



Parshat Tazria Metzora

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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Give the Critic a Taste of His Own Medicine

Parshas [Tazria](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The pasuk says, “And if the Kohen examines the *tzoraas* and sees that it has spread, he need not (further) examine the yellow hair, the person is *tameh* (impure)” (Vayikra 13:36).

The Baal HaTurim points out that there are only two times in the entire Torah where we find this expression “lo yevaker” (he need not examine). The first time is in our parsha. The second time is in Parshas Bechukosai, regarding the laws of *temurah* (switched sacrifices) “*lo yevaker* (he shall not distinguish) between good and bad” (Vayikra 27:33).

The Baal HaTurim explains that there is a connection between these two pesukim: Since the person was guilty of distinguishing between good and bad (by speaking *lashon horah*), therefore the Kohen has no need to examine his *tzoraas* symptoms further and can declare him *tameh* (impure) immediately. The Baal HaTurim concludes “...for there are seven reasons that cause *negaim* (ritual skin-blemishes) to come”.

This is a classic comment of the Baal HaTurim because it is a riddle. Anyone is welcome to speculate over the meaning of this Baal HaTurim during his or her Shabbos seudah. My feeling is that the meaning of the Baal HaTurim is the following:

What is the *aveira* of *lashon horah* all about? When we distill *lashon horah* to its basic form, what does it consist of?

Basically, *lashon horah* is about criticizing. It is the uncanny ability to look at a person or situation and find what is wrong — to latch on to the shortcomings and the downside. There is good and bad in all of us. We are not all good and we are not all bad. It is possible to look at a person and say “He’s stingy, he’s this, he’s that, etc.”

But that same person also has positive traits. The chronic *lashon*

horah speaker never sees these positive traits. He chooses to look at the bad and to criticize. He chooses to examine every person under a microscope, and always come to the conclusion that there are faults and shortcomings.

This is the meaning of the Baal HaTurim. When a person transgresses “You shall not examine between good and bad” (he always examines, always looks for fault and always criticizes), he will be punished *midah k'neged mida* (measure for measure). He will come to the Kohen and the Torah will instruct the Kohen “Do not examine any further.” Rule that he is *tameh* on the spot. Let him receive some of his own medicine. Teach the importance of “You shall not scrutinize (further)…” to he who always scrutinizes.

Does Mussar Help?

Parshas [Metzora](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Towards the end of Parshas Metzora, the *pasuk* says: “You shall separate the Children of Israel from their contamination; and they shall not die as a result of their contamination if they contaminate My Mishkan that is among them.” (Vayikra 15:31). The simple reading of this *pasuk* is that when *Bnei Yisrael* are *tameh* (impure), they should not, in a state of impurity, go into the holy places where they are forbidden to enter, lest they die from that impurity. However, homiletically, the sefer Yismach Yehudah cites the following interesting *vort* from a *drasha* of Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer (a great grandson of the Chasam Sofer, who was the Chief Rabbi of Cracow, Poland, in the early part of the 20th century):

Sometimes we talk to our children or to our students or to our congregants until we are blue in the face. We wonder, does it

make an impression? Are our words taken seriously? Do people change? Perhaps this is most relevant for professionals who do this for a living. Do all the things that we say, year after year, really help? Do speeches help? Do *drashos* help?

Does *mussar* (chastisement) help? Does lecturing to our children really help?

Rav Kornitzer suggests that we need to bear in mind that it may not help now, and it may not help six months from now or a year from now. But, at some point, at some time in the future, maybe the lesson will hit home.

I don't know how Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer explained the *mashal* that he gave, but today it is easy for us to imagine what this is like. Namely, the "*mussar*" is in the "cloud." Where is all this data? It is in the "cloud." Where is the "cloud?"? There is not a cloud in the sky! But we know this concept that something can be not in front of us, yet when we need to access it, it is somehow there for us to access. It is the same with *mussar* and with lecturing our children. It is there. It hasn't penetrated yet, but it can penetrate.

He references the *pasuk* "And these matters that I command you today shall be **upon** your heart (*al levavecha*)." (Devorim 5:6). It does not say *b'soch levavecha* (**within** your heart) because sometimes it has not yet penetrated the heart. However, at least it remains *al levavecha* – **upon** your heart. One day, maybe, just perhaps, it will penetrate the heart and will be *b'soch levavecha*. This is why the *pasuk* says "...*v'lo yamusu m'tumosam*" (Vayikra 15:31), which means you talk to people and you tell them what is right. Even though it might not help now or even ten years from now, **they will not die from their impurity**. How many people do we know that return at the end of their days? They don't die in their state of impurity because at the end of their days, they in fact

realize that what they were told so many years earlier was correct, and they in fact do come back.

Ironically, I was recently speaking with someone in Eretz Yisrael who told me the following interesting incident that happened only a few days ago. (*This was April 2016.*) I believe this story brings home the point that I am trying to make:

A fellow in Eretz Yisrael has a distant relative who was born and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania in the first half of the twentieth century. The relative's father was a *rav* and a *shochet*, who tried his best to educate his son in the proper Torah path, including sending him to a yeshiva. The boy only lasted in the yeshiva for two weeks. He hated it. He left the yeshiva and eventually left Yiddishkeit. He never got married. He does not have a wife or children. He is a man alone in the world. From what I gather, he must be in his late sixties or early seventies.

For whatever reason, this relative got an inspiration: I want to go to Israel. I want to daven at the *Kosel HaMaaravi*. He takes his Bar Mitzvah *tefillin*, which he has not put on in a half century, and has plans to visit the kosel, put on his *tefillin*, and daven there. He hooks up with some Federation tour and goes with this tour and their tour guide on the Federation tour to *Eretz Yisrael*.

The person who is relating the story finds out that his long-lost cousin is coming to Israel and he decides that he will get in touch with him, take him around, and give him a real tour of *Eretz Yisrael*. They meet in a certain place. The Israeli says to his American relative, "Have you been to the *Kosel* yet?" His cousin responds, "No, I have not been to the *Kosel* yet." The Israeli said, "Great. So let's go now!" The American says "No, not now. Maybe later."

"What's the problem?" his Israeli cousin presses him. "This is why you came. You want to put your *tefillin* on and daven at the *kosel*." The cousin is hesitant. Finally he says "I can't go!"

"Why can't you go?" The long-lost cousin finally explains "I can't go to the *Kosel* with a cross."

The Israeli cousin is incredulous: "What are you doing with a cross?" The American explains that while he was on the Federation tour they went through the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. "I have a very good Christian friend back home in America. I wanted to buy him a cross from Israel as a present. I asked the rabbi who is leading the Federation tour if it was okay to buy a cross for my Christian friend in America. He told me it was."

He bought the *tselem* (cross) and put it in his bag, and is now walking around Jerusalem with a *tselem* in his bag. He tells his relative "I cannot go to the *Kosel* with a cross in my bag."

This Israeli cousin told my friend this story and his friend told it to me. He then commented: This fellow has not had any connection to *Yiddishkeit* in maybe sixty years. He is putting on *tefillin* now for probably the first time in more than fifty years, or even more! But he still has a sensitivity, a feeling, that a person does not go to the *Kosel HaMaaravi* with a *tselem* in his bag.

This is an example of "...You shall not die in your state of impurity." The person left *Yiddishkeit*, he had a bad experience in yeshiva, he did not want to have anything to do with Judaism, and he has not kept who knows what for all these years, but there is something in the Jewish heart that remains "*al levavecha*" – **upon** your heart. It was ON the heart. It was "in the cloud." After all these years, it finally penetrated that you do not go to the *Kosel* with a *tselem* in your bag.

This is a lesson to all of us, whether you are a *rav*, a rabbi, a *rebbe*, a teacher, or even a parent. If you preach and preach and

preach and it does not seem to make a difference, yes, it does!
 “You shall warn... and they shall not die in their state of impurity.”

The power of company

Written by Daniel Shasha

Parashah Tazria teaches that a speaker of lashon hara who contracted tzaraas was quarantined outside the camp (13:46). What was the purpose of this quarantine? Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin explains that a common reason why one speaks lashon hara is because they fail to see the good in their companions and instead badmouth them.

When they are quarantined and are forbidden to have contact with anyone else, including other people who are tameh, it will give them an opportunity to appreciate what it means to have human company. Loneliness is extremely painful, and the metzora will be led to be grateful for all those around him, focusing on their good. Furthermore, the only way they can survive is dependence on others, e.g., people bringing them food and water. All this will lead them to appreciate their friends and realize their good traits; consequently, this will cause them to repent.

Everyone has so much good, and it is essential that we focus on it, despite their shortcomings. It is a mitzvah from the Torah to emulate Hashem, ‘And you should walk in His ways’ (Devarim 28:9). The Tomer Devorah teaches how Hashem focuses on the good we do, overlooking our defects. Someone who has committed many sins yet performs acts of kindness, Hashem doesn’t punish him since he loves those who perform acts of kindness! So too, we must do whatever we can to try to appreciate the good in our companions, despite their shortcomings. Our Sefarim teach that when we focus on the good in others, it actually helps bring out the good in them, helping them become better people.

The Gemara recounts how Rabbi Chiya’s wife was a very challenging person, constantly causing her husband a lot of distress. Yet, whenever Rav Chiya found something he thought she would appreciate, he wrapped it up

nicely and gave it to her as a gift. He exclaimed, “Is it not enough that she raises our children and protects us from sin?” (Yevamos 63a)

Tazria

Written by Benji Landau

וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

(12:3)

The Gemora in several places teaches a halacha that although the posuk here would seem to imply that any time on the eighth day of a baby’s life is fitting to carry out Bris Mila, there is a preference in doing so as early as possible in the day. The source for this halacha is from Avraham Avinu, who when carrying out the command to offer his first-born son on the alter, wasted no time in arising early in the morning, saddling his donkey and making his way to Har Ha’Moriyah, as the posuk says, וישכם אברהם בבקר. This serves as a paradigm that we should always endeavor to carry out Mitzvos at the earliest possibility of doing so. This halacha is known famously as זריזין מקדימין למצוות, those who are alacritous rush to carry out Mitzvos.

The commentaries discuss the nature of this halacha, and the status it holds. There seem to be three schools of thought as to the importance of this halacha, the first of these represented by the Meiri. In his commentary to Yoma 28b he states explicitly that this halacha is not learned out from the issue of Bris Mila by coincidence. The reason that the Gemora encourages us to carry out the Bris Mila as early as possible in the morning is in order that we do not delay the Bris Mila due to being overly compassionate for the baby. Rather we should be willing to do the Mitzva as early as possible. As to the Gemora’s finding a source from Avraham Avinu, the Meiri states that just as Avraham went as quickly as possible to fulfil H’s command despite knowing full well that this would only bring about Yitzchak’s death sooner, so too we should adopt the ways of our Forefathers and carry out the Mitzva of Mila as soon as we can. In other words, the Meiri understands this halacha

to be nothing short of a Minhag, or Righteous Practise, and certainly carries with it no obligatory requirements.

The later commentaries provide two justifications for the stance adopted by the Meiri on this issue. Firstly the posuk of Avraham and the akeida takes place before the giving of Torah at Sinai and we have a principle that we do not learn any obligations from p'sukim before Matan Torah. Secondly, the phraseology of the Gemora does not seem to imply an absolute obligation, rather it has the connotation of being merely a suggestion; a good idea for those who take Mitzvos seriously would be to do them at the earliest opportunity.

The next level understood by the commentaries is led by the Turei Even. He understands that this halacha does indeed carry with it certain obligations when it comes to the fulfilment of Mitzvos. However, any obligations with regard to this halacha are only of a Rabbanic nature. The final level in this issue is presented by the Radach. He understands that not only does this halacha that provide certain obligations, but he also states that this is a halacha on a Biblical level, and carries as much weight as any other Biblically mandated halachos.

There are some exceptions to this rule, one of which concerns the recitation K'rias Shema in the morning. The proper time given to recite the Shema is from dawn but the Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Chaim 58:1 states that one should delay reciting Shema until just before sunrise in order to say Shema just before the Amida without interruption. The Mishna Brura §10 says that if one will be unable to do this, he should recite Shema as close to dawn as possible in order to fulfil the fulfilment of זריזין מקדימין למצוות..

The gift of speech

Written by Daniel Shasha

Parashas Metzora describes how the metzora who spoke lashon hara and contracted tzaraas was purified. Part of the purification process consisted of the Kohen taking two birds (14:4). Chazal (Arachin 16b) teach that specifically birds were used since they constantly chirp; consequently, helping atone for the metzora, who was sent outside for speaking lashon hara, a consequence of idle chatter.

The Chafetz Chayim explains that lashon hara results from a lack of appreciation of the gift of speech, and instead, one uses this gift thoughtlessly, resulting in lashon hara. One who truly appreciates the value of speech would always be on guard to make sure that this isn't being misused. The Chafetz Chayim brings a parable to help bring out this point. There was a man who, unfortunately, was mute. He worked very hard to find a cure to help him speak and went to many doctors, but to no avail. One time, he heard about a new specialist in this field who had a possible cure. This gave him newfound hope, and after consulting with this doctor and starting a treatment plan, he fulfilled his lifelong goal of being able to speak! How much gratitude would this man have to the doctor? Of course, he wouldn't be an ingrate and badmouth the doctor.

The Chafetz Chayim explains that Hashem gave all of us this special gift of speech; is it not basic gratitude to ensure we do not misuse it and badmouth His creations? Instead, we can use this gift to thank Hashem. The Magen Avraham teaches that our mouths were only created in order that we thank Hashem. We can also use this gift to speak about the good in others.

In fact, the Zohar writes, "Just as we are held accountable for the negative words we say, we are also held accountable for the positive words that we didn't say," since the purpose of our mouths is to express our gratitude.

One time, Rav Yisrael Salanter was hosted by a simple peasant woman. Rav Yisrael engaged her in conversation, taking an interest in her lifestyle. He asked her how many cows she had, how much milk they produce, how many

eggs her chickens lay, etc. Those who accompanied him were startled at how such an esteemed Rabbi could engage this woman in such simple talk. He explained that since this woman hosted them, they were obligated in gratitude. By asking about her lifestyle and taking an interest in her, she would feel very good about herself. This is a way of expressing his great gratitude toward her.

Humor

1-Around the barbecue:

Q. Who invented fire?

A. Some bright spark

2-Q. What did the one flag say to the other?

A. Nothing, it just waved

3-Q. What is the name of the dance we do on Yom Ha'Atzmaut?

A. The Indepen-dance

4-Q. Who is widely recognized as the best mathematician in the Old Testament?

A. Moses, he wrote the Book of Numbers.

