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בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
TAZRIA-METZORA

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
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THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Parshas Metzora discusses the laws of the Metzora — one who is stricken with tzaraas, which can only be described as a spiritual skin disease. The Gemarah¹ records that there are seven possible causes for tzaraas, with lashon harah, gossip and slander, being the most well-known of the seven.

The laws of lashon harah can be complex and, at times, confusing. Yet, shemiras halashon, avoiding gossip, comes with a very special gift, one that is rarely found in relation to the other 'negative' commandments, as seen from the following story.

Reb Yannai² was learning in his house when he heard a peddler outside announcing, "Who wants to buy a potion of life? Who wants to buy a potion of life?"

Reb Yannai asked the peddler to sell this miraculous potion to him. The peddler took one look at Reb Yannai and responded, "No, this product is not for you, nor for those like you." After Reb Yannai insisted, the peddler opened up a Tehillim, and read the words, "Who is the man who desires life...? Guard your tongue from evil..."³

Surprisingly, Reb Yannai stated, "All my life I had read this verse, but did not understand the meaning until this peddler came and taught it to me."

After quoting the story, R' Isser Zalman Meltzer⁴ asks the obvious question — there doesn't seem to be anything complicated about this passuk, how did Reb Yannai not understand this passuk beforehand?

R' Isser Zalman Meltzer explains that Reb Yannai understood the passuk to mean that if one violated the laws of lashon harah, they would be subject to the same penalization as any other 'negative' commandment, which may include the loss of some years of one's life. However, the peddler explained that lashon harah is not like the other commandments — by refraining from speaking ill of another, Hashem actually guarantees that He will add years to one's life.

There are so many reasons to engage in shemiras halashon, and now we can add another. Even if the possibility of hurting someone isn't enough to stop us, we can inspire ourselves to keep Hashem's Torah by focusing on what we will gain by doing so.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

We all know that at the very best, spreading lashon harah is a waste of time, and at worst, one can violate many commandments, and may truly ruin someone's life.

What are the best practices to avoid speaking ill of others?

First and foremost, it is important for one to learn the laws of lashon harah. It is impossible to avoid something if you don't know what it is!

As an added bonus, when one learns the laws, the importance of watching what one says will be foremost in one's mind. This itself will cause one to be careful with whatever or whoever they speak about.

Lastly, using one's imagination might be of service in this regard. Imagine having to go to each person spoken about, and asking their forgiveness. Just the thought of telling someone what was said about them should be enough to inspire anyone to shemiras halashon.²

1 Ohr Yisrael, Letter 7

2 Chofetz Chaim, Lashon Harah, 5:12

1 Arachin 16a

2 Vayikrah Rabbah 16:2

3 36:13

4 Haskama to R' Hominer's sefer Ikrei Hadanim

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Torah study that doesn't include Mussar study doesn't guarantee good middos. In order to develop good middos one must include much Mussar study, make a regular accounting of his spiritual affairs, and work on overcoming his negative impulses and drives. - R' Y.Y. Kanievsky zt"l, the "Steipler Gaon," Peninei Rabbeinu HaKehillos Yaakov

A TWIST OF THE TONGUE

Many years ago¹, in the kingdom of Persia, the king fell ill. After many days, a doctor approached the king and explained, “Your illness is rare but there is one cure — Your Highness must drink the milk of a lioness.”

The king groaned; where was he going to find someone to milk a lioness? Before he could say a word, one of his most trusted servants stepped forward. “Sire, if Your Highness would grant me ten goats, I feel confident I will be able to accomplish the mission.” The king nodded with hope in his heart.

The servant left the kingdom and headed straight to the forest where he knew a lions’ den to be located. After a few days, he arrived with the goats. He took one goat and approached the den, throwing it towards the den and then running for his life. The next day he repeated this, but coming just a bit closer. He did the same on the third day, and so on. By the tenth day he was able to approach the lions, and milk the lioness like he would a docile animal.

Ecstatic, he turned for home. However, on his return trip, he had the most incredible dream. Each one of his limbs was claiming credit for the amazing accomplishment. “If not for me,” said the feet, “we never would have been able to reach the den, I am clearly the greatest!” The hands countered, “What are you talking about? If not for us, how would we have milked the lioness?” And on it went.

Suddenly, the tongue spoke up. “Had I not spoken to the king, we never would have gone anywhere in the first place.” All the other limbs started laughing. “You? You live in a dark and damp cave, there is no way you are the most important!” “Very well,” replied the tongue, “tomorrow you will admit that I am indeed the king of the limbs.”

The servant awoke, concerned by this strange dream. After arriving home, he was admitted into the chamber of the king. “I have brought for you the milk of a dog!” the servant stated triumphantly.

With shock and anger on his face, the king ordered this servant taken to the dungeon, where he would stay until he would be executed the next day. “How dare he,” the king fumed, “what a terrible trick to play on a sick man!”

That night, the servant dreamt again. “What are you doing! You are going to get us all killed!” The limbs were in a panic. “Do you now admit that I am rightfully the king of the limbs? Do you not see my awesome power?” The limbs conceded that they were not nearly as powerful as the tongue. “Now I will save us all.”

The next morning the servant asked to speak to the king. “Sire, please forgive me. I had thought it understood, sometimes a female lioness is also referred to as a female dog.² Please, take this milk and be healed.”

Indeed, the doctors tested the milk, and found it to be genuine. The king was cured, and handsomely rewarded his faithful servant. After seeing this, the limbs all agreed, the power of life and death is truly in the tongue.

¹ Medrash Tehillim 39:3

² In Aramaic the words לבייא “laviyah” and כלביא “k’laviyah” are very similar sounding.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Every moment that a person guards their mouth, they merit the ‘hidden light’ that no angel or creation can even fathom.¹
- Even excessive praise, when you know that it will cause others to speak ill of someone, can be considered within the realm of *lashon harah*.²

¹ Iggeres HaGra

² Chofetz Chaim, Hilchos Lashon Harah, 9:1