewise, a baal lashon hara, is dissatisfied with what he has, a manifestation of his lack of *bitachon*. The end result is that he speaks derogatory about others, but it all begins with his discontent within.

### Seeking a Cure

In our observations, some people naturally find it easier to avoid lashon hara because they possess an easy-going personality. They take everything in stride and are not particularly affected by what others have. It would be wonderful to recommend adopting such a disposition to refrain from lashon hara. However, those with such a temperament often face challenges in other areas. They may lack motivation to grow and accomplish, remaining stagnant and content regardless of their level.

We must strive to find the proper balance—cultivating ourselves to constantly grow while avoiding jealousy and negativity toward our peers’ achievements. How can we merge these seemingly contradictory behaviors?



The answer lies in the abovementioned words of the Vilna Gaon; this balance is achieved through *bitachon*. By strengthening our *bitachon*, we can develop inner peace with what we are bestowed—our unique skillset and life circumstances, yet be accomplishing individuals and achieve personal growth. A person with *bitachon* has no need to speak lashon hara.

To combat lashon hara, it's insufficient merely to restrain oneself from speaking negatively; one must cultivate *bitachon*. With a strong sense of *bitachon*, a person can be both motivated and content, driven to grow yet satisfied with their lot.

May Hashem help us strengthen our *bitachon* and refine our inner selves, thereby rectifying the cause of this *gallus*, and bring about the final *geulah* speedily.



## ❧ Day 6 ❧

### **We Are Allies – Not Enemies**

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Shlit"א

R"מ Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, Baltimore, MD

Imagine that someone started an appeal in Shul. The Cause? To build a new Bais Hamikdash. Yes, all that's missing is a few million dollars, and then we can start building the new Bais Hamikdash. How long do you think it would take to raise the funds? My guess is that Klal Yisroel would realize that this is a serious appeal, and it would only take a mere few hours to raise the funds.

Yet, the Chofetz Chaim notes that we know what we need to rebuild the Bais Hamikdash, and it doesn't even have to cost us a red cent. The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of two sins: *sinas chinom* (baseless hatred) and the lashon hara that it engenders. He concludes that since these sins caused the Churban, rectifying those sins will cause the Bais Hamikdash to be rebuilt. All that Hashem asks of us is to abandon the sins of baseless hatred and lashon hara, and to strengthen our *midda of shalom*.

### **Why Hasn't Ben Yishai Come?**

Though we naturally focus on this objective during the Three Weeks, we have other reminders over the course of the year, as to why we still mourn on Tisha B'Av. Unfortunately, many people often miss those signs.

Chazal instituted, for instance, that when Rosh Chodesh begins on Sunday, the Haftorah read on the Shabbos before is



*Machar Chodesh* [- Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh.] Superficially, it seems that the entire connection between this portion of Navi and Rosh Chodesh is merely the words "*Machar Chodesh*." Rav Shimon Schwab Zt"l wonders why Chazal would have us skip the haftorah we would ordinarily read, which is always related to the weekly parsha, and read a different haftorah simply because of the tenuous connection between the words "*Machar Chodesh*" and the fact that the next day will be Rosh Chodesh.

Rav Schwab answers, that in Mussaf of Rosh Chodesh, we say, "מזבח חדש בציון תבין" – Establish a new altar in Zion." In essence, we are davening to Hashem to rebuild the Bais Hamikdash. With these words, we allude to the fact that here we are – another Rosh Chodesh has come, and we still can't offer a Korban Mussaf, because we don't have a Bais Hamikdash.

Chazal amplified this message by giving us a reminder a few times a year, when we read the haftorah of *Machar Chodesh*. That portion of Navi in essence asks us: Do you know why tomorrow you are going to only daven Mussaf and you are not going to bring a Mussaf? Because of what happened in that haftorah. In that haftorah, when Shaul Hamelech wants to know why Dovid did not appear at the seudas Rosh Chodesh, he asks his son Yehonasan, "Why hasn't Ben Yishai come, not yesterday, and not today?" It sounds like such an innocent, innocuous question. But it's a question that reverberates throughout the generations. *Why hasn't Ben Yishai come? Why hasn't Moshiach come?* And the answer is obvious. Because of the *sinas chinom*, the baseless hatred, similar to the *sinah* that Shaul had demonstrated toward Dovid Hamelech.

Each time we read that haftorah, we are sent a subtle reminder: Get your act together. Stop the *sinas chinom*, so Ben Yishai can come.

## A Tale of Two Dips

Here is another example of a reminder we get, but many, perhaps, miss. The *passuk* in Eicha (3;15) says: הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי בַמְרֹרִים – You filled me with bitterness (merorim). The Midrash connects the word "merorim" with another time of the year when we use it: עַל מַצּוֹת וּמְרֹרִים יֵאָכְלוּ – with matzos and bitter herbs (merorim) you should eat it. Chazal note that the first day of Pesach always falls on the same day of the week as Tisha B'Av. Clearly, this is not a coincidence; the Midrash is teaching that if Pesach came and went, and we haven't acted on a certain message we should have taken from Pesach, we will undoubtedly sit on the floor on Tisha B'Av and cry about the Churban once again.

What specific lesson are we supposed to learn from Pesach that can prevent Tisha B'Av? Hagaon Rav Mattisyahu Salomon Zt"l explains, based on the writings of the Ben Ish Chai, that it is the lesson derived from the two tibbulim, the two dippings, we do at the *seder*. The Ben Ish Chai explains that the first dip corresponds to the *passuk* וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת הַכְּתָנִת בְּדָם – they dipped his tunic in blood (Breishis 37; 31). By alluding to this *passuk*, Chazal wanted to remind us how we got into the *gallus* Mitzrayim. It all started with *sinas chinom*.

The second time we dip reminds us of the *geula*. The Midrash says that one of the merits that enabled Klal Yisroel to leave Mitzrayim was that they didn't speak lashon hara. The *gallus* in Mitzrayim ended because there was no *sinas chinom*. This is symbolized by the second dipping, as the *passuk* says וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדָּת אוֹזֵב וַיִּטְבְּלוּ בְּדָם – Take a bundle of grass and dip it into blood (Shemos 12; 22). They took a bundle. United!

The whole story of *gallus* and *geula* is summed up in one simple lesson. We got into *gallus* through *sinas chinom*, and we



got out through unity. And *gallus* Mitzrayim is the paradigm for all future geulos. We will be redeemed from this *gallus* when we unite. That is the only way we are going to get out of this mess. And if we have to keep Tisha B'Av this year, that means we didn't pick up the lesson of dipping at the *seder*.

### Are We Making Progress?

Sometimes we have to make a *cheshbon hanefesh*, and think analytically about ourselves. We have to wonder – with regard to eradicating *sinas chinom*, have we made adequate progress in all the years since the *churban*? Or are we pretty much in the same place where we originally were?

In truth, we have to first define what *sinas chinom* means. Do we really hate people for nothing?

The Netziv explains that *sinas chinom* means that if someone has a difference of opinions than you, has a different approach to *avodas Hashem* than you, or has different *minhagim* than you, you treat him like an *apikores*, a heretic. That's what was going on during the *churban*, and, perhaps, continues to be a problem by some of us today.

A case in point: While preparing this *derasha*, I considered including two beautiful stories.

The first took place during the 1940s, when R' Zev Gold visited my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Halevi Ruderman Zt"l. R' Gold was the head of the world Mizrachi organization at that time. One night, R' Gold gave a speech to a group of Mizrachi members who were not shomer Torah u'mitzvos. When he finished, they asked him why he was staying by Rav Ruderman, who was not affiliated with the Mizrachi movement. "There are 613 mitzvos in the Torah," R' Gold answered. "With Rav Ruderman, I only have *chilukei de'ios* about one of those

mitzvos. With you people, I disagree on dozens and dozens of mitzvos!" Isn't that a special story? You can agree with someone about 612 mitzvos, 610 mitzvos, 600 mitzvos but basically, you agree with the person.<sup>1</sup>

The second story is about Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Zt"l and Rav Kook Zt"l, who had profound differences of opinion, but nevertheless traveled to the kibbutzim and moshavot to try to influence the irreligious people. To quote from the book *Ish Al Hachoma* (Guardian of Jerusalem): "Despite the intensity of the clash between R' Yosef Chaim and R' Kook, the dispute never invaded the personal realm and each demonstrated a high regard for the other. Even at the height of the dispute, whenever the two would meet at a bris or a wedding, they would engage in friendly conversation taking no pains to hide their mutual esteem." Another beautiful story. You can argue with someone, you can hold that his way is wrong, but you can still respect him, and still work together with him.

When I told some people that I was planning to include these stories in my derasha, they warned me to desist. Why? Because people will take the wrong message. They'll decide that Rav Ruderman wasn't enough anti-Mizrachi that he hosted R' Zev Gold, and that it's just wrong to tell any story involving Rav Kook. That, according to the Netziv, is the essence of *sinas chinom*. Just because you disagree with someone on one issue, they become worthy of contempt? You can't even tell a story about them?!

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1. Of course we are only referring to cases where the other isn't a halachic Kofer or Apikores.



### **Chilukei Dei'os – Yes; Machlokes – No**

We have to learn to differentiate between two terms that may sound similar, but are worlds apart: *chilukei dei'os* and *machlokes*. You can have *chilukei dei'os* with someone, you can disagree with someone – even disagree passionately with someone – but it doesn't have to lead to *machlokes*. *Chilukei dei'os* is a necessity. We must stand up for our beliefs. But it doesn't necessitate *machlokes*, going to war with them on a personal level.

How do you do that? How do you look at another Yid who doesn't look the same as you, who has different opinions than yours, and still work with him, understand him, and, even, appreciate him?

### **I would like to offer two suggestions.**

First of all, we must expand our horizons. If we had an inkling of how bad the situation of some Yidden in Klal Yisroel is today, of how many Yidden are, unfortunately, distant from Yiddishkeit, then whenever we would see another Frum Yid – someone who eats kosher and is shomer Shabbos and keeps taharas hamishpacha – we'd think, "He's a Frum Yid, he's an ally! He's not an enemy!"

There's a war out there for Jewish neshamos. Speak to a kiruv worker, and hear for yourself the battle that's going on.

And if that option doesn't work for you, just open up the wedding announcements in a secular newspaper, and read how Ms. O'Conner is wed to Mr. Steinberg. Find out how many of acheinu Bnei Yisroel are being lost forever.

My second suggestion is that we spend time getting to know Yidden who are somewhat different than us.

My friend's child once needed surgery, and he had to spend Shabbos in New York near the hospital where his child was being treated. He went to the closest shul to daven, and when he walked in he saw a group of people sitting together in the back. One was wearing a kappota, another a white straw hat, and the third had no hat at all. Not one looked like the other, but they were sitting and schmoozing, and seemed to be having a wonderful time. How can three people who generally wouldn't give another a glance on the street be having such a good time together?

Do you know what happened? They got to know each other. When people are sitting in a hospital with a sick child, lo aleinu, they start to talk to other people. Maybe you have differences with him about three mitzvos, four mitzvos, five mitzvos, but on 608 mitzvos, you agree.

Get to know people. Even if they don't look or dress or speak or act exactly like you, don't miss them. Remember that they're *unzere mentchen*, they're our people. If a Yid keeps kosher, keeps Shabbos, and keeps *taharas hamishpacha*, he's ours.

HE'S AN ALLY, HE IS NOT THE ENEMY.





## Day 7

### Lashon Hara – Something Unique for Yidden

Rabbi Yehoshua Grunwald Shlit"א

Dayan, Bais Havaad, Lakewood

We find an interesting discussion in the *achronim*, namely, if Goyim are also commanded not to speak lashon hara. The Malbim (Parshas Ki Savo), Kli Chemda (Parshas Yisro 7), and Shu"t Eretz Tzvi (vol. 2, 69) write that Goyim are commanded not to speak lashon hara. On the other hand, we find that the Maharsh"א (Shabbos 33b) writes that Goyim have no *mitzva* at all not to speak lashon hara.

As mentioned, there are multiple *achronim* that agree that Goyim are commanded not to speak lashon hara. It should be noted, though, that they vary in their reason to obligate them. The Malbim explains that it is included in their *issur* not to kill. On the other hand, the Eretz Tzvi explains that even though Goyim only have 7 *mitzvos*, nevertheless, they are commanded in many more things which are called - *middos*, just as Yidden have more obligations that aren't in the count of 613 *mitzvos*. Yet, others say, that it is *sevara* [- logic,] that obligates them.

Rashi in Parshas Shemos (2;14) writes, that Moshe Rabbeinu was wondering why Klal Yisroel were punished with *gallus* Mitzrayim, more so, than any other nation, until he witnessed a Yid speaking lashon hara. Now, according to the opinions that Goyim also have this *aveira*, then why weren't they also punished? And, why did Moshe Rabbeinu feel relieved when he saw a Yid speak lashon hara? Is it possible to conceive, that Goyim are better than Yidden in the area of lashon hara?

We can add further to those questions, as the Midrash (Shemos 1;29, see also Kinnos, 13) tells us, that Klal Yisroel in Mitzrayim had such a great *zechus*, because no one else other than Dasan and Aviram had spoken lashon hara. So, if that's the case, why was it so terrible that a Yid or two spoke lashon hara?

The S'fas Emes (year 5648) addresses these questions. He writes, that certainly, Goyim speak much more lashon hara than Yidden, however, more is expected of us, Yidden, because "speech" is something unique for Klal Yisroel.

In my humble opinion, I think we can add explanation to his words, based on the Sefer Nefesh Ha'chayim (Sha'ar 1, ch. 4). The Nefesh Ha'chayim explains that Hashem created Yidden with a *heilege neshama*, and, as such, through performing *mitzvos* we are building in the upper *olamos*, and through *aveiros* we are destroying in the upper *olamos*. In other words, a Yid that speaks lashon hara, in reality, is destroying more than what Nevuchadnetzar did to the Bais Hamikdash. As Chazal tell us, Nevuchadnetzar really only burnt an already destroyed building. Meaning, the main destruction came from our *aveiros*, so that, when the Yidden sinned, the kedusha of the Bais Hamikdash, essentially, already got destroyed. As such, Nevuchadnetzar really burnt an already vacant building, because those Yidden that sinned were the true destroyers.

The Nefesh Ha'chayim (ch. 16 and 18) goes on further to explain, that in truth, there are three parts to each one of us, a *Nefesh*, a *Ruach*, and a *Neshama*. And, parallel to those, there are three types of *mitzvos* and three types of *aveiros*. The *mitzvos* or *aveiros* which are done with actions are connected to the *Nefesh*. The *mitzvos* or *aveiros* that are done with speech are connected to the *Ruach*. And those that are done with thought are connected to our *Neshama*.



Furthermore, the *mitzvos* or *aveiros* that are done by action, which are connected to the *Nefesh*, can cause the *Nefesh* to be destroyed. That is why we find often that the Torah writes ונכרתו והנפשות. However, the *mitzvos* or *aveiros* that are done through speech, which are connected to the *Ruach*, cause the most destruction, because the *Ruach* is too high to be just cut off from its root. And, therefore, it follows, that an *aveira* from a Yid's speech, which affects the upper *olamos*, can be the most destructive of all *aveiros* possible.

In truth, there is another point to bring out, how we see that this *mitzvah* really singles us out from the Goyim.

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 2b) and Sifri (Parshas Vezos Haberacha) tell us that Hashem asked all the other nations if they wanted the Torah. Each nation, then asked, "What does it say in the Torah?" And, Hashem responded to each one the hardest *mitzvah* for that nation to fulfill.

To the *Yishmealim*, Hashem responded, that in the Torah it says not to steal. To which they responded, "We can't accept that, as that is our whole essence to steal, just like our forefather."

To the children of *Eisav*, Hashem responded, that in the Torah it says not to kill. To which they responded, "We can't accept that, as that is our whole essence to kill, just like our forefather."

And, Hashem responded to the nations of *Amon* and *Moav*, that in the Torah it says not to commit adultery. To which they responded, "We can't accept that, as that is our whole essence to commit adultery, just like our forefather."

Hagaon Rav Elya Lopian Zt"l asked a very interesting question. He asked, what would have happened had the Yidden asked Hashem "What does it say in the Torah?" before accepting it?

And he answered, that Hashem would have said, that it says in the Torah that it is forbidden to speak any lashon hara, because that is the hardest *mitzva* for us to fulfill. Upon hearing that, Klal Yisroel would have probably said, that such an acceptance is too hard, and, *chas ve'shalom*, wouldn't have accepted the Torah, either.

Then, Rav Elya asked a follow-up question; if that is the case, why was it a better choice that we just acted oblivious and accepted the Torah without asking? Such behavior is similar to one that walks a path full of potholes and ambushes but doesn't worry because he blindfolds himself. Isn't that more of a foolish behavior than a praiseworthy one?!

Rav Elya explained that if you look in Rashi in Mesechta Shabbos (88b) you will find the answer to the mentioned question. Rashi tells us, that Klal Yisroel said נעשה ונשמע not because they acted oblivious, but, rather, because they trusted in Hashem, that if Hashem will give them the *mitzva* then Hashem will also give them the tools to be able to fulfill the *mitzva*. We, Klal Yisroel had *emunah* and trust in Hashem that He will never ask of us the impossible. And so, it doesn't make a difference to hear what the *mitzvos* are, because whatever they are, we will be able to do them.

As Rav Elya explained, by all *mitzvos*, and specifically for the *mitzva* of lashon hara, we must have that *emunah* that if Hashem commanded it, then it must be possible. This *emunah* is what we had then by Matan Torah, and this is what we should continue with throughout all the generations. We must strengthen ourselves that if we will do our *hishtadlus*, then Hashem will give us the ability to actually fulfill it.

It is indeed necessary to understand what is considered a valid form of *hishtadlus* for overcoming lashon hara, and



for that one should study the Sefer Shemiras Halashon. However, once someone learns what they are and practices them, he doesn't have to be scared that it's too difficult to keep shemiras halashon.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to mention all the techniques that the Chafetz Chaim writes, but we can mention a few. One can remind oneself of the story of Miriam, learn Torah, and daven to Hashem for *Siyata Dishmaya*. Also, learning the halachos of Shemiras Halashon is very helpful to overcome the yetzer hara of lashon hara.

We can now see, that lashon hara is what separated the Yidden from the Goyim at the time of Matan Torah, and beyond. The Goyim lacked the interest and *emunah* in Hashem, and, therefore, they lost out on getting the Torah. However, we, the Yidden, said נעשה ונשמע, because we trusted in Hashem.

As such, lashon hara is not something that Yidden are worse off with, than the other nations. On the contrary, lashon hara is the *mitzva* that shows our shine! Not only because we are more careful with it, but also because it shows our strength of *emunah* and bitachon! Let's keep it up, and be zoche soon to see the complete *geula*!



## ❧ Day 8 ❧

### Fortunate Life

Hagaon Harav Reb Chaim Weg Shlit"א

Rosh Kollel, Kollel Zichron Gershon, and Rav, Kehillas Sunset  
Grove, Lakewood

In Parshas Vayetze, we learn about the birth of the *Shevatim* and how their names were chosen.

The Torah tells us:

וַתַּהַר לֵאָה וַתֵּלֵד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעֵינַי כִּי עָתִיד יֵאָחֲבֵנִי  
אִישִׁי – And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called him Reuven, as she had declared, "Because Hashem has discerned my humiliation, for now my husband will love me."

וַתַּהַר עוֹד וַתֵּלֵד בֵּן וַתִּאָמֶר כִּי שָׁמַע יְהוָה כִּי שְׂנוֹאָה אָנֹכִי וַיִּתֵּן לִי גַם אֶת זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ  
שִׁמְעוֹן - And she conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved, He has given me this one also," and she called his name Shimeon.

The *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* asks an obvious question. If Leah was using her sons' names as a way to express what she had davened to Hashem, then she named them out of order. In human relations, if someone is unloved, first they have to work on removing the ill feelings, and only subsequently, can they work on building a relationship. How could Leah seemingly have done the opposite, to first daven to instill love with her husband, and then repair the ill feelings?!

The *Ohr Hachayim* answers something truly remarkable, which brings out the outstanding *middos tovos* of the *Imahos*. He writes, that once Leah got married to Yakov Avinu, she



didn't dream that Yakov Avinu disliked her at all. She didn't pay attention at all to any difference in Yakov Avinu's devotion to her and her sister. She didn't keep any tally count of any lack of *shalom bayis* that may have resulted between Yakov Avinu and herself.

However, when she had a baby shortly after she got married, she thought to herself, "Why did Hashem give me a baby right away? It must be there was some lack of *shalom bayis* between us two, for which Hashem gave me a baby to help repair the issue."

Then, when she had another baby shortly after, she thought to herself "Why did Hashem give me a second baby so soon? It must be, that not only was there a lack of love between us, but there must have been, in fact, some ill feelings and negativity towards me, that Hashem had to give me two babies to repair our marriage to the place where it ought to be."

The *Ohr Hachayim*, then adds, "And this is the lifestyle of those who are fortunate!"

What an amazing insight! The *Ohr Hachayim* told us the best secret possible, that one who wants to have a fortunate life should adopt a lifestyle and personality of not keeping track of those little [or even big] interpersonal mishaps that one has.

If one lives a life of judging others favorably, looking at the world with positivity, and refraining from complaints about others, they are shaping for themselves a fortunate and happy life. Irrelevant of the *aveiros* involved in judging unfavorably and speaking lashon hara, it is simply a fortunate life. Understandably, it is *Ratzon Hashem* that one lives like that, as they are manifesting *middos tovos* and refraining from masses of *aveiros*, as well.

The Chafetz Chaim, in *Sefer Shemiras Halashon* (Sha'ar Hazechira Ch. 4, footnote) quotes the Yalkut Shimeoni (Parshas Ki Seze; siman 933) that compares a ba'al lashon hara to a rabid dog. The Chafetz Chaim also quotes the Gemara (Yoma 83b) that tells us that there are five characteristics that identify a rabid dog: a rabid dog's mouth is open, it constantly drips saliva, its ears are drooping, its tail lies between its thighs, and it walks on the sides of *reshus harabim*.

The Chafetz Chaim then explains how each of these five characteristics are so befitting to describe a ba'al lashon hara.

The rabid dog's mouth is open, and so is the mouth of a ba'al lashon hara always open to speak negatively about whoever he can.

The rabid dog also constantly drips saliva, which is a result of the extreme anger and *azus* that are embedded in it. So too, the ba'al lashon hara is full of anger, ready to burst on anyone who crosses against his path. Additionally, anyone that has any contact with the rabid dog gets dirty from all of its dripping saliva, and, so too, the ba'al lashon hara leaves a negative impression wherever he has contact.

The rabid dog also has its ears drooping, its tail lying between its thighs, and it walks on the sides of *reshus harabim*, which are all for the purpose of enabling it to act as if it's walking innocently. In other words, the rabid dog tries acting innocent, all for the purpose that pedestrians won't protect themselves from him. So too, the ba'al lashon hara is constantly gathering information and "news," while pretending to be innocent, all for the purpose of exposing negativity without anyone being able to protect themselves.

In essence, the Chafetz Chaim, based on Chazal, is teaching us something fascinating. He is teaching us, that the ba'al



lashon hara is not merely an *aveira* or a negative behavior; it is rather a lifestyle. It's a lifestyle of negativity with *azus* and anger, all wrapped up together. It's a lifestyle of counting every little mishap one has had with others and paying attention to everyone else's acts and comments. It's a lifestyle of thinking about what everyone around him is thinking. It's a lifestyle of the opposite of what *Leah Imeinu* demonstrated!

Perhaps, you can all remember attending a levaya of some old woman, where a grandson spoke about his grandmother, how she never spoke negatively about others. The woman's upbringing was certainly before the Chafetz Chaim Heritage Foundation was founded, and her carefulness came from some other source. It was simply because she saw everything with positivity. She naturally never saw the negative in others, and, therefore, never had the urge to speak lashon hara.

It is told about Hatzaddik Hagaon Rav Ahron Belzer Zt"l, that when he would walk in the streets of Tel Aviv on Shabbos, and a vehicle would drive by, he would say "Mazal tov, the baby should be born healthy." Or, he would say, "רפואה שלימה", the passenger should have a speedy recovery." One of his *chassidim* once commented to him, "Rebbe, we know it's not true that so many people are driving to the hospital, so why are you saying all this?" The Rebbe responded, "I don't see chillul Shabbos, I want to only see positivity, and I work on myself to always be looking only at the good of others."

Many years ago, when I was a bachur preparing to travel to Eretz Yisroel, to learn there for a couple of years, I went with a group of friends to get chizuk from the mashgiach Hatzaddik Harav Reb Mordechai Schwab Zt"l, who is well known for his work in encouraging so many to be careful with shemiras halashon. He told us, then, that when we go to Eretz Yisroel,

וראה בטוב ירושלים, we should make sure to see and talk about the good of Yerushalayim. When one visits Yerushalayim, perhaps, it's possible for him to see Yidden that unfortunately aren't [yet] shomer Torah u'mitzvos, and some that are anti-Yiddishkeit. However, one can surely also see the many shomrei Torah u'mitzvos, the myriad of yeshivos, the נשים צדקניות, the unbelievable *chesed* that's going on, and so much more. The mashgiach charged us with a mission – only see the goodness and the positivity!

When someone studies two halachos a day of shemiras halashon they are not just educating themselves with the halachos, they are not just working on becoming more careful with shemiras halashon, they are shaping for themselves a lifestyle of fortunate life!

Hagaon Hatzaddik Reb Eliyahu Dessler Zt"l (Sefer Lev Eliyahu, Parshas Vayetze) writes that if someone thinks that by exercising good *middos* they are sacrificing *Olam Haze*h for *Olam Haba*, they are making a big mistake. It is true that it's worth sacrificing for *Olam Haba*, but working on one's *middos* is working on their own *Olam Haze*. One who lives a life with *middos tovos*, is in truth experiencing the most fortunate life possible!

May we all be zoche to that fortunate life!



## ❧ Day 9 ❧

### **Increase Love and Brotherhood**

Maran Hagaon Harav Reb Aharon Yehuda Leib  
Shteinman Zt"l

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Ponovezh

Our generation is known as the generation of *Ikvesa D'Meshicha*, the "Footsteps of Mashiach." The entire Jewish People long for the imminent salvation of Hashem. It is clear that the more we do to draw close to Hashem through Torah and *Mitzva* observance, the sooner we will merit the True Redemption promised to us through our holy prophets. One of the main tenets of our Torah is that we must strive for unity and brotherly love between us. Our holy sages have taught us that since we acted in just the opposite way, we caused the Churban and lost our Bais Hamikdash, which we have yet to rebuild. All the anguish and destruction we have experienced, and all the suffering we presently endure is a result of that Churban.

Therefore, we would like to repeat things that are well known. Critical to our survival is that each one of us judge others favorably, giving them the benefit of the doubt. This practice will prevent quarreling and hatred, *chas veshalom*. We must also train our children to never speak badly of another. We will thus actualize the directive, *ha'emes vehashalom ahavu* – "Love truth and peace" (Zecharya 8;19).

I would like to express my pain regarding the state of interpersonal relations among our brethren. Unfortunately, we are witness to an increase in *machlokes*, not just between

individuals, but even among numerous communal organizations of Torah and chesed. The severity of this sin is described in Chazal, and its punishment, too, is declared to be extremely harsh – both in this world and in the World To Come. There is no need to elaborate on this.

When a person is involved in dispute he believes that he alone is right. He cannot so much as conceive that he may be wrong. That being the case, he concludes that his opponent is a *rasha* (evildoer) against whom it is permitted to do anything. Included in this is even to report him to authorities or call him to a secular court. The person does not wish to take him to a beis din which rules in accordance with Torah law, since it lacks the power of enforcement.

To our great sorrow, we have recently seen a tremendous increase in the number of widows and orphans among us. Who can be sure that this is not because of the sin of *machlokes*? It is possible that the deceased husband and father was not even the one involved in the dispute, yet since we are all responsible for one another, he was punished. Or even more than this, he may have occasionally heard the words of dispute and derived pleasure, or even accepted them as truth.

We know that Hashem is pained when one Jew harms another. If their disagreement draws in many other people, it is possible to estimate the great pain it causes Hashem. Unfortunately, it arouses the Heavenly prosecutors, and the Divine Attribute of Judgement makes its accusations. May Hashem protect us!

Who am I to give you rebuke? However, almost daily I am presented with cases of dispute between individuals, between institutions, and even internally between the administration of an institution and its staff.



Realize that these quarrels have a detrimental effect on the entire world, as Chazal teach: One must always view the world as [if on a scale] equally balanced between merits and sins (Kiddushin 40). A single good deed could tip the scale to the side of merit, and a single sin can tip the scale to the side of guilt - *Rachmana litzlan*.

Besides all this, everything we do, whether good or bad, affects others and causes them to do likewise. Arguments breed more arguments, and informing to the government breeds more informing. How long will we fall?! It seems to me that the only solution is that each and every one of us should be willing to be *mevater* (give in). If [during a dispute] we were to tell the other person that he is in the wrong, he would not listen, for he is absolutely convinced that he is 100 percent correct. Therefore, the only solution is to tell him, "Give in even if you are right. It is so worthwhile to eliminate all quarrel and dispute."

Each one of us should have pity on his soul, on the souls of his family members, and on the whole Jewish Nation. This is aside from the pain (so to speak) of Hashem when there is no peace between us – which is the worst thing that can be.

Yet there is a dismal syndrome which causes one to deceive himself into thinking that he is acting for the sake of Heaven, and is not allowed to give in at all to the other side. For such a person, there is no solution other than for him to introspect deeply until he realizes the truth. He must then return to Hashem in *teshuva*, and He will have mercy on him.

It is incumbent upon us all to increase our efforts to make peace. We must also pray fervently that Hashem have mercy on His honor [by our making peace among ourselves], and that the Jewish Nation not to be punished from Above. May we merit the blessing described this way by Chazal: Hashem did

not find a vessel to contain blessing better than [the vessel of] peace (Uktzin 3;12).

In the merit of peace, may Hashem withhold any Heavenly anger until the time when we will merit the ultimate Redemption. Amen Selah!



## ❧ Day 10 ❧

### **Judging Favorably – Part 2**

Hagaon Harav Reb Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlit"á

Rav, Old City of Yerushalayim

The Mishna teaches us to "Judge every man in a favorable, meritorious light" (Pirke Avos 1:6). This was where Yosef and his brothers stumbled, if we are permitted to speak in such terms. Each side did not judge the other in a favorable light. Yosef should have said to himself: "If ten of the greatest sages decided that this food is not *"eiver min hachai"* then perhaps I am the one who is mistaken. Perhaps it is permissible to eat the meat in this fashion". Although he is not permitted to concede to their opinion without clear proof, he should at least have judged them more favorably. A possible course of action would have been to ask his father. If Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, and the other brothers feel that this is not *"eiver min hachai"* then perhaps they are correct. Our father is a Gadol Hador, let him rule for us. If he is not sure, we can ask our grandfather Yitzchak. He should not have rushed to accuse his brothers of eating *"eiver min hachai"* and then inform his father of this in no uncertain terms.

The brothers too, should have judged Yosef favorably. Where did they get the idea that he was a *"rodef"*? Perhaps his intentions were quite the opposite, to prevent them from sinning so that they too would have a share in Eretz Yisrael and the entire spiritual legacy of the holy forefathers. Both sides did not judge each other favorably, if we may speak in such terms.

The Rishonim tell us, that the requirement to judge others positively does not apply to evil people, not only are we not required to judge them favorably but we are required to grant them an unfavorable judgment (see Rambam and Rabeinu Yonah's commentary to this Mishna). However, unless we are aware that someone is a "*rasha*", we must assume that what he is doing is right and not as it appears. Even if he is acting improperly, we should assume that perhaps he was not given the same education as we have been given, for a Yid in Moscow cannot be as knowledgeable as one in Yerushalayim.

We must always try our best to find the good in others. The brothers assumed that Yosef was a "*rasha*," and therefore had the right to judge him unfavorably, but what gave them the right to assume that he was a "*rasha*"?

Life would be so much better if we would learn to judge others favorably. This applies especially to married couples. Perhaps if people would interpret the actions of their spouse less negatively, there would be far fewer divorces than we are seeing today. When the husband comes home and finds his food burnt, why must he assume that his wife did so intentionally, perhaps while the food was on the fire she went to answer the telephone or had to attend to a crying baby.

There are so many stories told regarding how people misjudged others, when they should have given them the benefit of the doubt. We can take this one step further, and add that a person may think that his neighbor is guilty of wrongdoing, when in reality the accuser is the guilty one, as the following story illustrates.

A woman was waiting at the airport for her flight. She went to the newsstand and purchased a package of wafers to eat while she was waiting. As she was eating her wafers, she suddenly



heard her name being called over the loudspeaker instructing her to come to the counter to straighten out some paperwork.

Upon returning to her seat, to her horror, she noticed a man sitting there, a total stranger quite calmly eating her wafers! Inside she was very angry, but she decided to do her best to avoid publicly embarrassing him. What did she do? She sat herself down right next to him and proceeded to eat the wafers from her package - the same one the man was helping himself to. Between them, they managed to finish off the entire package of wafers.

Many hours later, on the plane, she opened her handbag only to discover a packet of wafers! She suddenly realized that in her haste to go to the counter, she must have placed the wafers in her bag. It was now clear, that it was not he who was eating from her wafers, but she was eating his! She had thought he was stealing from her, when in fact she was stealing from him. She could only imagine what must have been going through that man's mind when some strange woman sat herself down next to him and demolished his wafers, one after another. Perhaps he judged her favorably and assumed that she had spent her very last penny on the flight and had nothing left to eat, but could she not have at least asked for permission?

Life would be so much better if we could judge each other favorably. The following story took place here in the Old City of Yerushalayim: Two people once came to me. One man claimed that the other said to him "I will kill your wife!" The other man responded that he was speaking in question form - "Would I kill your wife?" This was simply a case where one did not understand the other's manner of speaking because they were raised in different cultures.

Chazal provide us with one of the ways of judging others positively: "Do not judge your fellow man until you find yourself in his place, his situation" (Pirke Avos 2:5). My father z"l once explained that "his place" can at times be taken literally. We cannot compare a person raised in one environment with one raised in another. Thank G-d, we were raised in Eretz Yisrael, in Yerushalayim, or one of many other wonderful cities, we cannot compare ourselves to a Yid raised in Moscow, where the value system is so different from ours. This was an example of: "do not judge your fellow man until you find yourself in his place" - literally "his place". In each place, there are different opinions and different manners of speaking.

I often say that all of Chazal's adages regarding judging others favorably, and "do not judge your fellow man until you find yourself in his place, his situation", only apply when it is necessary to judge the other! For example, when a *shidduch* is suggested, he must know whether or not this is a suitable family for him to marry into. If someone suggests a chavrusa for him, he also must inquire whether it is a good match. In such circumstances, Chazal instructed us to do our utmost to judge the other favorably and to try to put ourselves in his place.

When there is no pressing need to judge another, then it is better not to judge him AT ALL, "the judge of all the earth He will do justice" (see Bereishis 18:25). Why must you be the judge? Rather do not judge at all!



## Day 11

### The Root of It

Harav Hagoon Reb Yaakov Galinsky Zt"l

וַיְצַוה הַכֹּהֵן וְשָׁחַט אֶת הַצִּפּוֹר הָאֶחָת אֶל כְּלֵי הָרֶשׁ עַל מִים חַיִּים ...  
וְשָׁלַח אֶת הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה

*The Kohen shall command, and one shall slaughter the one bird into an earthenware vessel, over spring water ... and send away the live bird into the field. (14:4-7)*

In order for the metzora to be purified, he needs to bring two birds. One is slaughtered into an earthenware vessel, over spring water, and the other is sent away to an open field. After that, he brings the rest of his offerings. The Kohen places blood from the guilt offering on the person's right earlobe, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot (Vayikra 14:14). The Kohen does the same with the oil that the metzora brings to accompany his offerings, and then the Kohen pours the rest of the oil over the metzora's head (ibid. 14:17-18),

Rashi explains why he brings two birds:

לפי שהנגעים באים על לשון הרע, שהוא מעשה פטפטי דברים,  
לפיכך הווקפו לטהרתו צפרים, שמפטפין תמיד בצפצוף קול (ערכין טז:):  
*Because the lesions of tzara'as come as a result of slander, which is an act of chattering. Therefore, for his purification, he was required to bring birds, which twitter constantly with chirping sounds.*

The question is how the chirping of birds can be compared to lashon hara, which is completely forbidden and corrupt. There is nothing forbidden or corrupt about a bird's chirps?!

To explain, let's take a look at the Meshech Chochmah's explanation (Vayikra 14:51) with regard to the Kohen placing blood on the metzora's earlobe. In his explanation, the *Meshech Chochmah* brings the words of the Gemara:

מה טעם משופות כיתידות שאם ישמע אדם דבר שאינו הגון יניח אצבעותיו באוזני  
תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל מפני מה אוזן כולה קשה והאליה רכה שאם ישמע אדם  
דבר שאינו הגון יכוף אליה לתוכה ת"ר אל ישמיע אדם לאוזניו דברים בטלים  
מפני שהן נכוות תחלה לאיברים

*Why are a person's fingers pointed like pegs? Because if a man hears something inappropriate, he can plug his ears with his fingers. Rabbi Yishmael taught: Why is the entire ear hard and the earlobe soft? Because if man hears something inappropriate, he can fold the earlobe over [his ear] to seal it. Our Rabbis taught: A man should not let his ears hear idle things because they are burned first of all the organs [in the fire of Gehinnom] (Kesubos 5b)*

Rashi explains there that the ears of a person are consumed in the fire of *Gehinnom* first, since they are the softest and thinnest of the organs. The Maharsh"א points out, that at first, the Gemara mentions the prohibition of hearing things that are inappropriate - forbidden speech. Then, it adds that a person shouldn't allow himself to hear even permissible speech, such as idle words, because "they are burned first." In other words, once a person allows himself to listen to idle conversation, he will easily come to hear inappropriate things. This is not the case regarding the other senses, for example, the sense of sight. A person doesn't need to close his eyes at permissible images.

The *Meshech Chochma* goes on to say, that this is why the Kohen places the blood and oil on the person's earlobe. Since he was afflicted with tzara'as as a result of speaking lashon hara



and engaging in mockery, he is being reminded that he should have "folded over his earlobe to seal his ears" or plugged them with his fingers. (The Maseis Binyomin adds that the Kohen also places blood and oil on his toe to indicate that at the least he could have gotten up and left.)

The Chafetz Chaim adds, that the remainder of the oil is poured over the metzora's head, because if he heard lashon hara, then it led him to think derogatory thoughts about the subject of the slander, so his head also needed atonement (cited in *Me'orah shel Torah*).

All these explanations are beautiful, but they also raise a question. A person does not contract *tzora'as* for listening to lashon hara, but rather for speaking lashon hara, as Chazal say מאי דכתיב זאת תהיה תורת המצורע זאת תהיה תורתו של מוציא שם רע, "What is the meaning of 'This shall be the law of the *metzora*' (Vayikra 14;2)? It means 'This shall be the law for he who propagates a bad name.' (Arachin 15b)" In that case, the Kohen should have put the blood and oil on his mouth and lips?!

It must be, that even if the *tzora'as* which he contracted for speaking lashon hara, heals, and the metzora repents for the words he spoke, he is being shown, that this is not enough. It's not enough for him to repent for the sin itself; he needs to pinpoint the root of the sin and eradicate it.

The Alter of Kelm discusses (*Chochma U'mussar* 1;149, 2;317) Adam Harishon's excuse when Hashem asked him what he had done: האשה אשר נתתה עמדי הוא נתנה לי מן העץ ואכל, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, gave me from the tree, so I ate" (Breishis 3;12). Interestingly, it seems that he is renouncing all guilt and blaming someone else. Essentially, he gave an answer more suited for a little child.

The Alter of Kelm explains that Adam Harishon knew very well that teshuva hinges on regret, confession, and resolve not to sin again. He knew that the resolve not to sin hinges on eradicating the root of the sin and the inclination toward transgressing it. He examined the recesses of the soul and said, "How can I repent if I am a creature that is tempted by others, even my wife? In that case **וְאָכַלְתִּי אִין בְּתִיב כְּאִן, אֵלֶּא וְאָכַלְ, 'I ate and I will eat again'** (ibid. 19;12)."

He realized that there was no true resolve not to sin again in the future!

This is why the Rambam tells us, that just as we are obligated to repent for our bad deeds, we need to repent for our bad traits because bad character traits are the root of bad deeds (Hilchos Teshuva 7;8).

What is the character trait that is at the root of lashon hara? The obsessive need to listen to the news and an undue interest in current events and the affairs of the outside world. It's nothing but an obsession, because what does it add to your life? What does it have to do with you?

Instead, the Torah tells us what to focus on: "Slaughter the one bird" into an earthenware vessel, over spring water, which represents Torah, as water always refers to Torah (Bava Kamma 17a). The Torah refers to the bird that is to be slaughtered, as "the one bird," hinting that the words of Torah should constitute a person's primary speech; he should mainly speak words of Torah (Toros Kohanim, Metzora 1). The other bird should be sent out to the field, far away – indicating that a person should refrain from other forms of speech.

The Chiddushei Ha'rim points out, how a person's income is allotted to him from Shomayim (Beitzah 16a), and Chazal tell us that the One who created the day provides each one's



sustenance (Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 20), yet people exert so much effort on earning a livelihood as if Hashem has nothing to do with it. On the other hand, when it comes to *Yiras Hashem*, which we are told is the only thing in our hands, that people leave up to Hashem! We can say the same thing when it comes to the news.

People think if they keep track of the news, they have some sort of control over current events. But how will listening to the news enable them to predict or prevent a war? Or the collapse of Communism? Or the rise of the Euro? Or the upheaval in the Middle East? There is nothing we can do about any of these events, and spending an inordinate amount of time keeping up with the news is simply a waste of time.

During the tumultuous period of World War One, the Imrei Emes, Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, zt"l, once traveled to his brother Rav Moshe Betzalel, zt"l, to serve as a sandak. On the train, he glanced through the window and noticed a group of Jews standing on the train platform arguing vociferously. He asked them what they are discussing.

"The course of the war" was the answer.

What was the Rebbe's response?

"The Midrash says that if you see two empires contending with each other, look for the feet of Mashiach (Breishis Rabba 42;4). What does the 'course of war' have to do with you? Instead of spending time discussing the war, you should do your part – increasing Torah and *mitzvos* to bring Mashiach closer!"

If we would get into this habit, we would rid ourselves of nonsense, close our ears from listening to useless news, and focus on increasing our Torah study, then we will rectify the root of lashon hara, as it says, מְרַפָּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים, "The healing for a tongue is the tree of life" (Mishlei 15;4). *Lashon*, "tongue,"



refers to lashon hara (see Yirmiyahu 9;7), and *eitz chaim*, "tree of life," is none other than the Torah – that is the way to eradicate a predilection to lashon hara - through Torah study (Arachin 15b).



## ❧ Day 12 ❧

### **Running After the Right Kavod**

Hagaon Harav Reb Chaim Friedlander Zt"l

Mashgiach, Yeshivas Ponovezh

You are all likely familiar with the concept of the Sefer Chovos Halevovos (Chapter 7) that when Reuven speaks *lashon harah* about Shimon, Reuven's (prior) *mitzvos* are transferred to Shimon and Shimon's (prior) sins are transferred to Reuven. As such, speakers of lashon hara will find on the Day of Judgment that they will not be receiving reward for good deeds that they did do, and will—on the contrary—receive punishment for bad deeds which they did not do.

The truth of the matter is that this idea is not only in the Chovos Ha'Levovos, but it also appears in the Sefer Maggid Meisharim (written by Rav Yosef Karo, Parshas Vayakhel). Additionally, the same idea appears in the Sefer Marpeh Lashon by Rav Raphael Hamburger Zt"l. It is a very frightening concept.

However, we must understand how this can be. How is it possible, that Hashem, Who is completely righteous, rewards people for mitzvos they haven't done and punishes people for sins they never violated? Additionally, why is it only by the *aveira* of lashon hara that we find this concept?

Before we go to the answer, let's first give an introduction. The Gemara (Erachin 15) tells us that in the future all the animals will come to the snake and ask him, "Why do you bite other beings without even benefitting from them?" And the snake will answer, "And what enjoyment do speakers of lashon hara have?!"

It seems wondrous that the Gemara says that people say lashon hara without enjoyment. From the amount of people that have desires to speak lashon hara, it sure seems like there is some sort of enjoyment?! And this is not a new thing that so many people are driven to say lashon hara, as the Gemara (Bava Basra 165) already tells us that everyone who doesn't work on themselves will sin with at least *avak* lashon hara. [And the Ramba"m (Meseches Avos 1;16) adds, that in later generations everyone who doesn't work on themselves will sin with real lashon hara.] Additionally, we see for ourselves that even young children are driven to say lashon hara about their siblings and friends. Furthermore, the Chafetz Chaim wrote a whole section in his sefer to explain techniques on how to refrain from lashon hara, so there certainly must be a natural drive to violate this *aveira*. If so, what does the Gemara mean that people speak lashon hara without enjoyment?

The answer to all the above-mentioned questions is that there is a natural human trait to measure one's self based on one's counterparts. People are judging their accomplishments based on how they compare themselves to their peers. Also, people exert tremendous effort to find favor in the eyes of those around them, which, in turn, gives them a feeling of self-respect and self-worth. It is human nature that when people are among others, they are measuring all of their personal actions, words, and, even, clothing to those around them. Consciously or subconsciously, people are focused on how others value them.

This is just as Reb Moshe Chaim Luzatto Zt"l (Mesillas Yesharim, 11) writes, that the drive for *kavod* and respect is the greatest human drive, greater than any other desire in the world, and if not for it, anyone would be willing to wear the most simple clothing, live in the most modest home, and



eat the most basic food possible. It is only that people are concerned that they will have an image of being inferior, that they push themselves to work hard. Unfortunately, people are not measuring themselves based on their true qualities and accomplishments, only on their peers instead.

We can now understand the drive to speak lashon hara. People mistakenly think that if they succeed in lowering their friends' image, they will increase their personal image. They also fool themselves, that if they can ridicule their friend for a shortcoming, they themselves are better than their friend in that respect.

This can be further explained with the words of the Ramba"n (Vayikra 19;18) in his explanation of the *mitzva* of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, which is the opposite of lashon hara. The Ramba"n explains that certainly everyone must save themselves before their friend, as Chazal tell us that חייד קודמין – your life comes first. Nonetheless, the Torah commands that we should wish good for our friends in all areas, [not just a few,] the same that we wish good for ourselves in all. The Torah even commands that we should wish our friends to have even better than we have in all areas, without any limits of love for our friends. Obviously, according to the Ramba"n it is to be understood, that your friend's wellness and achievements will not diminish anything from your own.

We can extrapolate, that the same runs true for the opposite, which is the *aveira* of lashon hara; the underlying cause of lashon hara is that one can't bear that his friends are better than him.

With this, we can understand what the Gemara states that the snake responds, that speakers of lashon hara also have no enjoyment. The Gemara means that there is no true enjoyment

for the speaker; rather, it is merely an imaginary enjoyment. The speaker thinks that he is raising his own respect with his words, but truthfully he is only lowering his respect. He may be very driven to slander another, but it's not an enjoyment. It's more comparable to an addict running after his addiction, which he himself rationally despises.

With this Hagaon Hatzaddik Rav Eliyahu Dessler Zt"l explained the rationalization for the concept of the Chovos Halevovos. The speaker's mitzvos get transferred away from his account, and instead, he receives the *aveiros* of the subject because he is being paid back מדה כנגד מדה – measure for measure. Since he was trying to boost himself on his friend's account, he therefore gets punished by his friend getting boosted from his account. In essence, if he doesn't teach this lesson to himself in this world, then in heaven he will discover what he was really doing and what the repercussions for it are.

We can, now, also better understand why the Torah punishes the metzora with isolation out of the community. The metzora got inflicted with tzora'as as a punishment for speaking lashon hara, and, therefore, is punished to be isolated from society. Additionally, he must call out to all that pass by him "*tamei*" "*tamei*," so that others shouldn't become *tamei* from him and they should daven for his recovery. These punishments are all not for the purpose of getting back at him, rather, they are necessary for his cure. Since he got into the habit of misusing society, he needs to relearn what society is all about.

He stays out of society so that he will feel how much he desperately needs society. That is also why he is forced to ask others to *daven* for him so that he realizes that he must come on to others. He also warns others not to become *tamei*, so



that he regulates himself to be a helper for others, not just to take from others whatever he can.

The Gemara tells us that learning Torah is a protection not to come to lashon hara, as well as a cure for one that already sinned with lashon hara. Learning Torah is the opposite of being self-centered. One that learns Torah, learns so for the sake of bringing the world and himself to completion. As such, we can now understand why those that learn Torah, earn the real *kavod*, as Chazal tell us.

May we all be *zoche* to run for the real *kavod*, and not get fooled into running after the fake *kavod*.



## Day 13

### Every Yid Is a Great Star

Harav Hagaon Reb Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlit"á

Rav, Old City of Yerushalayim

Chazal tell us: "Why is the section of the spies adjoined to the section of Miriam? Because she had been punished for evil talk, which she had spoken against her brother, and these wicked people saw and did not learn a lesson" Rashi Bamidbar 13:2). Although chronologically the episode of Miriam did precede the affair of the spies, we know that "The Torah's events were not recorded in chronological order" (Pesachim 6b). In Parshas Beha'aloscha, for example, the section discussing the Aron's journey: "*Vayehi binsoa haaron*" (Bamidbar 10:35), is not written in its proper location. Chazal tell us that this section is surrounded by inverted "*nuns*" because "The Torah made signs for this passage, in front of it and after, to say that this is not its place. But why was it written here? It is in order to make an interruption between one trouble and another" (Rashi Bamidbar 10:35 citing the Gemara in Shabbos 116a).

Accordingly, if the Torah chose this juxtaposition of the incident with the spies together with that of Miriam there must be an additional reason for it. Chazal therefore explain that the Torah is criticizing the spies for not having derived a lesson from what happened to Miriam.

Superficially, this is very difficult to understand. What moral can we expect the spies to have learned from Miriam? Had the case been that Miriam spoke lashon hara against sticks and



stones and was punished for it, we could have derived by means of a *kal vachomer* that if it is forbidden to speak lashon hara about sticks and stones then certainly we may not speak this way of a fellow Yid, how much more so a *Talmid Chacham*, and even more so of the greatest sage and prophet that ever lived!

How does the fact that Miriam spoke lashon hara against the greatest sage and prophet teach us that we are forbidden to speak negatively about sticks and stones? What type of a *kal vachomer* is this? There are countless flaws in such logic! What then is the meaning of this criticism against the spies for not having learned a lesson from what happened to Miriam?

A further difficulty lies in the fact that the Torah commands us: "Beware of a *tzora'as* affliction ... Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way, when you were leaving Mitzrayim" (Devarim 24:8-9) - "if you wish to take care that you not be stricken with *tzora'as* do not speak lashon hara, remember what was done to Miriam who spoke against her brother Moshe and was stricken with afflictions of *tzora'as*" (Rashi Devarim 24:9).

This implies that not only should the spies have learned a lesson, but we too must realize the severity of speaking lashon hara from what happened to Miriam. (According to the Ramban "Beware of a *tzora'as* affliction ..." is a positive commandment: "We are commanded to verbally remember to take to heart what Hashem did to Miriam when she spoke of her brother, despite her being a prophetess, as a means of distancing ourselves from speaking lashon hara" (Ramban's appendix to the Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos - Mitzvas Asei 7). How can we learn from Miriam who spoke lashon hara against Moshe Rabeinu that it is even forbidden to speak lashon hara against an ordinary

Jew? Perhaps there is nothing wrong with speaking lashon hara against someone who is not on such a high level?

We can explain as follows: What does the A-lmighty say to Miriam and Aharon when He rebukes them? "... My servant Moshe; in My entire house he is trusted. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a vision and not in riddles, and at the image of Hashem does he gaze" (Bamidbar 12:6-8). You should have understood that if I chose Moshe to be My messenger to take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, to give them the Torah, and to carry out the myriad other great things that he did, then it was obviously not for no reason but due to his special virtues (even if you do not know what they are). In that case "Why did you not fear to speak against My servant Moshe" (ibid.).

The spies should have applied similar reasoning (following the incident of Miriam) - if this is the Land Hashem chose as the residing place of His Divine Presence to reside if it was this Land He elected to give to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and to bring Klal Yisrael to, then there must be something special about this Land that we do not find elsewhere. We may not be able to discern precisely what these advantages are, but we should at least believe that they exist and not slander the Chosen Land as if it were some terrible place, G-d forbid.

The same applies to every Yid. Each Yid is a member of the Chosen people and he therefore must have virtues, because Hashem did not choose Am Yisrael as His nation for no reason. Hashem said to Avraham: "Gaze now toward the Heavens and count the stars if you are able to count them ... so shall your offspring be" (Bereishis 15:5). The stars may appear to be minuscule but in truth they are vast. The same applies to Hashem's children, even when they appear small and insignificant they are in fact enormous. We must therefore take



great care not to speak lashon hara against any Yid, even if we are unable to discern it, he is in fact very great, just as we are unable to discern the vastness of a star!



## ❧ Day 14 ❧

### **Daleytoria – Derogatory About the Klal**

Rabbi Yehoshua Grunwald Shlit”a

Dayan, Beis Din Bais Havaad, Lakewood

The Chafetz Chaim composed a *tefilla* that one should say, to ask Hashem for help not to be *nichshal* with the *aveira* of lashon hara. In the *tefilla*, it states that ‘Hashem should help me refrain from any lashon hara or rechilus, and certainly to refrain from *daleytoria* about the Klal.’

What does *daleytoria* mean? And, why is it worse than lashon hara?

Sefarim explain, that *daleytoria* is when someone speaks to Hashem about the faults of Klal Yisroel. We find this issur in the Gemara (Meseches Pesachim 87b), which learns this issur from the *passuk* אֵל תִּלְשֵׁן עִבְדֵי אֵל (אֲדֹנָי) אֲדֹנָי (Mishlei 30;10). The Gemara explains that even if the people of the generation are such sinners that they curse their parents, nevertheless, don’t tell it to Hashem. Just like no father wants to hear about their son’s faults, so too, Hashem does not want to hear about the Yidden’s faults.

Harav Binyomin Zilber (Sefer Mekor Halacha vol. 1; pg. 86b) adds, that even if one only speaks negatively about a large group of Klal Yisroel, such as a city of Yidden, it is also included in this *issur*.

Moreover, we find in numerous places in Chazal that Hashem punishes severely for this *aveira*.



One of those sources is the *Zohar* (*Zohar Chadash*, pg. 21b), which tells us that even if someone is the biggest *tzaddik* in the world, but he speaks *daleytoria* about Klal Yisroel, his punishment will be the worst of all. The *Zohar* adds, that there was no one that was a greater *tzaddik* than Eliyahu Hanavi, in his generation, nonetheless, Hashem told him that he is deserving to eat burning coals as a punishment, [because he said *daleytoria*.] Rashi (Melachim 1; 19; 16) adds, that Eliyahu Hanavi also lost his prophecy because of this sin.

The *Zohar* (ibid.) concludes, that immediately upon Eliyahu Hanavi hearing about his sin, he promised to always tell Hashem the *zechusim* of Klal Yisroel, and, as such, any Yid that does a *mitzva*, Eliyahu Hanavi immediately goes and reports it to Hashem. We actually find this in *Tanna Devei Eliyahu (Rabba*, 1, 19), that Eliyahu Hanavi said amazing *limudei zechus* for Klal Yisroel, exactly as he promised.

Similarly, we find (see Meseches Yevamos 49b) that Yeshaya Hanavi got punished with death and other punishments because he spoke *daleytoria* on Klal Yisroel.

Interestingly, though, we find, that the Midrash (Midrash Rabba, Parshas Tzav, 10, 2) tells us, that Yeshaya Hanavi only became a *navi* in the first place, as a reward for being exceptional at seeing and reporting the good of Klal Yisroel. Moreover, the Midrash writes, that because of this trait that he had, he merited a greater level of prophecy than all other *nevi'im*. Other *nevi'im* only became a *navi* through a teacher, however, Yeshaya became a *navi* directly from Hashem. Additionally, many of his prophecies were said in double terms, unlike all other *nevi'im*.

If so, we can wonder, why was he punished for saying *daleytoria* one time? The *Yefeh Toar* (on Midrash, ibid.) answers,

that the *daleytoria* that Yeshaya said was a mistake, which he said out of pain, but, nevertheless, Hashem punished him, because Hashem judges great *tzaddikim* for even small sins.

Harav Zilber (ibid.) adds, that by extension, even to tell the faults of Klal Yisroel to another Yid is included in this *issur*, because wherever you say it, Hashem hears it.

Rav Zilber further explains, that, nevertheless, if one only speaks about a small group of sinners, it is permissible, and even a *mitzva*, in some circumstances.

One can then wonder how an authority can give *mussar* to the public that they should improve in *avodas Hashem*, without mentioning their faults. The *Sefer Pele Yoetz (Erech Saneygoria)* addresses this question, and writes that speakers should only say 'such and such is what people should do', or 'such and such, people should be careful with', but not mention that 'the population isn't careful with such and such.'

Based on a Midrash (*Devarim Raba*, see *Sefer Shefa Chaim* vol. 15, pg. 518), perhaps we can offer another alternative approach. The Midrash seems to indicate that if one first proclaims the goodness of Klal Yisroel, they can, following, mention the sins, when it's for a good purpose.

It is told of Harav Levi Yitzchak of Bardichev Zt"l, that when a *darshan* would request to give a sermon in his Shul, he would only allow them to speak on condition that the speaker wouldn't mention any of the public's sins. One time, a speaker who accepted those terms, forgot himself in the middle of his sermon and started saying that the community isn't careful enough in a specific area. Immediately, Harav Levi Yitzchak of Bardichev Zt"l, went to the *Aron Kodesh*, opened it, and began *davening* to Hashem. He said, "Hashem don't believe him, he's



not talking with a straight mind, he simply needs money to marry off his daughter, please supply him with his needs, and You will see that he will no longer claim such things about Yidden.”

The Klauzenberger Rebbe Zt”l (*Sefer Shefa Chaim*, vol. 15, pg. 518) once said, that if there would have been Yidden that were skilled enough in this trait of reporting the good of Klal Yisroel, the entire World War II would have never come about. He said that all the *tzaros* have only come because speakers mistakenly think that by mentioning the sins of Klal Yisroel while admonishing them, they are saving Klal Yisroel. Little do they realize, that they won’t be successful on such a path; rather, they are only causing such destruction through the kitrug that they are bringing,

On the other hand, just as *daleytoria* is such a severe sin, so too, is the opposite, which is reporting the good and mentioning *limudei zechus* of Klal Yisroel, is such a great *mitzva*. Famously, Harav Levi Yitzchak of Bardichev Zt”l excelled in this, and found goodness in all of Klal Yisroel’s behaviors, as many are familiar with the various stories that demonstrate this.

The Chafetz Chaim (*Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hatevuna*, ch. 7) also elaborates on this idea. He brings from Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma, Shoftim, 4), that in the days of Gideon Ben Yoash, Hashem was waiting for someone to be *melamed zechus* for Klal Yisroel, until Gideon Ben Yoash was. In that *zechus*, he merited to see a מלך and the salvation came. From here you see how great it is to be *melamed zechus* for Klal Yisroel.

May we be *zoche* to be among those who are reporters of the good of Klal Yisroel, and not, *chas veshalom*, the opposite. And, may we be *zoche* to see the final *geula* soon!

## Day 15

### A Frightening Idea of the Chovos Ha'Levovos

Rabbi Yissocher Frand Shlit"a

R"m Yeshivas Ner Yisrael, Baltimore, MD

The Midrash tells the story of a peddler who went from town to town in the vicinity of the city of Tzipori, selling his wares. He used to call out, "Who wants to buy the medicine of life?" Rav Yannai, the Talmudic sage, was sitting there, and he heard the peddler's sales pitch. Rav Yannai said, "Sell me the medicine!" The peddler said, "You, and people like you, do not need what I am selling." Rav Yannai persisted and said, "But, nu – tell me. What are you selling?"

The Midrash continues that the peddler took out a volume of Tehillim and showed Rav Yannai the *passuk* "Who is the man who wants life...? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully. Depart from evil and do good..." [Tehillim 34:13-15]. These famous *pesukim* from Psalms pose the question – what is the best way to guarantee life? The *passuk* suggests the answer: Watch your tongue!

The Midrash concludes that Rav Yannai proclaimed, "My entire life I have been reading these *pesukim* and did not understand what they were teaching, until this peddler came along and informed me as to their meaning."

The question is obvious: What did the peddler tell Rav Yannai that he did not previously understand? Certainly, Rav Yannai knew how to translate a *passuk* in *Tanach*. The interpretation of these words is straightforward: "Who is the



man who desires life? Guard your tongue from (speaking) evil.” Rav Yannai claims that he never understood what the *pesukim* meant until now. How is that possible? What novel interpretation did the peddler provide?

The Shemen HaTov explains that certainly, Rav Yannai understood that a person who desires life needs to guard his tongue. But Rav Yannai had understood that the only way to guard one’s tongue from evil is to become a hermit. Rav Yannai thought that cleanliness of speech required being somewhat anti-social. Rav Yannai believed that mixing with society, having friends and engaging in conversation was a sure formula for NOT being able to live up to the standards of “Who is the man who desires life”.

Rav Yannai was shocked that the PEDDLER was “selling” this verse. Peddlers are known for their ‘gift of gab’. They travel from city to city and from house to house and have plenty to tell, plenty to share, and plenty to say. In classic Hebrew literature, the peddler was always portrayed as a gossip. The very name of the profession (*Rochel*) is related to the word for tale-bearing (*Rechilus*).

Rav Yannai’s revelation was not so much the interpretation of the *passuk* but the teacher of the lesson: “If the peddler can tell me that a person such as he can be careful about Lashon Hara (gossip), then my approach must change. I now realize that a person can intermix with society, talk, be sociable and still be careful not to speak Lashon Hara.”

Rabbi Layzer Levine, the father-in-law of Rabbi Berel Wein, grew up in the house of the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan. It is well-known that the Chofetz Chaim was himself the paradigm of someone who was careful not to speak Lashon

Hara. Therefore, we imagine that he was a person of very few words, who rarely spoke to those around him.

Rabbi Wein heard from his father-in-law that the opposite was true. The Chofetz Chaim was constantly talking! He was constantly engaged in conversation with people. And nonetheless, he was careful about Lashon Hara.

That is what Rav Yannai learned from the peddler.

In addition, there is another lesson here. Many times in life we are bombarded with messages. Some of these messages are very important. Some of these messages may come from the most unlikely of sources. Even the lowly peddler can deliver a powerful message to the great Rav Yannai. However, we must listen for such messages. Someone like Rav Yannai, who is constantly open to messages, will constantly learn and grow.

"From all my teachers I have become wise" [Tehillim 119:99]. A person must have the ability to learn from every teacher and from every situation. The messages are out there. Our job is to remain awake enough to receive them.

Now, let me share with you another approach to explaining the Midrash. The *Kosnos Ohr* references a very frightening passage in the *Sefer Chovos Ha'Levovos* ("Duties of the Heart" by Reb Bachya ben Joseph ibn Paquda). The truth of the matter is that this idea is not only in the *Chovos Ha'Levovos*, but it also appears in the *Sefer Maggid Meisharim* (which relates conversations between a *Malach* and the Beis Yosef – Divine Revelations, as it were, communicated to Rav Yosef Karo by an Angel). Additionally, the same idea appears in the *Sefer Marpeh Lashon* by Rav Raphael Hamburger Zt"l. It is a very frightening thought.



The *Chovos Ha'Levovos* writes in the "Gates of Acquisition" (Chapter 7) that when Reuven speaks *Lashon Harah* about Shimon, Reuven's (prior) *mitzvos* are transferred to Shimon, and Shimon's (prior) sins are transferred to Reuven! Slanderers will find on the Day of Judgement that they will not be receiving reward for good deeds that they did do, and will—on the contrary—receive punishment for bad deeds which they did not do!

A person who had been a *Shomer Shabbos* his entire life will ascend to the World of Truth and he will suddenly discover that he is not receiving any credit for his Shabbos observance! On the other hand, he will be punished for sins that he never committed. When he will express astonishment at this apparent injustice, it will be explained to him that his spiritual rewards and punishments have been switched with those of so-and-so, against whom he spoke *Lashon Harah*.

The *Chovos Ha'Levovos* cites an incident involving someone about whom *Lashon Harah* was spoken. Shimon heard that Reuven spoke *Lashon Harah* about him. Shimon then sent Reuven a fruit basket as a present. Shimon told him: "You did me such a favor, so I feel that I need to repay it!" Reuven asked, "What did I do for you?" Shimon responded, "You spoke *Lashon Harah* about me. Therefore, I received all of your merits. That was a tremendous present! It is only right that I should send you a present in return."

Like all great people in Jewish history who did something revolutionary, Rav Yosef Karo was attacked by people for his revolutionary accomplishment—the writing of the *Shulchan Aruch*. People spoke *lashon harah* against him. The *Malach* told the Beis Yosef (and this is recorded in the *Maggid Meisharim*) that he should not worry about the *Lashon Harah* because he

would get the *zechusim* of the people who slandered him, and all of his *aveiros* would be transferred to those other people!

Rav Raphael Hamburger, in his *Sefer Marpeh Lashon*, writes that many people will come to the World of Truth and find many positive *mitzvos* in "their ledger" that they never did. They will tell the "Gate Keepers," "We never did these *mitzvos*," and they will be told, "They were done by people who slandered you!"

The *Kosnos Ohr* says that this idea is the novelty that Rav Yannai did not understand. When Rav Yannai learned the *passuk* in Tehillim "Who is the man who desires life..." he thought that this was speaking about (life in) this world. The epiphany that he had because of the peddler's insight was that the *passuk* is teaching, "If you want life in the next world, the best way to achieve that is by guarding your tongue from speaking evil. If you work your whole life—you meticulously do *mitzvos*, keep Shabbos, are a *baal chessed*, and (after 120 years) you want to reap the rewards for all your efforts, the only way to guarantee that the reward of this "good life" will be preserved for you is to guard your tongue from speaking evil. Otherwise—according to the *Chovos Ha'Levovos* - a person can lose his *mitzvos* and lose his reward. He can, Heaven forbid, wind up with *aveiros* that he did not do and with *mitzvos* that were lost!

This is the "chiddush" that Rav Yannai had now learned.

The Chofetz Chaim brings this idea in the *Sefer Shemiras Halashon* (Chapter 3). He writes this idea again later in Volume 2 (Chapter 8.) There, in a footnote, the Chofetz Chaim brings, that many people at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei* recite a Biblical *passuk* that begins with the first letter of their name and ends with the last letter of their name. Many *Siddurim* have a list



of suggested *pesukim* for many different names. The *Kitzur Shel"á* writes that the reason we say such a *passuk* is that on the Day of Judgement, everyone will be asked his or her name. If someone forgets his name (as a result of the trauma of the death experience), at least he will remember the *passuk*, which he has recited so many thousands of times in his life.

I have for you a very curious *shailah*. Do you mean that I am going to forget my name? I forget many things these days, but I still remember my name! So, what does this mean?

The Chafetz Chaim explains: When someone goes to Heaven and suddenly, he is credited with a whole range of *mitzvos* that he well knows he never performed in his lifetime, he will recognize that this is Chaim ben Yosef's *mitzvos* and these are Shmuel ben Shalom's *mitzvos* and these are Dovid ben Tzvi's *mitzvos*. He will have credited to his account hundreds—maybe thousands—of *mitzvos* from different people. They will call him Dovid ben Tzvi; they will call him Shmuel ben Shalom; they will call him Chaim ben Yosef. He will become so confused! "Who am I really?" The *Shel"á*, therefore says, that if he has a *passuk* containing the first and last letter of his name firmly engraved in his self-conscious, which is how he will remember his real name.

This is all based on the above-mentioned *Chovos Ha'Levovos*.

My point with all this is, to impress on the audience—and on myself—the severity of the transgression of speaking *Lashon Harah*. If this *Chovos Ha'Levovos*, *Maggid Meisharim*, and *Marpeh Lashon* do not put the fear of G-d into you, then what will?! The specter of going up to the World of Truth and suddenly discovering that you have lost your hard-earned reward for doing *mitzvos*, is truly frightening!

The problem is, in my humble opinion, that this idea is too frightening. How can it be that a person works to accumulate Torah and *mitzvos* his whole life, and then they not be there for him in the World of Truth? It is too frightening.

Rav Dessler has a long essay (which I do not have time to go into now) explaining that this is not really what the *Chovos Ha'Levovos* means. He certainly does not take it at face value.

I would like to point out that we see an inference (*diyuk*) in the *sefer* Marpeh Lashon from Rav Raphael Hamburger that, perhaps, limits this concept. He formulates this concept by adding two very important words. He writes, "We see that one who is immersed, Heaven forbid, in this evil practice..." This means that we are talking about a person for whom this is his nature. He is what is called in *halacha* a Ba'al *Lashon Harah* (literally, a "master of slander").

As such, in my humble opinion, this *Chovos Ha'Levovos* only applies to a person who is a Ba'al *Lashon Harah*—a person who is constantly speaking slander. I am not here to minimize the prohibition. However, if a person stumbles (as we all do from time to time in this most difficult area of observance), I do not know if the *Chovos Ha'Levovos* really means to, in fact, say, "Well, you have lost all your *mitzvos* and you get all of his *aveiros*."

The mentioned *sefarim* certainly meant this teaching to be a motivator for improvement in this area, but I believe it is too daunting to accept it totally on its face value.

Still, the take-home message from all this is: "Don't speak *Lashon Harah*."



## Day 16

### Lashon Hara Hurts the Klal

Harav Hagaon Reb Chaim Weg Shlit"א

Rosh Kollel Zichron Gershon,  
Rav Kehillas Sunset Grove, Lakewood

The *Passuk* in Parshas Bechukosai states: ורדפו מכם חמשה מאה ומאה מכם רבבה ירדפו - when Klal Yisroel will do the *Ratzon Hashem*, five Yidden will chase away one hundred enemies, and when there will be a group of one hundred Yidden doing the will of Hashem, they will chase away ten-thousand enemies. Rashi asks, that the math doesn't add up, if five chase away one hundred enemies, then one hundred should chase away only two thousand enemies. Why are they able to chase away ten thousand?

Rashi answers, based on Chazal, that when there is a group of Yidden doing the *Ratzon Hashem*, the *zechus* is not just greater, rather it is exponentially greater. The larger the group, the greater the *zechus* becomes exponentially greater.

In truth, this concept not only applies to the *zechus* of being saved from the enemies, but also applies to the *zechus* of meriting *Hashro'as Hashechina*.

The Mishneh (Avos 3; 6) states: רבי חלפתא בן דוסא איש כפר חנניה אומר, עשרה שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה, שכינה שרויה ביניהם, שנאמר (תהלים פב) אלהים נצב בעדת אל. – Rabbi Chalafta the son of Dosa of Kfar Chananya says: If ten people sit together and engage in Torah study, the *Shechina* rests among them, as it is said in the *Passuk* ..

ומנין אפלו חמשה, שנאמר (עמוס ט) ואגדתו על ארץ יסדה. – How do we know this even for five? Because the *Passuk* says ..

ומנין אפלו שלשה, שנאמר (תהלים פב) בקרב אלהים ישפט. – How do we know this even for three? Because the *Passuk* says ..

ומנין אפלו שנים, שנאמר (מלאכי ג) אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' – How do we know this even for two? Because the *Passuk* says ..

ומנין אפלו אחד, שנאמר (שמות כ) בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבא אליך. – How do we know this even for one? Because the *Passuk* says ..

We can wonder, if Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa concludes that even a solitary student merits the *Shechina* to be with him, why then does he need to prove from *Pesukim* for groups of ten, five, three, and two? Rabbeinu Yonah explains that Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa is teaching us, that the more people that join in learning Torah, the more its cumulative value for bringing hashroas haShechina; a multitude of people studying Torah is better than a collection of individuals learning Torah individually. Hence, we see this cumulative concept, not only for the *zechus* of overcoming the enemy, but also for bringing *Shechina* among us.

Historically, we were the closest with the *Shechina*, at מתן תורה, as the *Passuk* in Parshas Va'eschanan (4;35) says: אתה הראית – which Rashi explains that it refers to the time of *Matan Torah*. Based on what we saw from the Mishne in Avos, we can now better understand why it was so important that we were כאיש אחד בלב אחד by Har Sinai. In order for us to be worthy of that closeness to the *Shechina*, it was necessary for us to be unified, for otherwise, we wouldn't merit such a thing. It was only with this prerequisite of *achdus*, that we got



such a *Hashroas HaShechina* as we had at מתן תורה, because only Klal Yisroel as a joint unit could possibly merit such a large degree of *Hashroas HaShechina*.

I once heard from Rav Matisyahu Solomon Zt"l, in the name of his Rebbe, Rav Elya Lopian Zt"l, that there is another reason why Klal Yisroel had to be כאיש אחד בלב אחד by Har Sinai. He explained, that there are some presents that Hashem gave to Klal Yisroel, which were only given to Klal Yisroel as a whole. The Torah, is one example. It was given to us as a present, but only given to Klal Yisroel as a whole, not to single individuals. Not even to multitudes of single individuals, only to Klal Yisroel as a joint unit.

Similarly, the Bais Hamikdash was not given to individuals; rather, it was given only to Klal Yisroel as a bonded unit.

With this, we can understand the Gemara in Mesechta Yoma that states that the *aveiros* of *avoda zara*, *gilui arayos*, and *shefichus damim* caused the desecration of the first Bais Hamikdash, which was only a *gallus* of 70 years. In contrast, the second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of שנאת חנם and lashon hara, which lasted already, almost 2,000 years, which teaches us the severity of שנאת חנם and lashon hara.

Based on the above, we can explain, that although the *aveiros* of *avoda zara*, *gilui arayos*, and *shefichus damim* are very severe *aveiros*, but they don't destroy the unity of Klal Yisroel. שנאת חנם and lashon hara, on the other hand, even if they may be less stringent, but they destroy the unity of Klal Yisroel. And, when Klal Yisroel is missing unity, they cannot merit the degree of *Hashroas HaShechina* that was in the Bais Hamikdash. As such, the Bais Hamikdash cannot be rebuilt until we are a רבים; only then can we merit such an intense *Hashroas HaShechina* like was there when the Bais Hamikdash stands.

Without unity, we lack the very precise prerequisite of meriting the Bais Hamikdash: having *achdus*.

The Sefer Chafetz Chaim Al HaTorah, in Parshas Bo, quotes a very fundamental Tana Devai Eliyahu (Eliyahu Zuta ch. 14), which states - שאין ישראל נגאלין לא מתוך הצער ולא מתוך השעבוד ולא מתוך הטלטול ולא מתוך הטרור ולא מתוך הדוחק ולא מתוך שאין להם מזונות אלא מתוך עשרה בני אדם שהן יושבין זה אצל זה ויהי' כל אחד מהם קורא ושונה עם חבירו - Klal Yisroel won't be redeemed because of too much pain, nor because of the severity of the *shibud*, nor because of too much movement, nor because of too much confusion, nor because of too much pressure, nor because of lack of food, rather, they will be redeemed in the *zechus* of ten Yidden that are sitting next to each other and each one is learning with his friend.

The idea that Klal Yisroel will be redeemed in the *zechus* of Torah, can be found in many *sefarim*, such as, in many places throughout the *Sefer Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh*. For example, see the *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh* (beginning of Parshas Tezave) that writes in the name of the *Zohar*, that Klal Yisroel are redeemed from each of the four *galluyos* through another *zechus*, and we will be redeemed from this fourth and final *gallus* through the *zechus* of Moshe Rabbeinu. That's why our *gallus* is so long, states the *Ohr Hachayim*, because until we are fulfilling our obligation of learning Torah and doing *mitzvos* properly, Moshe Rabbeinu doesn't want to redeem us.

However, from the Tana Devai Eliyahu we see, that what will bring the *geula* is the *zechus* of Torah together with the *zechus* of *achdus*. It will be through ten Yidden who are learning Torah with tremendous *achdus*. And this is precisely like we explained before, that to be *zoche* to the special present of the



Bais Hamikdash and the intense *Hashroas HaShechina* that comes with it, it is necessary for us to have *achdus*.

Some bachurim once asked Rav Elya Lopian Zt"l, why is it that if a Shul *gabbai* would see someone kill a fellow Yid, the *gabbai*, likely, wouldn't give him an *aliya*, however, if he would see a Yid speak lashon hara he would, likely, give him an *aliya*? And, Rav Elya Lopian Zt"l responded that the destruction to the person himself which is caused by the *aveiros* of *avoda zara*, *gilui arayos*, and *shefichus damim* is greater than the destruction to the person himself which is caused by the *aveira* of lashon hara. However, the destruction to the Klal that is caused by lashon hara is greater. As such, no one would think of giving an *aliya* to a violator of *avoda zara*, *gilui arayos*, or *shefichus damim*, even though one would, perhaps, give one to a violator of lashon hara. Yet, the *aveira* of lashon hara lengthens the *gallus*, because it is a prerequisite for Bais Hamikdash and *Hashroas HaShechina* that Klal Yisroel be with *achdus*, as one unit.

May we be *zoche* to merit the *zechus* of Torah together with the *zechus* of *achdus*, soon in our days. Amen!



## ❧ Day 17 ❧

### The Path to Teshuva

Hagaon Harav RebYaakov Galinsky Zt"l

On the day that the *metzora* was purified, he brought שְׁתֵּי־צִפְרִים חַיִּים טְהוֹרוֹת, "two live, clean birds.

Why does the *metzora* offer two birds to atone for his sin?

Rashi tells us why:

לְפִי שֶׁהִנְגְּעִים בָּאִים עַל לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, שֶׁהוּא מַעֲשֵׂה פִּטְפוּטֵי דְבָרִים, לְפִיכֵן הִזְקִקוּ לְטַהַרְתּוֹ צִפְרִים, שֶׁמְפַטְפְּטִים תָּמִיד בְּצִפְצוּף קוֹל

*Because the lesions of tzara'as come as a result of slander, which is an act of chattering, therefore, for his purification he was required to bring birds, which twitter constantly with chirping sounds.*

However, seemingly, this doesn't make sense.

You know, they say, that there were two Gedolei Hador who were especially meticulous in watching their speech and being careful never to utter a forbidden word: the Chafetz Chaim and the Imrei Emes of Gur. The difference between them was that the Imrei Emes avoided speaking unless it was absolutely necessary. For every word he spoke, he refrained from saying at least two. The Chafetz Chaim, on the other hand, spoke plenty – he spoke words of Torah, words of advice and guidance, words full of *Yiras Shamayim* – and with all that, not one trace of a forbidden word emerged from his mouth.

If that's the case, "chattering" itself is not wrong, unless it is a cause of wasting time that should be spent on learning, *chas*



*v'shalom*. How could it be said that the *metzora* had to atone for his slander by bringing two birds, which chatter and tweet? A bird never gossips and certainly never slanders.

The answer to this question can be found in Chazal's statement that those who lend money with interest may not serve as a witness until they repent - *משיקרו את שטריהם - ואימתי חזרתם, משיקרעו את שטריהם - שאפלו לנקרי לא ילוו ברבית, ויחזרו בהם חזרה גמורה, שנקרו לנקרי לא ילוו ברבית, and when are they judged to have repented? When they tear up their bills and repent completely so that they will not lend with interest even to a non-Jew"* (Sanhedrin 25b). Rashi explains that they must no longer even use the term *interest*, so that they won't revert to their old ways.

The Rambam says that the *passuk* לנקרי תשיך, "You may give interest to a gentile" (Devarim 23:21), is actually a positive *mitzva*. But if the penitent remains in the field of lending with interest, he will come to charge interest from Jews once again. Along the same lines, the *Ba'al Shem Tov* teaches (Ben Poras Yosef, Ki Seitzei 4) that if someone is repenting for the sin of lying, he should avoid lying even to make peace, which Chazal permit (Yevamos 65b), because he needs to sever himself completely from falsehood.

We can say, then, that talking a lot in itself is not prohibited, if it's necessary (see Peirush HaMishnayos, Avos 1:17), but someone who spoke lashon hara and wants to repent, must be careful not to chatter too much because *ברב דברים לא יחדל פשע, רב דברים לא יחדל פשע, "in a multitude of words, transgression will not be avoided, and he who holds back his lips is wise"* (Mishlei 10:19). Since he is prone to speaking lashon hara, it's better that he be frugal with all his words, so that he can avoid stumbling.

I was once sitting at a simchah, where they were giving out shots of schnapps. One of the guests declined, and I asked him

why. He explained that he was a recovering alcoholic, and if he had even a small glass, he wouldn't be able to stop at one.

It seems that this is what Chazal meant when they said that the world is like the letter *hei*. The *hei* is open on the bottom, indicating that whoever wants to go astray may do so. But it has a narrow opening on top because anyone who wants to do *teshuva* may reenter that way. The Gemara goes on to ask why a person doesn't reenter the same way he left (from the bottom of the *hei*). They answer, that such an opportunity would never arise (Menachos 29b).

What does this mean? To do *teshuva* for his sin, a person has to incorporate many strong safeguards to rise above his failing and be able to reenter through the narrow opening. Since he poisoned himself with his transgression, he now has to abstain even from doing what is permissible, so that he won't stumble again.

This idea is encompassed in Rav Elya Lopian's explanation of the Mishnah's statement עֲקֵבֵיךָ בֵּן מֵחֵלְלֵי אֵל אֹמֵר: הִסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים וְאֵי אֶתָּה בָּא לְיַד עֲבָרָה, "Akaviah ben Mehallalel says: Reflect of three things and you will not come into the hands of sin..." (Avos 3:1). What is meant by the "hands of sin"? Why didn't he simply say, "and you will not come to sin"?

The answer is that "hand" connotes power or possession, as Rashi writes regarding the *passuk* וַיִּקַּח מִן הַבַּיִת בְּיָדוֹ, "He took from what came into his hand" (Bereishis 32:14) – that "hand" connotes possession. Rashi says the same thing regarding the words וַיִּקַּח אֶת כָּל אֶרְצוֹ מִיָּדוֹ, "taking all his land from his possession" (Bamidbar 21:26), and the *passuk* וְכֵלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְחַצְצֵרוֹת הַתְּרוּעָה בְּיָדוֹ, "the sacred utensils and the trumpets for sounding in his possession" (ibid. 31:6).



The same is true regarding the words that we say in our daily *tefillos*: אַל תביאני לא לידי חטא, ולא לידי עברה ועון. "Do not bring me into the hands of sin, nor the hands of transgression and iniquity." We ask not to be in the "hands of sin" – not to be in its possession, not to get ensnared by it. Because the sin takes possession of a person. Chazal tell us that when a person commits an *aveirah*, it clutches him like a dog on a leash and leads him to his judgment (Avodah Zarah 5a; Sotah 3b).

At the end of the day, if a person finds himself speaking lashon hara and saying other things he shouldn't, and he wants to do *teshuvah* and is resolute about changing for the better, he must take two birds, which reminds him of those who talk too much, in order to sever himself from the transgression and free himself from its clutches. He must slaughter one of them into an earthenware vessel, over spring water (Vayikra 14:5), because water is Torah (Bava Kamma 17a), which teaches that a person should be sitting in the *Beis Midrash* and "killing" himself over it. The other bird he sends away. A person should focus on speaking words of Torah, while other kinds of speech – represented by the second bird – he should "send away" and abstain from them!



## Day 18

### A Path for Everyone

Harav Reb Avrohom Wolfson Zt"l

It is well known, that lashon hara is such a severe *aveira*. In fact, it is written in Maseches Derech Eretz (zuta ch. 4) that the first question one will be asked after 120, is if one was careful from violating the *aveira* of lashon hara. Additionally, Chaza"l tell us, that the *aveira* of lashon hara is equivalent to all other *aveiros* [combined.] On a simple level, it seems difficult to understand, why should lashon hara be worse than killing someone. However, I heard from Hagaon R' Elya Weitraub Zt"l that the explanation is that murder only kills the victim's body, whereas, lashon hara and halbonas panim affect the victim's *tzelem Elokim*, his inner spirit, which of course is worse.

We find that the Chasam Sofer (Derashos vol. 2, Derush Hespel, pg. 376) explains how lashon hara destroys the whole world. He writes, that when someone speaks lashon hara, the vapor from his speech enters the atmosphere, which later becomes a cloud. Later, the cloud becomes rain, and from the rain, the food grows. Then, when people or animals eat such produce, which was produced from such rain, they absorb some of this foul content inside of them. Thus, the lashon hara actually effects and harms the whole creation.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 165a) tells us, that everyone stumbles with the sin of *avak* lashon hara. The Rambam (Mishnayos Avos 1;17) further writes, that in later generations everyone stumbles with actual lashon hara, not just *avak* lashon hara. The Chafetz Chaim explains, that it doesn't mean that it is



impossible to be careful from lashon hara, rather, it only means that one will certainly stumble if he doesn't work on himself.

Hence, everyone is bound to fall prey to this yetzer hara of such a severe sin, unless they work on themselves. So, this alone should be enough to motivate anyone to look for a strategy to improve oneself to overcome this *yetzer hara*. And especially, no one wants to be a ba'al lashon hara, on which Chaza"l say he doesn't get *Olam Haba*. It follows, that it is only logical that everyone should adopt the suggestion of my great-uncle, Hagaon Rav Mordechai Schwab Zt"l, that said, that anyone who studies two *halachos* of shemiras halashon a day is at least, not a ba'al lashon hara.

And in truth, this concept of learning *halachos* of lashon hara as prevention can already be found in *Sefer Chovas Hashemira*, by the Chafetz Chaim (Ch. 3, in the name of Reb Bezalel HaKohen from Vilna.) There, he writes, that learning the *halachos* and *mussar* about lashon hara is considered a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of remembering the story of Miriam, which was given as a tool to help us overcome lashon hara. Furthermore, we can really learn this from the Ra'avad (Toras Kohanim, beginning of Parshas Bechukosai), who writes that through learning the laws of *tzora'as* one fulfills the *mitzvah* of remembering Miriam.

It is also worth noting, how challenging the *aveira* of believing lashon hara is. Imagine, if a rosh yeshiva would tell you, for informational purposes, something very negative about a student of his. And, you know that this rosh yeshiva would never lie. Nevertheless, you are not allowed to believe him on this, because it's an *issur* of *kabolas* lashon hara, even though, for defensive purposes, you are allowed to be suspicious that it is perhaps true. You are even obligated to take necessary



measures of caution, but, at the same time, you can't fully believe it. Isn't that challenging?!

And, another stringent thing that we find with lashon hara, is with regard to saying information for *to'eles* purposes. We find, that even when someone is allowed to say the lashon hara for *to'eles* purposes, he, nevertheless, must minimize it as much as possible. (See also Sefer Ta'am Vada'as Parshas Kedoshim, in the name of Gr"a.) And, even when it is for *to'eles*, but if he adds even one word that's not for *to'eles*, he violated lashon hara.

There is another part of *shemiras haddibur* that is also very important: the *issur* of *ona'as devarim*. It is so severe, that we find that the Mordechai (Bava Metzia siman 306) writes that if one says *ona'as devarim* they get *malkus*. The *achronim* discuss how that can be; some explain that the Mordechai only means *makkos miderabonon*. Either way, we see how stringent it is one who says *ona'as devarim*.

The Chassam Sofer Zt"l (Shu"t CM 176) discusses an incident where a *shochet* fooled a *mohel* to travel to another town, claiming that a specific person had a boy, when really they had a girl. This trick, in turn, caused the *mohel* tremendous embarrassment. The Chasam Sofer was asked if this was grounds to fire the *shochet*. To this, the Chasam Sofer wrote a lengthy responsa and concludes that if it can indeed be proven that this is what happened, the community can certainly terminate the *shochet* from his position until he appeases his victim. So, look how big of a punishment one can get for violating *ona'as devarim*!

From another angle, we can again see the stringency of *ona'as devarim*. Reb Yisroel Salanter Zt"l said that even if one said lashon hara and wants to do *teshuva*, he can't tell the victim what he said because it would be *ona'as devarim*.



In truth, all *aveiros bein adam lachaveiro* are quite stringent, because even Yom Kippur can't be *mechaper* unless one gets *mehila* from the victim. Hagaon Rav Ahron Y. L. Shteinmam Zt"l would quote, every year during Elul, the following Yerushalmi (Demai 1;3). The Yerushalmi records that Rav Pinchos Ben Yair was going to the Bais Vaad, together with his students. On the way, they had to pass a spot, which was blocked by an overflowing river. Rav Pinchos Ben Yair spoke to the river that it shouldn't block him, and the river made way for him. His students asked if they can also now pass through the clearing, and he responded that if any of them are sure that they never embarrassed another Yid in their entire life, they can pass and be sure they won't get injured, otherwise they shouldn't pass. And, Hagaon Rav Ahron Y. L. Shteinmam Zt"l would add, that it seems from the wording of the Yerushalmi, that Rav Pinchos Ben Yair was saying, that it wouldn't be sufficient if they once embarrassed another, asked *mehila*, and did *teshuva*. They should only pass if they never offended another at all!

To go one step further, it's worth mentioning that there are sources (see Mishnas Reb Eliezer 4) that it is forbidden to even think lashon hara about another Yid.

Let's conclude, with what Chaza"l tell us, that the good reward is even greater than punishment, and, as such, imagine how much reward one gets for speaking good or thinking good about one's friend. Additionally, the Maharsh"a (Makkos 10b) writes, that for every action, word, or thought that a Yid has, a *malach* is created, which helps him, carry out his plans. This, explains the Maharsh"a, is the explanation of Chaza"l בדרך שאדם ורועה לילך מוליכין אותו. As such, if we want to do good and to help our friends, there are no limits to how far we can get. May we be *zoche*, to be among those.

## Day 19

### The Purpose of Creation

Harav Hagaon Reb Avigdor Nebenzahl Shlit"א

Rav, Old City of Yerushalayim

The spies failed by giving negative reports about Eretz Yisrael, on their heels came the "*ma'apilim*" with an attempt to rectify the sin of the spies: The spies did not wish to make the ascent to Eretz Yisrael - we will go, and this time with even greater self-sacrifice than was demanded of us earlier! If yesterday we did not desire to go to Eretz Yisrael even though the Aron of Hashem and Moshe Rabeinu were with us, today we will travel onward to Eretz Yisrael even without the benefit of being accompanied by Moshe Rabeinu and the Aron. Is this not the most reasonable way to rectify the sin - to go to the other extreme as the Rambam advises regarding negative character traits? (Hilchos Deos 2:2) The "*ma'apilim*" thus go to the other extreme.

At first glance, it would appear that we are dealing with great *tzaddikim*, as it says: "In the place where '*ba'alei teshuva*' stand, the completely righteous do not stand" (Brachos 34b). Moshe, however, is not impressed with this form of *teshuva* and rebukes them in the Name of Hashem.

Why was Hashem angry with the "*ma'apilim*"? Why aren't they considered *tzaddikim* and *ba'alei teshuva*?

In my humble opinion, not only did they not rectify the sin of the spies but they in fact repeated it! What after all was the spies' sin? They did not understand that if Hashem chose



Eretz Yisrael and it was His desire to bring Bnei Yisrael there, then this proves that it is indeed a Land flowing with milk and honey and that it is possible to enter it.

What did the "*ma'apilim*" do at this point? They are also guilty of the same sin, but this time from the other side! They wish to make the journey to Eretz Yisrael when Hashem tells them not to go. If Hashem commands them not to go, there is no reason to go to Eretz Yisrael. The only advantage Eretz Yisrael has over other lands is that Hashem commanded us to go there. The moment the A-lmighty says not to go, there is no advantage to being there. The fact that they went on in spite of being commanded not to means that they have attached importance to something other than the word of Hashem. They did not understand that only the word of Hashem has any significance. Just as "not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live" (Devarim 8:3) - bread on its own has no value, its value stems from the fact that it is the will of Hashem that it nourish us.

The "*ma'apilim*", therefore not only do not correct the sin of the spies, they repeat it. The spies did not value Eretz Yisrael sufficiently and did not believe that it was possible to conquer it, in spite of knowing that it was Hashem's will that Bnei Yisrael be there. The "*ma'apilim*" were guilty of the opposite - they attributed independent value to Eretz Yisrael when they knew that Hashem did not wish for them to go there at this point in time. This is the reason for Hashem's great anger at them.

What we have said about Eretz Yisrael applies to the Mikdash as well. The Mikdash has no independent power of its own. The Torah tells us: "My Shabbos shall you observe and My Sanctuary shall you revere" (Vayikra 26:2). The Gemara comments: "One



would have thought that a person have fear of the Sanctuary, thus the *passuk* states 'You shall keep My Shabbos and revere My Sanctuary', the expression 'keep' was used in relation to the Shabbos, and in the same verse that of 'reverence' in relation to the Sanctuary, in order that the following comparison may be made: as in the case of 'keeping' used in the observance of the Shabbos, so in the case of 'reverence' used in relation to the Sanctuary, one is not to revere the Sanctuary but He who gave the commandment concerning the Sanctuary" (Yevamos 6a). Only when the will of Hashem is in the *Mikdash*, does the *Mikdash* have any effect. When the will of Hashem is missing, when you violate the precepts of the Torah, the *Mikdash* will not help you and Nebuchadnezzar will come and destroy it.

Chazal tell us that the wicked Tarnus Rufus asked R' Akiva regarding the Shabbos: "In what way is this day, different from other days?" (Sanhedrin 65b) - Why do you honor the Shabbos more than the other days? What could R' Akiva answer him? He could have said that Shabbos is the day of the creation of the world, the day the Torah was given to the Jewish people, that the Shabbos is a taste of the Next World, there is so much to say regarding the Shabbos, yet R' Akiva does not give any of these answers.

R' Akiva answers him with a question "In what way is this man different from other men?" (ibid.) - why do you deserve to be honored more than anyone else? Tarnus Rufus answers "Because my master desires it" (ibid.) (this is what the king wants, he appointed me his representative in the territory of Yehuda). R' Akiva responds "Shabbos too, because my Master desires it" (ibid.). Hashem commanded us to honor the Shabbos, had Hashem wished for us to honor Tuesdays, we would have done so. The A-lmighty, however, commanded us to honor the



Seventh Day so that is what we do. Why did Hashem choose the Seventh Day? "For in a six-day period Hashem made heaven and earth, and on the Seventh day He rested and was refreshed" (Shemos 31:17). But for us the fact that Hashem wishes for us to honor the Shabbos is sufficient. We do not attribute any independent significance of its own to the Shabbos, we honor it only because Hashem commanded us to.

Eretz Yisrael, the *Mikdash*, the Shabbos - none of these have any significance of their own. Only when Hashem commands us to observe and honor them do they have any value. When Hashem does not command us regarding them, they have no value.

Shaul fights against Amalek but is guilty of leaving some of the animals alive. The prophet Shmuel says to him "And what is this sound of the sheep in my ears" (Shmuel I 15:14), Shaul responds: "I have brought them from the Amalekite, for the people took pity on the best of the sheep and cattle in order to bring them offerings to Hashem, your G-d" (ibid. 15). This appears to be a very noble intention. Shmuel, however, is not impressed with this answer at all. He says to Shaul: "Does Hashem delight in elevation-offerings and feast-offerings as in obedience to the voice of Hashem? Behold - to obey is better than a choice offering, to be attentive than the fat of rams" (ibid. 22).

Shmuel goes even further, adding: "for rebelliousness is like the sin of sorcery, and verbosity is like the iniquity of idolatry" (ibid. 23). In other words, you are guilty of an infraction as severe as the sin of sorcery and the iniquity of idolatry.

Why does Shmuel choose to compare Shaul's sin to the sin of sorcery and to the iniquity of idolatry? Are there no other severe prohibitions in the Torah? Why does he not say that



what Shaul did was the equivalent of desecrating the Shabbos or cursing one's father and mother?

It appears to me that we can explain this based on the point we have just discussed. People generally act according to the laws of nature. A person plants his field when he is expecting rain so that the wheat will grow. He then harvests it when the wheat appears sufficiently ripe and it is possible to cut it. From the perspective of nature, this seems to be very logical. There are, however, two categories of people who do not act by logic alone. The first is the sorcerer. To him it is not the weather or the seasons that determine his actions, but rather whether a black cat or a white cat just passed before him or whether the stick he is holding is green or red.

Shmuel is telling Shaul: Hashem commanded you to kill the animals you brought from Amalek! He is not interested in you offering them as sacrifices! If in spite of this, you offer them, then this shows that you believe that it is not the will of Hashem in the offering that is important, but the offering itself. You have thus made sorcery out of the offering. This is not an offering to Hashem but some form of witchcraft! - "for rebelliousness is like the sin of sorcery".

This is the purpose of the creation, to enable us to reach a clear understanding that "*Ein Od Milvado*" "there is none beside Him" (Devarim 4:35). To human eyes it may appear to the contrary that there are other forces working in the world - here it is Obama, there it is the IDF, here it is Abbas, etc. The truth, however, is "there is none beside Him". We must recognize beyond any doubt that "He alone made, makes, and will make everything".

The spies were sent to scout out the Land and they failed in their mission, why? Moshe instructed them to see the Land,



but not to follow what their eyes see: "Do not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray" (Bamidbar 15:39). Of course we need our eyes, but the ultimate "*posek*", the one issuing the ruling must be one's intellect. We must understand that "Cities great and fortified to the heavens" (Devarim 1:28)) pale in comparison to the Creator of the Universe, we must be aware that the world is guided by Hashem alone. If we do so, we will certainly merit the redemption of the Jewish people, speedily in our day. Amen!



## ❧ Day 20 ❧

### Painful Words

Maran Hagaon Harav Reb Avrohom Pam Zt"l

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivas Torah Vadaas

Usually, when we think of *shemiras halashon* we think of the issur of lashon hara. And, indeed, the issur of lashon hara has recently gained tremendous publicity, through shiurim and books that were made available in many languages. In fact, many include the *limud* of *inyanei* lashon hara in their daily learning. A great amount of the credit is due to the Chafetz Chaim Heritage Foundation, which runs a tremendous campaign against speaking lashon hara. It is definitely quite important and is a *segula* for hurrying the *geula*.

However, there is another issur that is also very important, though it hasn't yet gained as much publicity, and that is the *aveira* of *ona'as devarim*. *Onaas devarim* are words that hurt and can cause a great deal of pain. They can cut deeply and many tragedies have resulted from them.

The Sefer Hachinuch defines the *aveira* as words that can cause pain to another and the victim cannot defend himself from them. The *passuk* (Mishlei 12;18) writes יש בוטה כמדקרות חרב ולשון חכמים מרפא – some people speak harshly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals. Hence, the *passuk* relates to us the stark contrast between one that says *ona'as devarim* and one that speaks like a *chochom*.

Sometimes, *ona'as devarim* is spoken with deliberate intent to harm, out of anger. Perhaps, more often, though, it results



from simple carelessness. Some people talk with disregard to the consequences that might be caused by their speech.

People say things that are absolutely brutal. People say insulting remarks, demeaning expressions, and name-calling. Sometimes it's between husband and wife and sometimes it's between parents and children. And, sometimes these words leave such tragic scars on their victims.

I once heard a mother scold her young child saying "bad boy, you are a bad boy," and the child cried hysterically. It took the mother a long time to calm him down. Probably, the boy did something that deserved some sort of reproach, but she didn't have to characterize him and define him as a bad boy. She could have said "what you're doing is not nice," "stop it," "I wish you wouldn't do that," or something else to express her disapproval, but not to label him as a bad boy. Negative labels can stick and have a negative impact on the soul and spirit of the victim. Surely, the mother didn't intend to hurt him so much, but everyone, including parents, must realize that people are sensitive, especially children, and we must be very careful with what we say.

I would venture to say, that in our society, the breakdown of families and lack of *shalom bayis* usually starts from verbal abuse in some form or another. Whether such insults were said deliberately, carelessly, or just in jest, it doesn't make a difference, because either way they hurt and can leave an everlasting scar. Additionally, so many children turned off from Yiddishkeit because of verbal abuse or verbal mistreatment; in some cases, it was from their parents' insensitivity and in some cases from their teachers'.

Right after the Torah writes the issur of *ona'as devarim*, the Torah writes **ויראת מאלקיך** - and you should be fearful of Hashem.



Why is it that the Torah wrote that here? I think that the explanation is because when it comes to *ona'as devarim* people speak differently in their home and out of their home. Many people are embarrassed and ashamed to speak out of the home the way they speak in their home. Therefore, the Torah tells us that we should always remind ourselves that wherever we are Hashem is listening. And, in truth, every word that we utter will one day be played back for us in judgment and we will have to answer for every single word that we have said. As the Vilna Gaon, in his letter to his wife, writes, there are angels that go wherever the person goes and record every word that one says. Imagine, when someone is in a place where no one else is around, and he thinks no one knows what he is saying, but really there are secretaries hiding and transcribing every word that is said. This is in fact what is really happening. Everything that we say is recorded.

In contrast, words should be used to soothe and comfort others. Words should be used to instill feelings of life, good spirits, and joy for others. Words can have such golden blessings of lifting the spirits of depressed souls. Words could and should be used as an act of *chesed*. Sometimes a simple "hello" or "good morning" can cheer another for a whole day or longer by feeling that someone else cares for them. Things like these are what words should be used for.

And I think, that because words can be used as such an amazing tool of good, this, in fact, magnifies the *chillul Hashem* when their used to destroy. A person who speaks *ona'as devarim* and makes it as if this is what words are for, is a desecration of Hashem's great present that He gave us: the power of speech.

In my opinion, much more needs to be written and spoken publically about the tragedies caused by *ona'as devarim*. This



concept needs the kind of exposure that has been given to lashon hara in recent years. More Yeshivos and Bais Yakovs should be teaching their students to recognize this type of speech and to restrain themselves from it. And then hopefully there will be fewer *shalom bayis* issues, fewer father-son issues, and fewer drop-outs from Yeshivos.

On the other side of the coin, one who is careful with his words, not to hurt others, is promised to receive such great reward that no creature, or even angel, can imagine how great his reward will be, for each and every second of restraint, as the Chafetz Chaim writes many times throughout his *sefarim*, in the name of a Midrash. Also, in the *zechus* of *shemiras haddibur* we will merit to hasten the *geula*, because negative speech is one of the things that are מעכב the *geula*. May we be zoche to that final *geula*, speedily in our days. Amen.



## ❧ Day 21 ❧

### **The Power of Shemiras Halashon**

Rabbi Yechezkel Menasche's Stories

I would like to share with you something that changed my life and the lives of many others; perhaps, it will change your life, too.

A few years ago, I got hold of a letter written by Rebbitzin Batsheva Kanievsky Z"l. In the letter, Rebbitzin Kanievsky wrote as follows:

"One day a group of people came to my husband, Harav Chaim Kanievsky (Shlit"a) [Zt"l], to ask him why so many tragedies are occurring. The Rav opened a Gemara and pointed to the answer – improper speech is the cause, and the only way we can alleviate the situation is by guarding our tongue.

Harav Segal Zt"l of Manchester wrote: I have not seen a person who learned two *halachos* of *shemiras halashon* a day who wasn't helped with having children, finding a *shidduch*, recovering from illness, earning a parnossa, or properly raising their children. Rav Segal promised that if a person learns Sefer Chafetz Chaim he will personally act as a defender in Heaven. And, indeed, we have seen open miracles that occurred for people who have taken it upon themselves to learn two *halachos* of Chafetz Chaim every day.

Shortly after I read the article by Rav Segal, a woman came to see me, her words punctuated by heartbreaking sobs. She told me that she has several older daughters who did not yet find a *shidduch*. I showed her the article, and she immediately committed to learning two *halachos* of Chafetz Chaim a day.



Within three days, her first daughter got engaged, and within 2 months her second daughter got engaged. Additionally, many hundreds of girls in need of *shidduchim*, have gotten married after making this commitment.

Another story was told to me by a woman who came to visit us with a month-old baby in her arms. She told me that she had come to us a year earlier in great sorrow because she had been married 20 years and remained childless. At that time, I had suggested that she learn two *halachos* a day. B"H she followed the advice and merited a son.

Only a few months ago, a terribly distraught mother came to me, hoping that I would advise her how to help her mother who was hospitalized for a malignant growth. I suggested that all her family members commit themselves to learning two *halachos* of *shemiras halashon* a day. After two days, she came back and asked that I publicize the miracle that occurred. She told me that the whole family gathered and were each mekabel to learn two halachos a day. After only two days, they received a phone call from the hospital telling them to take their mother home because the growth had disappeared and their mother had fully recovered.

These are just a sample of the many miracles that have occurred. In view of the current situation, we should commit ourselves – בלי נדר – to learn two *halachos* every day, and to *daven* with increased concentration."

Shortly after reading Rebbetzin Kanievsky's letter, I met a friend who was going through a rough time finding a *shidduch* for his daughter, so I suggested that he try this suggestion of Rebbetzin Kanievsky. Within four months from when he and his wife started learning *hilchos* lashon hara, his daughter got engaged.



Then, I shared this letter with more friends and more friends, and at this point, I am familiar with over 120 stories of people who saw big *yeshuos* through accepting this *kabbala*.

Someone that I know, started learning the *halachos* as a *zechus* to have children, but after five months of learning they came back and told me that it's not working. I encouraged him not to stop the learning, and, in fact, five months later he approached me to tell me that his wife is B"H pregnant.

There was a school that closed down, and all of its students had to search for another yeshiva. Someone who I know with children in that school was having difficulty getting their children into any yeshiva, and I, therefore, advised them to learn *shemiras halashon*. Three months later, their children got into a school in a way that was completely שלם כדרך הטבע.

There were two sisters who began learning *shemiras halashon* as a *zechus* for their respective daughters and a third sister's daughter. Within fifteen months, all three daughters got engaged.

A father of a seventh-grade boy, whom I know, was having issues with his son who was caught up with watching videos. The father made a *kabbala* to learn *shemiras halashon*, and the next day the son came to his father and said "Father, I don't think these videos are good for me. Here they are, please take them."

Someone told me that nine years ago, his dentist told him that one of his teeth either needed a root canal or to be pulled. He started learning *shemiras halashon* as a *zechus* that it shouldn't be needed, and nine years later he is still learning it and the tooth is fine without any root canal.

In another incident, someone needed their father transferred from NYU to the Cleveland Clinic. They had doctors and



*askanim* working hard to get it done, but the hospital wouldn't budge. As a *zechus* for his father, on Rosh Hashana, he started a learning program for *shemiras halashon*. After Rosh Hashana, he got the news that on Rosh Hashana his father had been transferred to the Cleveland Clinic, without any of his *hishtadlus*.

People whom I know did it as a *zechus* for all different types of purposes, and they merited a *yeshua*. One person that I know did it as a *zechus* for a business deal, another did it to get rid of a tax loan, and another did it to find an apartment.

One time, my wife was getting stitches from a Yiddishe doctor, and my wife asked that I should tell the doctor my stories to distract her from her pain. So, I told the doctor a handful of my stories. A short while later, I met that doctor and he thanked me. He said that after hearing my stories, he started learning *shemiras halashon*, and it literally changed his life.

This is what happens to anyone who learns *shemiras halashon*; it slowly has an effect on their perspectives and the way they think. And, slowly they actually become better in this area. And, this is really the biggest achievement of learning *shemiras halashon*.

It is well known that Rav Segal Zt'l asked to be buried with the *shemiras halashon* calendar. He said, "This is my ticket to *Olam Habah*." Perhaps, it's less known, though, that he would ask people "where is your ticket?" And the one being asked would say "what ticket, I'm not going anywhere?" And, Rav Segal would say, "where is your *kabbala* to learn *shemiras halashon*, because that is your ticket to *Olam Haba*."

Let me conclude with a final story, which was made public through Hagaon Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman Zt'l. There was a young bachur in Eretz Yisrael who was a *masmid*, *yarei Shomayim*, and was especially careful with his *bein adam*



*la'chaveiro*. One day, he was killed in an accident, and, needless to say, it was a very difficult *tzora* for all, and especially his parents.

The first Friday night after he was *niftar*, his mother was sadly crying on her recliner, until she fell asleep. The next morning, the mother told that she had a dream, in which her son that was *niftar* came to her. In the dream, her son told her as follows: "Mother, please don't cry for me, because it's Shabbos and it's *assur* to cry on Shabbos. Also, don't cry for me, because I'm in a great place in *Shomayim*."

Then, the mother asked her son: "Please, can you tell me, how much longer will this *gallus* be?" And the son answered: "I am not allowed to reveal such things, but one thing I can say, is that these types of accidents happen because people are speaking *lashon hara* and *rechilus*. If the *dor* would be strong enough with their carefulness in *lashon hara* and *rechilus*, this accident wouldn't have happened to me. They sent me from *Shomayim* to tell you this message, so that you should tell people this story and that they should learn *hilchos* *lashon hara* until they are fluent with the *halachos* by heart.

And, you should know, that in *Shomayim*, the Chafetz Chayim *davens* for the welfare of all those who learn *Shemiras Halashon* and try to keep it, and especially those who are *מזכה את הרבים* with this. Mother, please spread the word that *shemiras halashon* is *משפיע חיים*!"

We don't usually give much credibility to dreams, nowadays. However, Hagoan Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman Zt"l said that this story should be publicized, and for that, we should listen to it and hear its message.





## Brief Pointers of the Importance of Shemiras Halashon

- We all know the importance of preventive measures when it comes to protecting our health. How do we protect ourselves from lashon hara? Judging favorably is the key to the prevention of lashon hara. If we constantly look for the good in others, it will prevent us from stumbling in the *aveira* of lashon hara. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon Shaar Hatevuna, Ch. 4)
- The sin of lashon hara is equal in severity to all the *aveiros* in the Torah. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, hilchos lashon hara, Ch. 1, seif 4)
- When someone speaks lashon hara, an evil spirit attaches itself to his words of Torah and prayer, and blocks them from reaching their destined heights in *Shomayim*. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hakdama)
- Hashem is ready to end this *gallus* any minute. Which minute? The minute the *aveira* that brought us into *gallus* is corrected, which is the *aveira* of lashon hara. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hakdama)
- For every second that one controls himself from speaking lashon hora, he merits an *Ohr Haganuz* [- a heavenly light,] which is so rewarding that even a *malach* [- angel] cannot fathom it. (Midrash quoted by Gr" a in Iggeres Alim Liserufa)
- The Chofetz Chaim tells us: If someone learns my Introduction well, the hairs on his head will stand up out of fear from the severity of the *aveira* of lashon hara. He also gives a promise: If one learns my sefer on a daily basis, then his *yetzer hara* for lashon hara



will continuously become smaller, until it will eventually leave him completely. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hakdama)

- Hashem loves those who flee from *machlokes* and pursue *shalom*. When we only see the good in others and respect all Yidden, we promote peace and harmony in our personal lives and in the world at large. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 11)
- If there was a king that made a strict rule: "The people in my province may not smoke." Imagine how enraged the king would be to catch someone smoking in his very own palace! So too, if one speaks lashon hara in shul, his sin is too great to bear, because that is comparable to violating the King's command in His very own palace. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Pesicha, ese 7)
- Many people become enthusiastic when they hear about a *segulah* for *parnassah*. The Chofetz Chaim teaches us that the most powerful *segulah* for *parnassah* is guarding our speech. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 9)
- Lashon hara is one of the only sins that has its own direct punishment – *tzora'as*. This is because lashon hara is so dangerous for our *neshamah* that Hashem sends a frightening message so that we should immediately stop contaminating ourselves.
- The Chofetz Chaim teaches us, that thousands of *tefillos* are hanging in the air, never having reached the *Kisei Hakavod*. Why? Because these *tefillos* were uttered through mouths that have spoken lashon hara, and so, they are not allowed to reach their destination. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Hakdama)
- Some may claim, "It is better that I don't learn Hilchos Shemiras Halashon, because if I'm ignorant then I won't



be held responsible for speaking lashon hara." The Chofetz Chaim compares such people to a silly traveler who claims, "I don't have to look out for ditches; I'll just cover my eyes when I travel so that I will not see them. Then I'll be safe." Since we are speaking for most of the day, it is crucial to learn the halachos pertaining to speech.

- When a Yid speaks lashon hara about another Yid, he empowers the *Satan* to prosecute us, *ch"v*, before Hashem. The *Zohar* says that this can bring plague, sword, and murder to the world. The Chofetz Chaim warns us: Woe to those who awaken this evil force through forbidden speech! (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 4)
- Imagine: A man buys a beautiful *Shas* without bothering to look inside it. Upon returning home, he is horrified to discover that not one page of it is clear! He is beside himself with grief for not having opened it himself to see what he was buying. The same will be in the World to Come. A person can complete the entire *Shas* many times, but if he doesn't restrain his mouth from lashon hara, he will not find a single Gemara left to protect him. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 26)
- The generation of *Achav*, although they were *oivdei avoda zara*, were careful with *bein adam lachaveiro*. Hashem loves when His children are at peace with each other, and in that zchus, He gave them extra bracha in winning wars. When we are careful with Hilchos Shmiras Halashon, there is no limit to the *berachos* we can attain. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 2)



- The most effective method of avoiding lashon hara is the study of the relevant halachos and *mussar* (R' Betzalel HaKohen of Vilna).
- When we are careful with our speech, we are fulfilling the *mitzva* of *Vehalachta Bidrachav*, following the ways of Hashem. Just as Hashem distances Himself from lashon hara, so too, we must follow in His ways. (Sefer Chofetz Chaim, Pesicha, ese 14)
- *Tzora'as* was a big benefit for the Yidden. One who spoke lashon hara was able to see clearly the consequences of his actions. Today, we are not able to see openly the dangerous results of lashon hara. However, the *tumah* of the *aveira* attaches itself to our *neshamah*, and does not leave until we do *teshuvah*. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 6)
- Hashem despises 6 types of people. A haughty person, a liar, a murderer, one who contemplates wickedness, one whose feet run to do evil, and a false witness. But there is a seventh person whom Hashem despises even more than those: one who causes hatred between friends by talking *rechilus*. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 4)
- The Chafetz Chaim writes in Sefer Shemiras Halashon (Shaar Hatevuna, Ch. 8): One should train himself to patiently accept suffering and insults. By mastering patience, one will find it easy to guard his speech.
- *Machlokes* is an acronym for *Makah*, *Charon*, *Likui* (affliction), *Klalah*, *Tachlis* (destruction). On the flip side, Chazal teach us: "There is no vessel which holds blessing other than peace." (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 15)



- The Chafetz Chaim cites a *mashal*. A rich man told his friend, a poor man, "When you see a creditor, don't hide from him, because I will repay your loans. But if you see a wild dog, you must hide, because I can't save you from the vicious bite. So too, Hashem says, "I can save you from all the *tzaros*, but I can't save you from the dangerous *aveira* of lashon hara." (Sefer Shemiras Halashon Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 4)
- There is one *aveira* for which even little infants can be punished; the *aveira* of *machlokes*. *Machlokes* is truly, extremely destructive. Whole communities have been destroyed as punishment for *machlokes*. We certainly must avoid it at all costs. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 15)
- "One must struggle until one's dying day, not with fasts and afflictions, but rather by placing a muzzle on his mouth to prevent it from indulging in desires and speaking improperly. Through this, one's *aveiros* will be forgiven and he'll be saved from the depths of Gehinnom." (Gr"a)
- The quality of the "*Olamos*" that one creates with his Torah and *Tefilla*, are dependent on how clean he kept his mouth from lashon hara. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 10)
- One that is careful to keep away from *sinas chinom* will be forever remembered as one of the builders of the Third Bais Hamikdash. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 7)
- If someone sins with their mouth in this world, they will be mute in the next world. Additionally, there it will be even more embarrassing to be mute, because everyone



will know that he caused it to himself through his sins.  
(Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 9)

- On the *Yom Hadin* everyone will be presented every single word that they uttered during their lifetime, and they will have to answer what their *heter* was to say it. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Part 2, Ch. 6)
- When one speaks lashon hara about his friends' *aveiros*, in *Shomayim* the *malachim* speak about that speaker's *aveiros*. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hatevuna, Ch. 17)
- It's unimaginable how terrible of a punishment there is for even one word of *dibbur ha'assur*. (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 9, in the name of the Gr"a)
- The Midrash tells us that Hashem says "I can save you from all *tzaros*, as long as you don't speak lashon hara." (Sefer Shemiras Halashon, Shaar Hazechira, Ch. 4)



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