

This week's *Parashot* teach the laws of *Tzara'at* and describe the process of purification from that condition. Regarding this, R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) teaches:

The Torah necessarily encompasses man's entire existence. Certainly the Torah relates to a normal, healthy person. The first part of the Book of *Vayikra* describes lofty spiritual levels--the sacrifices and the dedication of the *Mishkan*. But, the Torah is meant to direct a person, and the life of a typical person includes times when he is not elevated. In *Parashot Tazria* and *Metzora* we meet the Jew when he is in an unhealthy state; specifically, when he is spiritually unhealthy.

The unique aspect of the human being is his power of speech. Thus, on the verse (*Bereishit* 2:7), "And G-d blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being," *Onkelos* comments, "He became a speaking spirit." Man's speech reveals his thoughts. Man has within him a special soul, and that soul's power reveals itself through speech. Also, man is a social creature, which is made possible by speech.

But, speech is a terrifying and horrible thing when used impurely. This is why *Chazal* speak so strongly of the evils of *Lashon Ha'ra*. When one corrupts the power of speech, he corrupts the essence of the human being.

Chief among all illnesses are those which come from unhealthy speech. All other faults stem from there. When man is worthy, he radiates the light of Torah on his surroundings. When he is unworthy, there will (G-d forbid) be *Tzara'at* in his house. (*Ha'Torah Ha'go'ellet* Vol. II p.134)

## Elsewhere in the Torah . . .

Rabbah bar Machsaya said that Rav Chama bar Guria said that [the sage] Rav said: One who gives a gift to his fellow is obligated to inform him, as it is written (*Shmot* 31:13), ["You shall speak to *Bnei Yisrael*, saying, 'However, you must observe My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations,] to know that I am *Hashem*, Who makes you holy.'" *Hashem* said to Moshe, "I have a good gift in My treasure house. Its name is *Shabbat*, and I wish to give it to *Yisrael*. Go tell them!"

[The *Gemara* continues:] But did not Rav Chama bar Chanina say, "If one gives a gift to his fellow, he does not need to inform him"? There is no contradiction. One [the latter] is speaking of when it will come to light anyway; one [the former] is speaking of when it will not come to light."

[The *Gemara* concludes:] But, *Shabbat* will come to light! [Perhaps the *Gemara* means that *Bnei Yisrael* will see that the day is different when no *Mahn* falls.] Nevertheless, its reward will not come to light. (*Shabbat* 10b)

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) asks: All *Mitzvot* have rewards! Why does the *Gemara* single out *Shabbat*?

He explains: It is true that the *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 39b) says: "There is not a single *Mitzvah* on which *Techiyat Ha'metim* / the Resurrection of the Dead does not hang." Every *Mitzvah* brings a person to *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come. However, Moshe was not required to specifically inform *Bnei Yisrael* of that reward, because the reward merely follows from the *Mitzvah*; the reward is not the essence of the *Mitzvah* and, therefore, was not the "gift" that *Hashem* was giving when He gave the *Mitzvah*.

*Shabbat* is unique in that *Shabbat* is in *Olam Ha'ba*. The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 57b) says, "*Shabbat* is a microcosm of the World-to-Come." Also (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a), "[*Olam Ha'ba* is] a day which is entirely *Shabbat*." When *Hashem* gave the *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat*, He gave the gift of *Olam Ha'ba*. That connection is not obvious; rather, the true nature of the gift that is *Shabbat* is hidden in *Hashem's* treasure house. Therefore, *Bnei Yisrael* needed to be informed of the gift they were receiving. (*Chiddushei Aggadot*)

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– Continued from facing page –

R' Horowitz continues: A person who feels sick is more likely to follow a regimen of medications than a person who is told that he is sick, but who has no symptoms. The same thing is true of a person who feels that his soul is unhealthy; he is more susceptible to being healed than someone who is at peace with his spiritual level.

Perhaps, writes R' Horowitz in light of the foregoing, Rabbi Alexandri used to circulate around Tzippori dispensing *Mussar* and *Tochachah* / rebuke to the townspeople for speaking *Lashon Ha'ra* and otherwise misusing the power of speech. But, he noticed that it was having no or little effect. Therefore, he tried a new tactic: he acted like a peddler who was selling the elixir of life. He convinced people that he had something they wanted, and they became more open to his teachings. After all, who does not want the elixir of life?

How did Rabbi Alexandri come to the realization that he needed to change tactics? It was from the words of King David in *Tehilim*: “Who is the man who desires life? . . . Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.” Why did King David include the question, “Who is the man who desires life”? He could have just told us: “Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.” But, King David was teaching the above lesson. He was instructing that before you lecture people about misusing the gift of speech, make them feel like they are lacking something (*i.e.*, the chance for long life) and that you can give them what they desire.

R' Horowitz explains further: Rabbi Yannai had been bothered by the same question: Why did King David start with a question? After meeting “the peddler,” Rabbi Alexandri, Rabbi Yannai understood the verse for the first time.

R' Horowitz concludes: In our verse, too, there seem to be superfluous words – “This shall be the law of the *Metzora* . . .” The Torah could leave out those words and just tell what the law of the *Metzora* is, *i.e.*, what *Korbanot* he must bring to achieve atonement. But, the Torah wants us to question: Why are these words here? What do they teach? They are here, says the *Midrash*, to make us focus on the word “*Metzora*,” so we discover that it is a contraction of “*Motzi Shem Ra*” / one who speaks *Lashon Ha'ra* and gives other people a bad name. In this way, because we questioned, we will realize on our own, and we will remember, how terrible are the consequences of misusing one's gift of speech.

(*Lakachat Mussar*)

**“Be careful with a light *Mitzvah* as with a weighty *Mitzvah*.”**

**(*Avot* ch.2)**

R' Chaim of Volozhin *z"l* (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes: Our Sages instruct us to perform a *Mitzvah She'lo L'shmah* / not with the correct intention if we cannot perform it *L'shmah* / with the correct intention. The former, writes R' Chaim, is what our *Mishnah* describes as a “light” *Mitzvah*, while the latter is described as a “weighty” *Mitzvah*. Be careful even with a “light” *Mitzvah*, for even its reward is very great.

(*Ruach Chaim*)

**“This shall be the law of the *Metzora* . . .” (14:2)**

*Midrash Rabbah* relates: A peddler circulated in the towns surrounding Tzippori proclaiming: “Who wants to buy the elixir of life?” [Tzippori was a major city in the Galilee during and after the Second Temple period.]

The Sage Rabbi Yannai met him and said, “Sell it to me!”

The peddler took out a Book of *Tehilim* and showed Rabbi Yannai the verses (34:13-14), “Who is the man who desires life? . . . Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.”

Rabbi Yannai said, “All my days, I did not know the simple meaning of this verse until this peddler arrived and informed me. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu warns *Yisrael*: ‘This shall be the law of the *Metzora*’ -- a contraction of ‘*Motzi Shem Ra*’ / one who gives others a bad name.” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Yisrael Ze'ev Halevi Horowitz *z"l* (1778-1861; rabbi of Sátoraljaújhely (“Uhel”), Hungary; later settled in Teveryah, *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: A story very similar to this appears in the *Gemara* (*Avodah Zarah* 19b), but there the person traveling between the towns is not described as a peddler; rather he is called Rabbi Alexandri. Why is Rabbi Alexandri described as a peddler? Moreover, what exactly did Rabbi Yannai learn from this encounter that he found so meaningful?

R' Horowitz explains: On *Pesach*, we engage in various activities -- for example, eating *Karpas*, covering and uncovering the *Matzah* -- in order to prompt children to ask questions. But why? Why do we not just lecture our children about the Exodus and the associated miracles?

The answer is that it is well known that a person retains information better when he is curious about it, when he has a desire to learn that information. The story of the Exodus is the foundation of our *Emunah* / faith in the G-d of the world; it is the basis for the entire Torah. The Torah wants us to teach the lessons of the Exodus to our children and it wants our children to retain those lessons. Therefore, we are commanded to transmit the lessons via questions and answers, prompting our children's curiosity and then satisfying their desire to know, so they remember.

R' Horowitz continues: The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 84a) relates: The Sage Rabbi Elazar was sitting before the Sage Rabbi Yochanan. After each teaching that Rabbi Yochanan taught, Rabbi Elazar said, “I know a source that supports your teaching.” Rabbi Yochanan became angry. “Don't you realize I already know I am correct?” he asked. “When [my student, the Sage Rabbi Shimon] the son of Lakish was alive, he would challenge each of my teachings with 24 questions, and I would give him 24 answers, and that way the teaching was clarified.” [Until here from the *Gemara*.] This, too, demonstrates the value that our Sages placed on learning through questions and answers, writes R' Horowitz. – Continued on facing page –