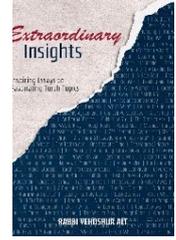
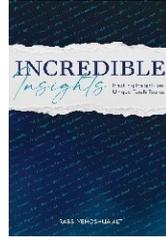


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Jarring Jargon

The root of the word צרעת is ר and ע. These two letters represent the idea of fragmentation, separation as it says תרעם בשבת ברזל.¹ Examples of these include פְּרֵעָה, בִּיעַ, and the like. This is because צרעת comes from הרע לשון הרע.

Of course we notice the ר, ע in the term לשון הרע. This causes separation as Rashi² tells us that the Metzora caused separation between husband and wife, man and his fellow and therefore he is separated by sitting outside the camp. In this way we can grasp באהליך יקרב, nor will any plague come near your tent, as one with צרעת (also known as נגעים) is separated from all three camps.³ To whom is he brought? Aharon (or one of his sons), the one who loves and pursues peace, since he caused the opposite.⁴

When the Chofetz Chaim, the author of Shemiras Halashon, would have a conversation with someone, he

would dominate the conversation so that הרע לשון הרע would not be spoken. Many of us may think that if one learns the Halachos of הרע לשון הרע he will not be able to talk. However, in truth it is the opposite! It is only when one learns the Halachos of הרע לשון הרע that he is able to talk.

Alleviating Acrimony

The Gemara⁵ teaches us the remedy for a Torah scholar who speaks Lashon Hara is to be involved in Torah.⁶ This is the deeper meaning in במים ורחץ, immerse in water, that he should immerse in the waters of Torah as אין מים אלא תורה.⁸ However, we are left to wonder, why is that the remedy? What is the connection between the two?

1) The Gemara⁹ tells us a Metzora is considered like a מת. It therefore comes as no surprise that the initials of the Parshiyos of a Metzora, which is תזריע מצורע, spell מת.

¹ Tehillim 2:9. See R' Shamshon Rafael Hirsch to Breishis 6:5.

² Vayikra 13:46.

³ Tehillim 91:10. Vayikra 13:46. This is in contrast to a זב and מת.

⁴ Vayikra 13:2. Avos 1:12. See for example Zevachim 35a that Kohanim are called Bnei Aharon.

⁵ Eruchin 15b. R' Chaim Feld said that he found over his many years in kiruv that classes on Shemiras Halashon made the greatest impact. The exposure to high ethical standards of the Torah with respect to gossip and other forms of derogatory speech gave students a great feeling of pride in being Jewish.

⁶ There is a saying, "There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it behooves us all not to talk about the rest of us."

⁷ As in Vayikra 14:8, 15:5 among many others. We should learn from Miriam who spoke Lashon Hara about Moshe and still got punished (Bamidbar,

chapter 12). All her good deeds didn't help her (Ramban, Devarim 24:9). Let us take into account the following:

- 1) It was her brother that she loved who she said the Lashon Hara about.
- 2) It was Aharon that also loved Moshe whom she told.
- 3) She brought Moshe into the world as she brought her parents back together after they separated (Sota 12a).
- 4) She saved him from the decree of הילוד היארה תשליכהו, כל הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו, throw the boys into the river (Shemos 1:22).
- 5) She didn't speak it in front of Moshe so he wasn't embarrassed.
- 6) Moshe didn't even care as he was the most humble man (Bamidbar 12:3).

⁸ Taanis 7a. Also, מים is 90 in Gematria—40 and 50. This refers to the 40 days it took Moshe to get the Torah and Shavuot, the 50th day of Sefira.

⁹ Nedarim 64b.

On the other hand, Torah is life—the opposite of death as it says **כי הוא חייכם**, it is your life.¹⁰ In the words of Dovid Hamelech: תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש: Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul.¹¹ Consequently, it is called a תורת חיים. In a similar vein, when the Torah is taken out from the Aron we say the ואתם הדבקים בה' אלהיכם חיים, you who cling to Hashem are alive today.¹² In light of what we mentioned, we can comprehend why the remedy for one who speaks Lashon Hara is Torah.

2) We have the ability to use speech in a positive way or negative way¹³ as it says **לבטא בשפתים להרע או להיטיב**,¹⁴ expressing with his lips, harm or good.

R' Shlomo Freifeld explains ואתה מחיה את כלם, You give them all life,¹⁵ in the following way. We are taught to emulate Hashem—**והלכת בדרכיו**—go in His ways.¹⁶ Just as Hashem gives life so should we: through a smile, give compliments, express gratitude, words of encouragement and so forth.

Words can also cause damage if we are insensitive, insult, talk disparagingly about others and so on. The Gemara¹⁷ teaches **מילי דנזיקין**, one who wants to be devout should fulfill the words of [Mesachta] Nezikin. This is also interpreted that words (מילי) can cause damage (נזיקין) so one who wants to be devout should be careful in this area.

Negative speech causes us damage as well our Torah and Tefila. This is analogous to a surgeon who uses dirty utensils for surgery. Performing such surgery may be disastrous. Similarly, with one who speaks Lashon Hara and uses that same utensil (mouth) to Daven and learn Torah. Tainted utensils produce tainted products.

Who is the one that desires life...? נצור לשונך מרע, He who guards his tongue from evil and lips from speaking deceit.¹⁸ This is because that is authentic Torah, when it's untainted since it comes through a clean mouth.

The ultimate way to use our speech is for Torah. Is it any surprise that צרעת is comprised of the same letters as עצרת, another name for Shavuot, Torah. With this we

can grasp the depth in the words **תורת המצורע**.¹⁹ Now we can understand why the remedy for one who speaks Lashon Hara is to be involved in Torah and as we say in Birkas Hatorah **לעסוק בדברי תורה**, to be engaged in the words of Torah.

Special Speech

The following are some ways that we are instructed and guided in how to protect ourselves from speaking negatively.

A) We should think before we speak. In this way we can understand²⁰ **וישובו ויחנו לפני פי החירות**—before we talk and have a free mouth, have **ישוב הדעת** (וישובו) and be settled (ויחנו).

The Gemara uses the phrase **בפומיה דרבי מאיר**, it was familiar in the mouth of R' Meir.²¹ מרגלא also means a pearl. An explanation given is that it was a pearl because he measured and weighed each word as each word was accounted for, concise to the point, **לשון נקי** and so on.²²

B) We must be so busy with Torah that we have no time to speak negatively. The Ahavas Yisrael was once asked on that which we are taught that **איני יודע**, we should teach our tongue to say we don't know.²³ This is not always true since sometimes we do know? He replied one should be busy only with Torah and not the emptiness of this world. As a result, he can then say **איני יודע** regarding matters of this world.

C) If we seek to see the positive in everyone and everything,²⁴ we would speak only good.²⁵ For this reason the Pasuk enlightens us to see the good of Yerushalayim,²⁶ since it is very easy to see its problems (Arabs, bureaucracy, etc.).

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Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of three books including the recently released Extraordinary Insights, in addition to being the host of The Fascinating Insights Podcast. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance

¹⁰ Devarim 32:47.

¹¹ Tehillim 19:8.

¹² Devarim 4:4. See Pesachim 68b.

¹³ Before we speak we need to ask ourselves if the words we are about to say will be helpful or harmful. How much of the many thousands of words we say daily are positive?

¹⁴ Vayikra 5:4. The Trisker Magid (Magen Avraham, Lecha Lecha, s.v. ויאמר) writes that the reason for illness in the world is due to the change in climate, air. Air is classified under רוח which is categorized as דיבור, speech, as in Targum Unkolos who says **רוח ממללא**, speaking spirit. Damaging one's speech (with falsehood, mockery and the like) negatively affects the air (speech is done through air—the breath of our mouth), and sickness comes to the world. Through a person sanctifying his speech with Torah and Tefila, it fixes up the climate and removes illness from the world (See also Drashos Chassam Sofer, volume 2, שער ק, s.v. ואחז"ל). Incidentally, if we rearrange the word **אור** we get **פא**, light of the mouth.

¹⁵ Nechemia 9:6.

¹⁶ Devarim 28:9.

¹⁷ Baba Kamma 30a.

¹⁸ Tehillim 34.

¹⁹ Vayikra 14:2.

²⁰ Shemos 14:2. Silence can improve the Shalom Bayis of many. This is the explanation given in (Avos 1:17) **אלא משתיקה**, I found nothing better for oneself than silence, as the Gemara tells us **אשתו כגופו**.

²¹ Brachos 17a, see Sanhedrin 50b, Rashi מרגלא. This phrase is used also with others like Abaye, Rava and so on. See there.

²² Similarly, Targum Unkolos says **כי כבד פה**, Moshe is heavy of mouth, **ארי יקר ממלל** (Shemos 4:10) as he gave importance to each word.

²³ Brachos 4a. The Metzora brings two birds for purification, one is slaughtered and one lives (Vayikra 14, see Eruchin 16b). The Zohar (Tazria) says one is afflicted with צרעת for the harmful words he uttered and the beneficial words that he didn't. The Sefas Emes (Metzora, תרסא) explains the one slaughtered represents the elimination of negative speech and the one allowed to live symbolizes beneficial speech.

²⁴ Tangentially, at times we need to apply the ruling a rav once gave concerning a specific question he was asked. He said, "even if it is *mutar* (permitted), it's *asur* (forbidden)." This has been applied to other areas of life as well. One example of this is giving an abundance of candy to a child.

²⁵ There is a saying, "When it rains look for rainbows, when it's dark look for stars."

²⁶ Tehillim 128:5.