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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON METZORA - 5774

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[weeklydt@torahweb2.org](mailto:weeklydt@torahweb2.org) date: Wed, Apr 2, 2014 at 8:49 PM  
subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Sight and Speech: From the Metzora to  
the Seder Night

**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

### **Sight and Speech: From the Metzora to the Seder Night**

Seeing and speaking play a pivotal role in the process of evaluating tzora'as. The phrase, "v'ra'ah hakohen - and the kohen will see", appears in both Tazria and Metzora numerous times. A metzora can only begin his purification when the kohen sees that the tzora'as has healed. The kohen seeing the tzora'as is so integral to ascertaining its status that the one cannot report to the kohen with certainty that he himself has seen tzora'as, rather the Torah insists that he merely state "k'negah nirah li b'bayis - what seems like tzora'as is in my house."

The second critical component in deciding an issue of tzora'as is the kohen's speech. Even if the kohen is convinced that it is tzora'as that he is seeing, as long as a formal declaration hasn't been made the person's clothing or house remains pure. Thus the procedure for declaring the house to be impure is delayed until its contents have been emptied to avoid their becoming tamey as well, thereby avoiding an unnecessary loss of possessions for the homeowner.

What message is being sent to the metzora as he observes the eyes and mouth of the kohen deciding his future? He is being taught the lesson that he most needs for his spiritual improvement: it was his eyes and mouth that brought the metzora to this state.

Chazal speak of the deficiency of the "eyes" of the metzora. His jealousy upon seeing others' successes caused him to speak evil. There is a direct correlation between these sins of sight and speech, and as such the metzora

{word-1}

must now learn the power of sight and speech. Just as he caused harm by looking and speaking evil about others, his home, clothing, and even his body are being scrutinized by the eyes and mouth of the kohen.

Our eyes and mouths are not only capable of harm, but can also be utilized for great good. The central theme of the seder night is v'higadeta l'bincha. The telling of yetzias Mitzrayim to our children is accomplished by using our eyes and mouths properly. "Ba'avor zeh", one sees the korban Pesach, matzoh and maror and formulates the story around these visual reminders. Chazal instituted many practices at the seder so the children will see and ask.

Not only is the annual mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim done through the power of sight and speech, but our entire mesorah is transmitted using these two powerful vehicles. We must show our children what a life of Torah is. They must see with their own eyes what Torah means to us. The image of how we learn, daven and observe mitzvos must accompany them throughout life. Even Yosef had to conjure up the image of his father from his youth to enable him to withstand the challenge of an alien environment. We teach our children by transmitting the words of Torah from our mouths to theirs. Accompanying this oral transmission are the powerful images we show our children.

Our potential to use sight and speech is so great, therefore we must always assure that our eyes and mouths are fit for this monumental task. We must be certain that we and our children look with an ayin tova and our mouths utter lashon tov to enable us to use the gifts of sight and speech for the wonderful tasks for which they were created.

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from: Shabbat Shalom [shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org) reply-to:  
[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org) date: Thu, Apr 3, 2014 at 9:15 PM

### **How to Praise**

#### **Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

The sages were eloquent on the subject of lashon hara, evil speech, the sin they took to be the cause of tsara'at, the subject of this week's parsha. But there is a meta-halakhic principle: "From the negative you can infer the positive"[1] So, for example, from the seriousness of the prohibition against Chillul Hashem, desecrating God's name, you can infer the importance of the opposite, Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name.

So there must in principle be a concept of lashon hatov, good speech, and it must be more than a mere negation of its opposite. The way to avoid lashon hara is to practise silence, and indeed the sages were eloquent on the importance of silence.[2] Silence saves us from evil speech but in and of itself it achieves nothing positive. What then is lashon hatov?

Lashon hatov – one of the most important tasks of a leader, a parent or a friend – is focused praise. The classic text on this is a Mishnah in the tractate of Avot, "The Ethics of the Fathers":

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five (pre-eminent) disciples, namely Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Joshua ben Chananya, Rabbi Yose the Priest, Rabbi Shimon ben Netanel, and Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh. He used to recount their praise: Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arakh: an ever-flowing spring. (Avot 2: 10-11)

The Mishnah is doing more than telling us that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had disciples. Every rabbi had disciples. The imperative, "Raise up many disciples"[3] is one of the oldest rabbinic teachings on record. What the Mishnah is telling us is how to create disciples. It is easy to have students who are uncritical devotees but never become creative intellects in their own right. It is not difficult to create followers. It is far harder to create leaders. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was a great teacher because five of his students became giants in their own right. The Mishnah is telling us how he did it.

He did it by focussed praise. He showed each of his pupils where their particular strength lay. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the "plastered well that never

loses a drop,” was gifted with a superb memory – an important gift in an age in which manuscripts were rare and the Oral Law was not yet committed to writing. Shimon ben Netanel, the “man who fears sin,” may not have had the intellectual brilliance of the others but his reverential nature was a reminder to others that they were not mere scholars but also holy men engaged in a sacred task. Elazar ben Arakh, the “ever-flowing spring,” had a creative mind constantly giving rise to new interpretations of ancient texts.

I discovered the transformative power of focused praise from one of the more remarkable people I ever met, the late Lena Rustin. Lena was a speech therapist, specialising in helping stammering children. I came to know her through a television documentary I was making for the BBC about the state of the family in Britain. Lena believed that the young stammerers she was treating – they were, on average, around five years old – had to be understood in the context of their families. Families tend to develop an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose its stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

By and large, we tend to resist change. We settle into patterns of behaviour until they become comfortable like a well-worn armchair or a comfortable pair of shoes. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages change and makes it unthreatening? The answer Lena discovered was praise. She told the families with which she was working that every day they must catch each member of the family doing something right, and say so, specifically, positively and thankfully.

She did not go into deep explanations, but watching her at work I began to realise what she was doing. She was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual regard and continuous positive reinforcement. She wanted the parents to shape an environment of self-respect and self-confidence, not just for the stammering child but for every member of the family, so that the entire atmosphere of the home was one in which people felt safe to change and help others to do so.

I suddenly realised that she had discovered a solution not just for stammering but for group dynamics as a whole. My intuition was soon confirmed in a surprising way. There had been tensions among the television crew with which I had been working. Various things had gone wrong and there was an atmosphere of mutual recrimination. After filming a session of Lena Rustin teaching parents how to give and receive praise, the crew started praising one another. Instantly the atmosphere was transformed. The tension dissolved, and filming became fun again. Praise gives people the confidence to let go of the negative aspects of their character and reach their full potential.

There is in praise a deep spiritual message. We think religion is about faith in God. What I had not fully understood before was that faith in God should lead us to have faith in people, for God’s image is in each of us, and we have to learn how to discern it. I then understood that the repeated phrase in Genesis 1, “And God saw that it was good,” was there to teach us to see the good in people and events, and by so doing, help to strengthen it. I also understood why God briefly punished Moses by turning his hand leprous – as mentioned in the last Covenant and Conversation – because he had said about the Israelites, “They will not believe in me.” Moses was being taught a fundamental lesson of leadership: It does not matter whether they believe in you. What matters is that you believe in them.

It was from another wise woman that I learned another important lesson about praise. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, in her book *Mindset*,<sup>[4]</sup> argues that it makes a decisive difference whether we believe that our abilities are innate and determined once and for all (the “fixed” mindset), or that talent is something we achieve through time by effort, practice and persistence (the “growth” mindset). The former tend to be risk-averse, afraid that if they fail this will show that they are not as good as they were thought to be. The latter embrace risk because they take failure as a learning experience from which we grow. It follows that there is good praise and bad

praise. Parents and teachers should not praise children in absolute terms: “You are gifted, brilliant, a star.” They should praise effort: “You tried hard, you gave of your best.” They should encourage a growth mindset, not a fixed one.

Perhaps this explains a sad aftermath in the life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai’s two most gifted pupils. The Mishnah immediately following the one quoted above states:

He [Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai] used to say: If all the sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the other, he would outweigh them all. However, Abba Saul said in his name: If all the sages of Israel, including Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, were in one scale of a balance, and Elazar ben Arakh in the other, he would outweigh them all. (Avot 2: 12)

Tragically Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was eventually excommunicated by his colleagues for failing to accept the majority view on a matter of Jewish law.<sup>[5]</sup> As for Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, he became separated from his colleagues. When they went to the academy at Yavneh, he went to Emmaus, a pleasant place to live but lacking in other Torah scholars. Eventually he forgot his learning and became a pale shadow of his former self.<sup>[6]</sup> It may be that praising his students for their innate abilities rather than their effort, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai inadvertently encouraged the two most talented of them to develop a fixed mindset rather than engage with colleagues and stay open to intellectual growth.

Praise and how we administer it is a fundamental element in leadership of any kind. Recognising the good in people and saying so, we help bring people’s potential to fruition. Praising their efforts rather than their innate gifts helps encourage growth, about which Hillel used to say: “He who does not increase his knowledge, loses it” (Avot 1: 13). The right kind of praise changes lives. That is the power of *lashon hatov*. Bad speech diminishes us; good speech can lift us to great heights. Or as W. H. Auden said in one of his beautiful poems: “In the prison of his days. Teach the free man how to praise.”

[1] Nedarim 11a.

[2] See for example Mishnah Avot 1:17; 3:13.

[3] Avot 1:1.

[4] Carol Dweck, *Mindset*, Ballantine Books, 2007.

[5] Baba Metsia 59b.

[6] Shabbat 147b.

Britain’s Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks  
Britain’s Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks  
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher..

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from: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** [ezbuchwald@njop.org](mailto:ezbuchwald@njop.org)

date: Mon, Mar 31, 2014 at 5:09 PM subject:

Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

Metzora 5774-2014

"The Peddler and Evil Speech"

by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Metzora, again addresses the Biblical affliction *Tzara’at*, צָרַעַת. Parashat Metzora teaches about the cleansing process for the afflicted person who has healed, and *Tzara’at* in the structure of the home.

In the opening verses of parashat Metzora, G-d speaks to Moses Leviticus 14:2, saying, וְהִבֵּאתָ אֶל הַכֹּהֵן, וְהִבֵּאתָ אֶל הַמְצַרֵּעַ בְּיוֹם טְהֻרָתוֹ, וְזֹאת תְּהִיָּה תוֹרַת הַמְצַרֵּעַ בְּיוֹם טְהֻרָתוֹ. This shall be the law [the Torah] of the *Metzora* [the afflicted person], on the day of his purification: he shall be brought to the Kohain (the priest).

The Talmud, in *Arachin* 15b, explains that the disease *Tzara’at*, is not a dermatological disease, but a spiritual disease that one contracts for speaking *Lashon Harah* (evil).

The Talmud cites the Talmudic sage, Raish Lakish, who explains: Why does the Torah say, this is the “*Torah*”—the law, of the *Metzora*, מְצַרֵּעַ? To teach

that these are the rules that pertain to one who is “*Motzee shaym rah*,” מוציא רע שם רע, who speaks evil of another.

Raish Lakish sees in the striking similarity between the word, “*Me'tzoh'rah*,” and the expression “*Motzee shaym rah*,” proof that the disease is a spiritual disease that is contracted from improper speech, and not merely a physical malady.

The Torah Temimah notes that with the exception of this single citation in Leviticus 14:2, the disease, *Tzara'at*, is never referred to in the Torah, as “*Metzarah*.” Occasionally the Bible refers to the stricken person as, “*Tzah'roo'ah*,” and most often, the disease is called “*Tzara'at*,” but never “*Metzarah*.” That is why Raish Lakish claims that the word, “*Metzarah*” is a “*not'ree'kohn*,” נטריריקון, a Hebrew acrostic for the phrase, “*Motzee shaym rah*”—speaking evil.

There is a well known Midrash, concerning the evils of improper speech (Midrash Rabba, Leviticus 16:2):

There was a certain peddler, who would wander among the towns near Tzippori [in the Northern Gililee], and would announce [to his would-be customers]: “Who wishes to purchase the elixir of life?” All the people would assemble before him. Rabbi Yannai was sitting [nearby] and studying. He said to him: “Come here, and sell it to me.” He [the peddler] said to him: “You [Torah scholars], and those like you, don't need it.” [Rabbi Yannai] beseeched him, so the peddler came over and brought him a book of Tehillim (Psalms), and showed him the verse in Psalms 34:13, that reads: “Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good?” And what does the verse say after that? “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking falsehood.” Rabbi Yannai said: “So too did Solomon say in Proverbs 21:23, ‘Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.’” Rabbi Yannai said: “All my life I would read this verse and did not know where it was explained, until the peddler came and informed me, ‘What man is he that desires life?’ Moses therefore warned Israel, זאת תהיה תורת המצרע, this is the law of the *Metzarah*—*Motzee rah*, מוציא רע [who speaks evil].”

The commentators are puzzled as to why Rabbi Yannai was so astounded by the words of the peddler. What did the peddler say that Rabbi Yannai had not known previously? Why was the understanding of the disease of *Tzara'at* clearer to Rabbi Yannai, as a result of his interaction with the peddler?

Rabbi Yehuda Nachshoni, in his Studies in the Weekly Parashah, explains in the name of the *Akeidat Yitzchak*, that the peddler who interacted with Rabbi Yannai regarding the sin of evil speech, did not really introduce any novel ideas that were not known by Rabbi Yannai. However, he did succeed in dramatically underscoring the enormity of the sin of evil speech. The peddler was not satisfied with the fact that he himself already knew the seriousness of the transgression, but felt compelled to go to all the public thoroughfares, to publicize the evils of *Lashon Harah* among the many community members who habitually engaged in evil speech. The peddler thus followed the paths of Abraham, who went *before* G-d, rather than Noah, who “walked *with* G-d.”

Furthermore, Rabbi Yannai was astounded by the depths of perception of the peddler (who was not a scholar), who recognized that speech is the unique essence of humankind, that every person's life is closely associated and bound to the power of speech, and to the content of every person's utterings. The peddler, who in fact turned out to be a gifted educator, taught that limiting one's speech, and sanctifying one's speech, is the secret of the good life, and underscores the real difference between human beings and all other creatures.

Rabbi Yannai also appreciated the clarity of the peddler's words, that guarding one's tongue from evil and one's lips from speaking falsehood, is the basis of proper living and its essence. Although the peddler basically spoke a simple truth, it is because of its simplicity that many people dismiss the importance of proper, sanctified speech. The peddler is comparable to a

physician who reveals that a particular malady is not physical, but spiritual. So is the malady of improper speech, a spiritual illness.

The parable may be applied even further, when considering the nature of the cleansing ritual of the stricken transgressor.

In the Torah, the Kohain serves as a peddler, who through the ritual of cleansing, drives home to the transgressor the importance of proper speech and the immensity of the violation of forbidden speech. The bird that is offered to G-d on the Altar, represents the chirping of the person who speaks evil, whose blood is poured into an earthen pot, as if words, like earthenware, are without meaning and impact. The splint from a cedar tree that is placed in the mixture represents the exalted stature and immense power of words, that can be transformed into a little red thread of pettiness, and the blood of the victim who was slandered.

Purification also requires the washing of one's clothes, the cleansing of one's outer garments and the immersing of one's body in a mikveh. At the end of the seven day period of transformation and repentance, the person who is cleansed must bring an offering. The former speaker of evil, who is now, hopefully, sincerely penitent, must have his ear, thumb and large toe smeared with blood, so that, henceforth, the things that he hears and does with his hands and feet, will be devoted solely to the purpose of seeking and pursuing peace. Only then, will the former transgressor gain atonement for his sins, and return to his tent in peace.

The peddler certainly had much to teach, and did so quite effectively. May you be blessed.

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from: Rabbi Berel Wein [genesis@torah.org](mailto:genesis@torah.org) to: [rabiwein@torah.org](mailto:rabiwein@torah.org) date: Wed, Apr 2, 2014 at 9:05 PM subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Metzarah

from: **Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein** <[info@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:info@jewishdestiny.com)> reply-to: [info@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:info@jewishdestiny.com) subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Spring Ahead

Last week Israel joined the United States and the other Western countries which had already pushed their clocks ahead one hour - going to summer Daylight Savings Time. The advantages of doing so are still somewhat debatable. There was even a report in the media last week that the switch to summer Daylight Savings Time somehow contributes to an increased risk of heart attack! But, summer Daylight Savings Time it is! Aside from losing an hour's sleep, I suffered no real ill effects from putting my mechanical - though not my body - clock ahead the one hour required by law.

Nevertheless, I was searching for some great moral lesson that I could derive from this mundane happening. I came to the conclusion that springing ahead is a good Jewish trait - even a Torah value, if you will. Judaism always insists that we look ahead and always consider tomorrow in our plans and actions for today. Our father Jacob said that “tomorrow I will attain my compensation and reward.” It is our nature to plan for our future even though that future is always unpredictable and uncertain. We plan for our retirement and even for our eventual demise. We are always planning ahead, projecting our future onto our current activities. Our clocks are always set ahead, for as much as we live in the present we really live in our future. This most human of all traits governs our thinking and policies, both individually and nationally. We are always springing ahead. We are to be comforted for our lost hour of sleep by the realization that in almost seven months from now we will turn our clocks back and regain that lost hour. Though there have long been proposals to keep Daylight Savings Time all year, Standard Time has not yet been eliminated, though it certainly has been curtailed. It seems that we cannot always spring ahead but must sometimes remember to fall back. Our future is always built upon our past. Without an understanding and appreciation of that past, the future becomes even more murky and unpredictable. For a long time, over the past few centuries, much of the

Jewish world has only looked to spring ahead. It almost consciously removed its past and only dealt with the great future that it imagined for itself – a utopian future that in many respects has never yet come into being. And the great and good future that did come to reality, such as the State of Israel and the ingathering of the scattered exiles of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, was really built upon the longing and devotion of past centuries and generations. Thus, without the fall back, the spring ahead would never have occurred. The lack of historical perspective in almost all sections of the Jewish world today is one of the most appalling and disturbing features of the dysfunction that plagues our current Jewish society. By neglecting to teach our children of our past we limit their vision and hopes for their future. But, just as, metaphorically, we regain the one hour that we lost when springing ahead by the process of later falling back, so too can we regain our past and help illuminate our future. There is a debate raging in the current Israeli Hebrew press as to the reasons why Israelis who move abroad assimilate into their new society without retaining any Jewish connection, at a far greater rate than Jews born in those countries. Without my weighing in seriously on this debate, I feel that it is proper to note that the average Israeli school teaches little about our past and does not engender any feeling of Jewish self identity into its students. It is no wonder that once the Israeli is no longer living in Israel, he or she has absolutely no moorings to the past and is extremely vulnerable to immediate assimilation and the loss of any Jewish identity. Generally speaking, we live in a “now” generation, desiring instant gratification with little thought about tomorrow or about yesterday. But it is clear that “now” is never satisfied, no matter how much material wealth and abundance is heaped upon it. The nature of human beings is to somehow find satisfaction in dreaming about tomorrow and in reminiscing about yesterday. Only by springing ahead and falling back does our present situation in life take on some meaning and satisfaction. So, the changing of the clock does carry with it important lessons about us and our world. Nothing that happens in God's world is without meaning and instruction. In any event, I am looking forward to regaining that lost hour's sleep later this year. Shabat shalom

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 from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
 reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha Blog:: **Rabbi Berel Wein** Metzora  
 The Talmud derives from this week's Torah reading the basic halachic principle of chazaka – the presumption that what was before is now as well. The Talmud inferred this from the fact that the kohein/priest, when declaring a house to be impure because of plague or pure because the plague had not spread along its walls, did so only upon leaving the house and standing outside of its premises. How can the kohein/priest be certain that there was no change in the mark or size of the plague during the instant that he left the house - outside of its premises? From this, the Talmud infers the concept of chazaka – what was just before is now as well – which is binding in halachic issues. The Talmud goes so far as to say that this concept of chazaka is “great” and necessarily logically strong. Yet the Talmud itself recognizes that life forces upon us the realization that circumstances do change and that what was may no longer be what is. How to square this circle has been a matter of halachic debate and consideration in all scholarly rabbinic works over the ages. But in a broader sense, this discussion applies even outside of the realm of rabbinic halachic discussion. There are certain norms in Jewish life and practice that are immutable and never subject to change. Their chazaka is “great” and powerful and whatever was is what it is today and will be in the future as well. But there are norms that are basically only societal mores and may no longer apply in different social settings and under different circumstances of life. How to decide which norms fall into which category is part of the ongoing debate that exists within the Jewish world today. Perhaps the area of greatest contention in today's world regarding these matters relates to what is generally called “women's issues.” There is

no doubt that the status of women in today's society – even in the most rigorous and conservative Orthodox society – is far different than what it was in eighteenth century Eastern Europe. But after all of the sloganeering and current political correctness is removed from the equation, the basic fact remains that Judaism recognizes and legislates gender equality in human terms but does not favor gender sameness. The differences in the psychological and emotional makeup between men and women are innate – part of their biological and mental nature. This is a chazaka that is strong and “great.” It teaches us that what was before is now as well, and will also be in the future. One of the great failures of the feminist movement over the last 50 years, in my opinion, is that it tried to make women not only the equal of men in the work place and society but it also tried to make them the same as men. This flew in the face of human nature. This same error is repeated in many Jewish circles today. Almost all of the feminist demands made upon Judaism today are based on the fallacious idea that women are the same as men. These efforts have not resonated within the broader observant Jewish community and have only led to disappointment and eventual alienation from Judaism itself. One must be wary of the power of chazaka. Shabat shalom

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from: Kol Torah Webmaster webmaster@koltorah.org to: Kol Torah <koltorah@koltorah.org> date: Thu, Apr 3, 2014 at 8:13 PM  
 subject: **Kol Torah Parashat Metzora Revealed**  
**by Rabbi Raphi Mandelstam**

If you were to ask any child on the street why a person gets Tzara'at there is no doubt that he would say that it is a punishment for speaking Lashon HaRa. How did he know that? Why do you think that such is the case? No doubt it's because we were all taught this in school. However, I beseech you to review last and this week's Parashiyot and I challenge you to find me where in the description of the laws of Tzara'at, Lashon HaRa is mentioned. I can save you the trouble if you'd like, and tell you that the Torah itself never makes any explicit mention of such a connection, at least not in these Parashiyot. However, Chazal (Arachin 16b) tell us that one of the many potential causes for Tzara'at is Lashon HaRa. But if it's not in the Torah itself, how did they know that?

Now, there is a very simple answer to that question. All one needs to do is fast forward to Parashat BeHa'alotecha and read the story of Miriam speaking Lashon HaRa about Moshe Rabbeinu to learn that her punishment for doing so was Tzara'at. It is very reasonable to suggest that Chazal worked backwards: Once we see that the Tzara'at that inflicted Miriam was due to her speaking Lashon HaRa, then it must be that the Tzara'at in our Parashiyot is also due to Lashon HaRa. However, it is undoubtedly still very strange that the very two Parashiyot devoted to Tzara'at make no mention of its cause. Is there perhaps a hint somewhere in this week's Parashah that alludes to Lashon HaRa? I believe there is.

One of the most unique Halachot regarding Tzara'at is the role of the Kohein in its procedures. Normally, when we have a question in Halachah, we turn to a Rabbi or Chacham. But when it comes to Tzara'at, the only way to determine its status is through the pronouncement of the Kohein. In fact, as many commentators point out, despite the physical presence of the Tzara'at, no Tum'ah status is given to the potential Metzora until he is officially declared Tamei, impure, by the Kohein. Why is Tzara'at dependent on the Kohein?

We turn our attention to an amazing insight by Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky. When discussing the prohibition of breaking a Neder, or vow, that a person has made, the Torah uses a very unique phrase. It doesn't say that one has erred in “changing” or “retracting” his words. The Torah relates that the one who violates a vow has violated the prohibition of “Lo Yachel Devaro,” literally translated as, “Do not make your words mundane.” The Shoresh, root, of the word “Yachel” is the same as the word Chulin, which simply

means mundane or lacking in Kedushah. When a person violates a Neder it is because he believes that his speech isn't such a big deal, and going back on his word can't have such serious ramifications. However, what he has forgotten is that speech can be a very powerful thing. In fact, as Rav Betzalel Radinsky points out, there is a context in which speech has a very powerful effect - the world of the Beit HaMikdash. Although normally when making a transaction an act of Kinyan is required, when donating something to the Beit HaMikdash, our mere declaration of an item's sanctity makes it Hekdeish (Mishnah Kiddushin 1:6). What we learn from the concept of Hekdeish is that our words can have just as powerful of an effect as our actions. Who is the one who understands this more than anybody? Who spends his day dealing with the effects of speech? It is none other than the Kohein, who works in the Beit HaMikdash and best understands that it is speech alone that creates the Kedushah within the animals he offers as Korbanot. Therefore, perhaps the elaborate role of the Kohein in the process of diagnosing a Metzora is the Torah conveying a message to us. The lesson that the Kohein can offer us more than anyone is the power of speech. It is the Kohein who makes the Metzora Tamei; not through any action, but merely through his speech alone. He tells the Metzora that speech is not something to be treated mundanely or haphazardly, but with awe and reverence. It is something that can truly effect people and, Chas VeShalom, hurt.

As we approach the holiday of Pesach, the holiday which the Arizal pointed out means a speaking mouth (the word 'Pesach' can be read as 'Peh' 'Sach,' meaning 'speaking mouth'), we should all recognize the power of our words and use them to praise one another, Daven, and learn Torah!

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from: Chanan Morrison ravkooklist@gmail.com reply-to: ravkooklist+owners@googlegroups.com to: **Rav Kook List** <RavKook-List@googlegroups.com> date: Wed, Apr 2, 2014 at 7:22 AM subject: [Rav Kook List] Nissan: "How Splendid This Tree is!"  
**Nissan: "How Splendid This Tree is!"**

In the spring of 1950, Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook published an article entitled, "The Beauty of the Tree." The article addresses the divide that is sometimes erected between one's inner spiritual life and the outer world, especially the universe and its natural beauty.

The Sages taught that we should appreciate the spectacular renewal of life in springtime. One who sees fruit trees blossoming in the month of Nissan is instructed to recite Birkat Ha-Ilanot, the blessing of the trees:

"Blessed are You... Ruler of the universe, who did not leave anything lacking in His world, and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give pleasure to people." And yet - we find in Pirkei Avot what appears to be the exact opposite view:

"Rabbi Jacob taught: One who is reviewing his [Torah] studies while walking along the way and interrupts his study to exclaim, 'How splendid this tree is!' 'How fair this field is!' Scripture considers it as if he has forfeited his soul." (Avot 3:9) Why was Rabbi Jacob so opposed to appreciating the beauty of nature?

Artificial Separation

The error of such a person, Rav Tzvi Yehuda explained, is not that he voiced his aesthetic appreciation for graceful trees and scenic vistas. That is perfectly legitimate. Indeed, the Sages formulated a special berachah to express our wonder and marvel at nature's springtime reawakening, with its effusion of colorful flowers and trees in bloom.

Rather, his error is in regarding this wonder as an interruption from his Torah study. He mistakenly compartmentalizes life, isolating his inward-directed spiritual life of prayer and Torah from the outside world's beauty and grandeur. By doing so, "he forfeits his soul" - he abandons his soul's sense of beauty and its harmony with the natural universe.

The wondrous power of creation is revealed in the blossoming of plants and trees. Creation is a continuous process - "that God created to [continue to]

{word-1}

develop" (Gen. 2:3). The universe's development is completed with the highest capabilities of humanity. At our most perfected state we become partners with God in creating the world (Shabbat 10a).

Our spiritual growth parallels the growth of trees. Like trees, our shiur komah or spiritual potential reaches up to the heavens. The tzaddik is thus compared to a towering tree, providing fruit and shade: "The righteous flourishes like a palm; he grows great, like a cedar of Lebanon" (Ps. 92:13).

We need to integrate the beauty of nature - "How splendid this tree is" - within the context of Torah. We need to recognize that this natural beauty appears within it and through it. For the Torah itself is called a "tree of life for all who hold to it" (Proverbs 3:18).

This inclusive outlook reveals the spiritual splendor of the natural world. It is this insight which inspires the soul to praise the One "Who created goodly creatures and goodly trees."

Two Realms, One Structure

Rav Tzvi Yehudah noted that the author of this mishnah is Rabbi Jacob. Rabbi Jacob also taught that this world is like an anteroom, where we prepare ourselves to enter the palace, i.e., the World to Come (Avot 4:16). The significance of this statement is that there exists a fundamental connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. They are not two separate domains, but rather comprise together a complete structure. Therefore the lofty splendor of the palace-world is able to penetrate and ennoble the material world.

This approach is particularly valid in the Land of Israel. As the Midrash teaches: "Do you wish to see the Shechinah in this world? Then study Torah in the Land of Israel" (Midrash Tehillim). Torah study in Eretz Yisrael enables one to perceive God's Presence in this world. One experiences the beauty of the world, and is able to discern the inner splendor of the trees.

(Adapted from LeNetivot Yisrael vol. II, pp. 144-146)

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www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha Parshas Metzarah**  
**by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

It was, Like, Negah! Like (lik) adjective 1. Possessing the same or almost the same characteristics; similar: on this and like occasions. 2. Alike: They are as like as two siblings. 3. Having equivalent value or quality. Ah, the good old days, when the word meant something. Today, the kids have found a new interpretation for the word. "So I was, like, hello?" "So I was on the checkout counter, and the girl in front of me had, like, some apples." I am wont to interject, "were they like apples? You mean, that actually they were not apples, but rather they were really oranges disguised by a shiny red coating?" But just as our parents learned to realize that the word cool was no longer a setting on an air-conditioner, or a description of current climate conditions, I decided to accept that like has also metamorphosed into just another expression. I guess it's, like, cool. But maybe there was more than etymological benefit to this exercise in social adaptation. I began to adjust my thought process and applying the fact that the word like has taken on new meaning. And I applied that thinking to this week's Torah reading. The parsha tells us this week that just as the concept of an irregular blemish can appear on one's body or hair, it can also appear on the walls of his home. And when a negah appears in his home, he goes to the kohen and declares, "like a negah appeared to me in my home." The afflicted sounds like a child of the new millennium. Why does he not say I may have a negah? Why use the words "like a negah." After all if it looks like a negah and acts like a negah than it must be a negah! Why then does he use the word like in describing it? Rabbi Paysach Krohn loves to tell the beautifully haunting story of the woman who left Rusk Institute with her child who was in a wheelchair. It was a wintry day and the chill that pervaded the young boy's fragile bones declared its chilling presence with the icy frosting it left on the exposed metal of his wheelchair. Waiting at the bus stop on the corner of

34th and 2nd Avenue, three large city busses whizzed by, unable to accommodate the mother and the child and his special chair. It was only after a half-hour wait that the mother flagged down a bus and insisted to the driver that he allow them to board. As the poor woman struggled to lift the wheelchair into the narrowly impatient doors that waited to slam like the jaws of a tiger, the driver shouted at her, "Lady you'll have to wait for a bus with a lift! I gotta go!" Immediately a few passengers jumped to her defense! "It's freezing out there. We will wait!" Embarrassed into submission, the driver acquiesced. As the mother and child settled in their place on the bus, one said to her, "Your child is not handicapped. It only seems that way. In truth it is the driver that has a handicapped mind!" The Torah is telling us an important foundation in negativity. When one seemingly has a blemish or sees a blemish in his own home, he has no right to declare it as such. He may have a problem but should never declare it until seeking spiritual confirmation. One may think it is a blemish, it may even appear as a blemish yet until confirmed by the compassionate kohen, it is only like a blemish. However, until confirmed with counsel, it is not. If one goes to the kohen and learns to utilize the impairing experience to grow, to become more patient, more understanding, and perhaps more sensitive to others, then the hindrances that he or she experience may be troublesome, they may even be disheartening, they may even be like a handicap -- but they are truly not. Because the handicap is only in the mind; and what is on the body is only like a blemish that can fade away like the whiz of a speeding bus on 34th Street. Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series. Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org.. Project Genesis, Inc.

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org reply-to:  
shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Apr 3, 2014 at 9:15 PM

**Metzora: The Art of Speech**

**Rabbi Eliyahu Safran**

We speak, therefore we exist.

When a newly elected member of Parliament approached the esteemed British Prime Minister Disraeli for advice, Disraeli was only too happy to share some profound wisdom and insight. "For the first six months," Disraeli counseled, "you should only listen and not become involved in debate."

The man was perplexed. "But my colleagues will wonder why I do not speak!" the man sputtered in protest. Disraeli considered the man for only a moment more before responding, "better they should wonder why you do not, than why you do."

How true were Disraeli's words! How often our silence resonates more profoundly than our words! In music, it is the balance of notes and rests which create the melody. A song of unrelenting notes is often little more than noise. So too, a man of only words and not silences is little more than empty wind.

Yet, if all we are is rests and silences, we are without substance. For, while it is true that all creatures communicate, it is our ability to speak which distinguishes us and raises us above all other forms of creation. Without speech, only the most basic needs can be communicated. With speech, we can create and glory in art, in poetry, in worship and prayer. Speech is that which epitomizes the Divine gift inherent in each of us.

"... And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life..."

The Targum translates, l'ruach memamela, "to a communicative, speaking being." That is, our ability to communicate through speech best characterizes the living soul within us. Our bodies, as Yishayahu the prophet exclaimed, are mere physical entities. "All flesh is grass...The grass

withers, the flower fades; but the word of our G-d shall stand forever." We, like grass, wither. But our words, the power of our speech stand forever.

Speech is power. And with power comes danger. It should come as no surprise then that of all possible human transgressions, the one punishable with tz'aras is the sin of lashon ha'rah – evil speech.

Resh Lakish does not mince words. Referring to the law of metzora he says, "This shall be the law of he who spreads evil talk" (mozi shem ra) One who is guilty of lashon ha'ra forfeits the mantle of spirituality from his being. What is he left with? Just his afflicted and "diseased" physical existence.

A medical doctor can treat leprosy, but only a kohen brings to bear gifts that can realign and rebalance the physical and spiritual aspects of man. The Mishna in Negaim teaches that the ultimate cure for the metzora comes about through the verbal pronouncement of tavor uttered by the kohen. Just as the spiritual imbalance was the result of evil talk, its cure can only be realized through the "pure" talk. As the prophet Malachi declared, "For the kohen's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek Torah at his mouth."

The cure required for the evil talker brings back into alignment the physical and spiritual natures of man. The Torah demands that the leper offer "two living clean birds" for his purification to repent for his idle chatter, "for birds continually chatter and chirp." He must bring cedar wood because the cedar is symbolic of haughtiness and pride, both manifest in his idle and meaningless talk. He must immerse himself in running water. As the Sefer HaChinuch elaborates, "The immersion in water symbolizes that the unclean person is recreated at that moment, just as the world consisted wholly of water at creation, before man came into the world. The renewal effected on his body will prompt him to a reappraisal of his own conduct."

To use the gift of speech for evil is a terrible transgression. To use it for good is a great blessing. Our noblest expression of spirituality is found in our daily need to pray. To pray wholly is to transcend the physical self; to climb above the work of our hands and to surpass the product of our minds. Prayer is "an act of self purification, quarantine for the soul. It gives us the opportunity to be honest, to say what we believe, and to stand for what we say."

"The acceptance of the spirit is prayer."

Our prayer is made possible by our ability to speak. Yet, even in prayer, the blessing and danger of speech is evident. As we enter into prayer, we cry to G-d, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise."

We are raised by our prayer. Made more whole. And yet, even after we have uttered our prayer we must guard against the possibility that our words were false, self-serving, and insincere. And so we conclude every prayer with a simple request, "Guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking guile."

Would that those words were forever in our hearts and at our lips!

If they cannot be, better that we choose silence. For our silence will serve our better angels more than any words we might speak.

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**Peninim on the Torah**  
**by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**  
**Parshas Metzora**

This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2) The tongue has no mind. It expresses the feelings that the individual has in his heart. A positive person, whose outlook on life and people is positive, invariably speaks only good - because this is what he sees. This is what he feels in his heart. A negative person, whose view on life and people is jaundiced, speaks lashon hora, evil speech, because this is all that he knows. In other words, the best protection

against lashon hora is a positive outlook. A primary component for maintaining a positive view on people is to respect others. This is increasingly difficult for the individual who is himself insecure, thus viewing everyone as a threat. One who is secure in his own skin senses no threat from others, and he is able to respect others without feeling that, if he does so, it diminishes him. While this all seems like simple, common sense, sadly it is one of those areas of common sense which many people have difficulty grasping. The following episode is a perfect example of this failing.

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells the story of a Rav in Yerushalayim who found himself spending considerable time counseling young, married couples who were dealing with various crises which may arise in a marriage. Since he was not a professional, just a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, with abundant patience and common sense, he felt it prudent on his part to consult with one of Yerushalayim's leading psychologists. Perhaps he could pick up a few pointers, some sage advice, a practical approach to some of the issues with which he was dealing. He met with the woman, and it was a beneficial meeting, as he gained much from the conversation.

After the initial meeting, the woman asked him what his vocation was. He replied that he studied full-time in the Mirrer Kollel. "Perhaps you know my husband," she exclaimed excitedly. "He sells flowers right next to the yeshivah."

Hearing this, the young rav tried to visualize a florist shop near the yeshivah, but he could not conjure up the image. This was because there was no flower shop near the yeshivah. The only florist - "sort of" - was a very short man who sold flowers out of buckets every Erev Shabbos. He could not be married to this woman, he thought to himself. She was one of the premier professional marriage counselors in Yerushalayim.

Apparently, his stupefaction was evident all over his face, because the doctor began to chuckle, as she responded to what was coursing through his mind, "Yes, he is the short fellow who sells flowers every Friday afternoon. When he was young, he had polio which severely stunted his growth. My husband has been selling flowers for years. It is meaningful to him and something that he enjoys. He claims that he prefers most of all to sell in front of the Mir, because it is the only place that anyone who walks by actually greet him respectfully."

People have feelings. The way we look - or stare - at them makes a big difference. How we greet - or do not greet - them sends a powerful message. When we ignore someone, we are basically saying to him, "You are not worth my time." It actually goes much further than this. Thinking positive, acting positive, saying nice things to and about people is much more than simple human decency and proper etiquette. It can determine one's future!

In the hakdamah, preface, to his sefer on Meseches Bechoros, V'eid Yaaleh, Rabbi Aharon Dovid Lebovics quotes an incredible statement from the Zohar (Zohar Chadash Parashas Noach). The Zohar addresses the spiritual advantage of Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu in contrast to Noach, who, although referred to by the Torah as a tzaddik, righteous person, is held in spiritual disdain for not praying for the evildoers of his generation.

The Zohar quotes the Sages who contend that Noach was uncertain enough of his own worthiness that he was unable to pray for others. This is why he did not go that extra mile for others. He simply felt that he was unworthy. Rabbi Elazar says, "Despite all of this, he still should have prayed. For Hashem is pleased to hear good about His children." This teaches us that, despite how little Noach thought of himself, he would have been successful had he prayed. Hashem is a loving Father, Who wants to hear people - regardless of their own worthiness or spiritual standing - speak favorably of His children. Rabbi Elazar adds, "The punishment of the preeminent tzaddik of the world who speaks ill of the Jewish People to Hashem, is greater than that of anyone."

A simple Jew will receive unparalleled reward for thinking and speaking positively of the Jewish People. Likewise, regardless of one's past spiritual achievement, if his remarks about fellow Jews are jaundiced, he will be held in spiritual contempt. There are individuals who truly exemplify this idea.

They look for every avenue to give the benefit of the doubt regarding the behavior of fellow Jews. Regrettably, others act out this contempt as long as their own virtue is not impugned.

The Bobover Rebbe, Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl, was leader and mentor to thousands and the consummate example of an ohev Yisrael, one who loves all Jews. One morning, as he was putting his Tefillin back into their boxes, he cut his finger on the edge of one of the boxes, which was made of silver. His finger immediately began to bleed. As the Gabbai was about to get a band aid to stop the bleeding, he noticed a subtle smile, a sense of satisfaction, on the Rebbe's face. The Gabbai asked the Rebbe why he manifested a portrait of calm and joy as he stared at his finger bleeding. The Rebbe replied, "In the Talmud Chullin 7b, Chazal say, 'When a man stubs his finger in the course of a mitzvah, and his finger begins to bleed, the blood which runs is like the blood of a korban Olah. The atonement of the blood running from his finger is equal to that of an Elevation offering.' I was thinking to myself, 'What z'chus, merit, do I have that I was granted the opportunity to offer up an Olah?'

"I realized that I am very demanding of myself never to speak ill of a fellow Jew - regardless of the situation. It is certainly possible, however, that I might have harbored an inappropriate feeling within me against someone. In my mind, I might subconsciously have found fault with individuals. This is a sin b'machshavah, in thought, for which the korban Olah is mechapeir, atones. This is why I am filled with joy!"

The Kohen shall go forth to the outside of the camp; the Kohen shall look, and behold: the tzaraas affliction has been healed from the metzora. (14:3)

The atonement of the metzora does not occur overnight. He must spend time in quarantine, away from people, alone with himself, so that he can reflect on his misdeeds. He was better than others - or so he thought. His haughtiness bred contempt for others - because, after all, he was better than they were. Being alone allows him the opportunity to realize how much "better" he really is. As soon as he comes full circle and comes down from his lofty perch, he is ready for atonement. The spiritual healing process has begun. The three-stage process of purification may now begin.

Being alone will affect a person in that manner. There are various forms of loneliness. We fear being alone, but the greatest loneliness is not the loneliness of solitude. There are those who live within the most thriving communities, in the midst of congregations of happy, friendly people, yet they are lonelier than physical or psychological hermits who are at peace dwelling amongst their own thoughts. The physical number of people that we see on a regular basis has little correlation with our loneliness. It is the companion of our thoughts and the warmth of our hearts towards the things and the people with which we come in contact that determines the loneliness that we feel. In other words, it all depends on our perspective on life. Someone who is bitter will remain lonely, regardless of the multitudes of people who surround him. One who is a happy person is never alone. He is surrounded by his thoughts and the warm feelings in his heart.

Some of us thrive on friendship and people - even if, at times, they might be insincere, because, in our minds, it makes us feel important, needed. A brilliant secular poet writes of sailing from Liverpool, England to the United States. Sadly, he had nobody to see him off, so he gave a sixpence to a little urchin boy playing on the docks and asked him that, in return, he was to stand by the dock and wave his kerchief to him until the ship was in midstream. Why did he do this? If he had to pay for the "friendship," was it not self-defeating?

It was the ache of loneliness. The ship with hundreds of passengers was setting sail. Everyone had someone who cared about him. This poet had no one. So he grabbed the opportunity for mercenary friendship because, ultimately, it was better than nothing. Indeed, he later remarked, "I had my six-penny worth."

There is loneliness that comes with age. An elderly man once complained to his rav, "My children are good to me. I know that they love me, but, after

all is said and done, I am a problem to them. I would like to talk intimately to them, share my heart, but when I make the attempt, I can see that they have no clue. They do not understand what I am going through. I have known periods of loneliness throughout my life, but never more keenly than now."

An elderly man dropped in at a convention. Two younger men were seated at a table having coffee together. The man walked over to their table and said, "I do not know either of you, and you obviously do not know me either. Will you, nonetheless, allow me to sit at the table with you and join in your conversation? You see, I am so lonely. I am over ninety years old and I know no one, and I want to talk to somebody."

Veritably, man cannot fulfill himself in a lonely existence. Isolation deprives the individual of emotional and even spiritual growth. We must participate in helping and sharing with others. We mature and develop by responding to the needs of others. As we enlarge the scope of our concern, we include others in our circle of caring, thereby adding a new dimension to our lives. When we think only of ourselves, our problems seem to be much larger, as bitterness and depression set in. When a lighthouse keeper on a deserted island was asked whether he was lonesome, he replied, "Not since I saved my first person from drowning." Loneliness is a malaise one overcomes by cultivating caring for - and involvement with - others. Generating and harboring bitterness only magnifies the problem.

In truth, we are never alone. A Jew who has faith in Hashem knows that he is not alone. Indeed, there is no loneliness so great, so absolute, so diminishing, as the loneliness of a person who feels he cannot call out to Hashem. We may be able to surround ourselves with materialism, with friends, with family, but, if when we pray to Hashem we do not have the confidence that we are being heard, we are by far the loneliest people. Emunah, faith, is the most soothing balm for the ache of being alone. One who believes knows that he can call on Hashem 24/7. A young man would call his Bubby daily to check up on her out of a sense of achrayus, responsibility, and love. She was blessed with a large cadre of grandchildren who took turns visiting her and attending to her needs. Therefore, whenever he called, it was another grandchild who usually picked up the phone to answer the call. One day, he called, and his grandmother answered the phone. Startled, he asked, "Bubby, are you alone?" She replied, "Dear child, I am never alone." When one feels the companionship of Hashem, he has solved his problem; he has discovered the ultimate response to loneliness.

This is the spiritual metamorphosis that the metzora experiences. As he sits alone in quarantine, he realizes that his personal issues led to his arrogance and slander. The bitterness that seethed within him prompted him to lash out at others. His punishment is to be alone, to mull over his predicament, its origins and solution. The solitude allows him to think, to become acquainted with himself - the real "him" and to seek out Hashem. The great Chassidic Masters encourage us to apportion a specific amount of time when we can be alone - not lonely - but alone: to think; to contemplate, to learn to enjoy the solitude. While loneliness hurts - solitude helps. We learn to live with ourselves. As the metzora learns to live with himself, he will also learn to live with others. Then he has been healed.

And behold! The affliction had spread in the house: it is a malignant tzaraas in the house. (14:44)

It seems as if every type of tumah, spiritual contamination, has some form of tikkun, spiritual repair, some way to correct what has been "broken," to fix what has been put into spiritual dysfunction - everything but tzaraas ha'bayis, a house that manifests a plague. The house must be dismantled - every component connected to the house, wood, stone, even the earth upon which it is built - must be removed. Is this not a bit extreme?

Every creation has a spiritual dimension to it or else it would cease to exist: domeim, inanimate; tzomeach, growing vegetation; chai, living creations; medaber, creatures who are able to speak - human beings. All exist as a result of the ratzon Hashem, will of G-d, which grants them existence.

Otherwise, they would simply disappear. Our Sages speak about inanimate objects as if they have an aspect of life to them. The "walls" have ears. Indeed, a well-known passage in the Talmud Yoma 47a observes that Kimchis (a righteous woman) was blessed with seven sons, each of whom achieved the exemplary distinction of becoming Kohanim Gedolim. The Sages asked her, "What did you do that catalyzed the merit for such blessing?" She replied, "The walls of my house never saw my (uncovered) hair." Apparently, walls have some sort of vision.

Horav Lazer Brody, Shlita, derives from here an insightful lesson concerning the influence of the "home" on a Jewish child's education. Kimchis' house never viewed anything morally inappropriate, and, therefore, seven Kohanim Gedolim were products of this home. A home that is morally pure, free of any spiritual flaw, assimilates these qualities into the "virtual" fabric of the home. In turn, the home leaves its lasting effect on its inhabitants.

The story is told concerning a certain gadol, Torah luminary, who, for many years, studied Torah in his home, employing a loud voice as he reviewed the Gemorah. After he died, the house passed hands, and it was eventually sold to a non-observant family. After a short while, the family was compelled to move out of the house. When pressed for a reason, they replied that, for some reason, they felt uncomfortable in the home. They had no idea why this was so, but, whenever they were in the house, they seemed "pressured" to leave. They had no clue concerning the source of the pressure, although they felt it to be palpable. The explanation: The house was holy, having been sanctified through the sounds of Torah which once filled its cavity. Rav Brody likened this to a forty-watt bulb which is placed in a socket made for two hundred watts of electricity. When the "juice" comes through, it explodes the bulb. It has no way of maintaining such extreme electrical pressure.

If a woman's blood flows for many days... You shall separate Bnei Yisrael from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination. (15:25,31)

One would think that, as people age, they become more amenable to perform teshuvah, to repent a life lived inappropriately, not in consonance with Torah dictate. Yet, this is not necessarily true. Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, writes that as a person ages, the yetzer hora, evil inclination, puts on a greater battle to lay claim to this individual's spiritual dysfunction. After leading him astray for a lifetime, he does not want to lose the battle at the very end. I have noticed this in speaking with seniors who agree with what they "hear," but are not prepared to effect a spiritual metamorphosis. They give all kinds of excuses, some even valid, but, at the end of the day, it is the yetzer hora putting up a valiant fight to protect his "interests."

The Noam HaMitzvos derives an important principle concerning teshuvah from the above pasuk. There are those who, upon committing a sinful act, immediately realize the error of their ways, regret their action, and repent. In contrast is the individual who not only does not repent, but he adds to his sin by continuing his downward spiral. He now thinks that, in his present circumstances, sunk in the miserable abyss of sin, he has no way out. He cannot climb out. He is eternally stuck in the murky quicksand of sin and guilt, being pulled down lower and lower.

The Torah speaks to him: Even after many "days" of spiritual contamination, he has hope. The door to teshuvah is never sealed. One just has to have the strength of character and courage to "knock." Despite this, one should make every attempt to resolve his teshuvah issues while he is still young. Once one reaches senior citizenship, he must learn to contend with a much stronger, wilier and more desperate yetzer hora. The yetzer hora has invested much during this person's lifetime to see to it that he dies a sinner. Certainly, as the end approaches, he is not going to slack off. On the contrary, he will work exceedingly hard to bring this person's life to an awful fruition.

In his Michtav Mei'Eliyahu, Rav Dessler relates the following episode. The Chevrah Kaddisha, Jewish Burial Society, came before Horav Eliyahu, zl,

m'Izmir, author of the Shevet Mussar, with a pressing question. Apparently, the "Don," head of the robbers, was at death's door. He asked that the Rav come to see him, so that he could confess his sins before he took leave of the world. The Rav did what he had to do when a person makes such a request, regardless of his deleterious background. He donned his hat and coat and proceeded to the robber's home.

The robber lay in bed, the color of his face ashen, his breathing very slow and labored. It was obvious that the end was near. The robber opened up his eyes and saw that the Rav had come. He said, "Now, we begin, 'Ashamnu, I have been guilty!'" He continued on, reciting the rest of the Viduy, his voice rising with each condemnation of his past. The tears flowed freely as this man, wracked with terrible guilt, poured out his heart to Hashem, asking forgiveness for a life of sin.

His gang of robbers stood by watching the scene. They, too, were moved by the experience - to the point that they began to shake with fear, as they, too, confessed their misdeeds. It was a scene that could bring the most hardened profligate to advance his own thoughts of teshuvah. Suddenly, out of the blue, the robber baron, just minutes from death, stopped his Viduy in midsentence and began to issue forth from his mouth expletives and vile cursing. He blasphemed Hashem, denied everything there was to believe in, and, in short, spoke like the miscreant that he had always been.

The Rav attempted to stop him, by encouraging him to recite Shema Yisrael, the last verse one recites as he is about to take leave of this life. The Don looked up at the Rav and said, "Chas v'shalom! Heaven forbid! I will not say Shema Yisrael! Do you not see who stands before me with an unsheathed sword, prepared to slice me into pieces if I utter another Hebrew word!"

Apparently, it was another of the ruses of the yetzer hora. The yetzer hora convinces one to sin, then he becomes the Satan who prosecutes him. Afterwards, he has the "honor" of being his executioner, as he dons the mantle of Malach Ha'Maves, angel of death. This man was too weak to stand up to the last round of ammunition in the yetzer hora's cache. He died a sinner, cursing until the very end.

When the yetzer hora sees that a person is about to throw in the towel, defer to the sense of right and truth, accept Hashem and repent his life of evil - he mounts a vigorous offensive. This is why it is a mistake to wait. Putting off teshuvah for a more propitious time is a "grave" mistake, because there is no better and more suitable time than now.

In memory of our beloved parents Rabbi Dr. Avrohom Yitzchok Wolf Rebbetzin Anna Moses Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family Ari and Rivky Wolf and Family Abba and Sarah Spero and Family Pesach and Esther Ostroy and Family Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family

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