

## פ' מצורע תשפ"ד

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### **KIDDUSH LEVONO**

Rav Sternbuch noted this past Motzaei Shabbos that the moon for *kiddush levono* was unlike one he had ever seen, and that the coming week would be a difficult one. Upon being asked whether it was important to know in advance about negative decrees, Rav Sternbuch responded that the very fact that you know something bad may happen is a positive thing. This is presumably because this information enables us to mitigate the trait of justice and overturn evil decrees by repenting, remedying what needs to be rectified, and strengthening our *emuna* and *bitochon*. Subsequently, upon being told about the looming Iranian threat, Rav Sternbuch – like the whole of *klal Yisroel* – said *Tehilim*.

Yesterday (Monday) morning, upon being asked for a *brocho* by a visitor, Rav Sternbuch responded that the whole of *am yisroel* is need of a *brocho*. This morning, when Rav Sternbuch was asked what he had to say about the current situation, he responded: “And you shall fear your God” (i.e. fear sin but not anyone or anything else).

### **THE PARASITES ARGUMENT**

“*This shall be the law (toras) of the metzora*” (14:2)

The commentators struggle to explain the rationale for the commandment requiring the *leviyim* to shave their hair. However, “the Torah of the *metzora*” teaches us that a *ben Torah* must be willing to be treated like an outcast. Even when he is derided for living a supposedly unproductive parasitic lifestyle, or pressurized to learn a trade, he should not let this make any impression on him. He must be willing to endure humiliation like a *metzora* and not let this affect his pride at being a soldier in Hashem's army.

The *kohanim* also did not “work for a living” and owned no property. In fact, they were totally dependent on others for their livelihood. For basic food they received *terumos*, for meat *zro'ah lechayayim* and *keivo*, and *reishis hagez* for clothes. They were complete “*shnorers*”. One might have expected *shevet levi*, the elite of the nation, who were chosen for *avodas hakodesh* because they did not participate in the *chet ho'egel*, to have enjoyed a more respectable material status, but their main reward is set aside in the World to Come, and their material situation in this world is only for their benefit, allowing them, as it does, to dedicate themselves to *ruchniyus* and *avodas Hashem*.

The Rambam notes (at the end of *Shmita Veyovel*) that someone who dedicates his life to learning and *avodas Hashem* acquires the status of a *levi* and becomes *kodesh kodoshim*. His main reward is in the World to Come. As for this world, although he is assured that if he has the appropriate level of *bitochon*, he will not want for anything, there is no promise that his *parnosso* will come honorably, and he may have to suffer disgrace, and be taunted for scrounging off others. The *possuk* tells us that such is the Torah of the *metzora*, someone who wants to earn the Crown of Torah must be willing to suffer disgrace like a *metzora*, and the Torah becomes most entrenched amongst such people.

*Ba'alei teshuva* who have become *bnei Torah*, rejected by their families and treated as outcasts, should also be inspired by the knowledge that they are fulfilling the instruction of this *possuk* literally. By being willing to undergo such humiliation for the sake of Hashem and the merit of serving Him, they acquire the *keser Torah*, become close to Hashem and receive His blessings in the merit of their willingness to live like a *metzora*.

## REPENTANCE FOR *LOSHON HORO*

The merits of a person who speaks *loshon horo* are transferred to the person he spoke against, and the sins of the latter are transferred to the person who spoke *loshon horo* (see *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaar HaKeniah*, chap. 7). However, repentance is always possible even for major sins like *loshon horo*, and when the *baal lashon hara* repents, all his merits revert back to him, and according to some commentators, the previous victim who in the interim has accumulated more merits due to the transfer does not lose those merits following the culprit's repentance; instead, both victim and repentant culprit receive an equal reward, for the Creator has plenty of reward in store for everybody.

As part of the repentance process, the Chofetz Chaim writes (4:12) that if the victim of *loshon horo* is unaware of what the perpetrator said, the latter is still obliged to tell the victim what he said and to request his forgiveness.

The Chofetz Chaim asked Rav Yisroel Salanter for an approbation for his *sefer*. After perusing it in depth, Rav Yisroel told the author that everything he had written was true except for the above *halocho*. In his opinion, it is forbidden to do this because telling the victim about the perpetrator's slanderous statements against him would hurt the victim. The Chofetz Chaim, for his part, did not change his mind, disagreeing with this argument. However, he suggested that Rav Yisroel nevertheless write a *haskomo* stating that all the *halochos* in the *sefer* are correct except that one, but Rav Yisroel responded that he could not do that, since many people do not read the wording of *haskomos*, and therefore people might receive the mistaken impression that he agreed with everything in the *sefer* including that *halocho*.

Rav Dessler wrote to Rav Sternbuch in a letter that in his opinion the *halocho* on this issue follows Rav Yisroel Salanter, and people should act accordingly.

## ENTRENCHED HABITS

*He shall be brought [vehuvo] to the kohen (14:2)*

The commentators explain that the word *vehuvo* implies that the *metzora* had to be brought to the *kohen* even against his will. Why would anyone pass away the chance of escaping the physical and emotional suffering endured by the *metzora* by being declared *tohor* by the *kohen*?

This shows that a person living with *tumoh* can become so accustomed to it that he finds it difficult to change and start to live a life of *tahara*. Similarly, once a person becomes used to speaking *loshon horo* he finds it difficult to overcome this habit.

The Alter of Kelm noted that just like the gravity of a physical disease can be measured by the extent to which doctors are preoccupied by it, so too if the Torah sets aside two *parshiyos* discussing *hilchos tzora'as* which stems *loshon horo*, that is indicative of the great danger posed by that sin.

## IMMERSION IN THE MIKVAH

*And immerse himself in water, and become clean. (14:8). Sifro: even in a mikvah.*

The medrash says that immersing in a mikvah is a divine decree, and the Rambam (end of *hilchos Mikvo'os*) and the Chinuch (*mitzvah* 173) add that this act depends on a person's intention and devotion. In other words, when immersing oneself in a mikvah one has to have thoughts of repentance and consider himself to have become born-again, just like the world consisted completely of water before man was created, as it says, "and the spirit of Hashem was hovering over the face of the water" (*Bereishis* 1:2). In other words, water signifies renewal. Although immersion in a mikveh is valid even if the person does not have such thoughts, nevertheless the quality of purity that Hashem showers on a person who immerses in the mikvah depends on the nature of his thoughts.

Therefore, even if a person goes to the mikvah every day, he should have thoughts of repentance and renewal every time, so that he can merit attaining appropriate purity.

## RELATIVE EFFORTS IN TORAH STUDY

*If he is poor and his means are not sufficient (14:21)*

The type of sacrifice that was brought depended on a person's financial situation. For the poorest, even a *korban minchah* of flour and oil was sufficient. Hashem does not expect more from us than we are capable of giving. This does not apply only in the financial sense. In all areas of *avodas Hashem*, we are only judged on the basis of our own specific talents and capabilities.

For example, the reward of someone who overcomes an inborn restlessness or less-than-average intellectual ability to apply himself to learning Torah, eventually becoming a *talmid chochom*, is much greater than that of someone with a perceptive mind and a temperament conducive to protracted periods of study, who only learns for a few hours a day.

The Ohr Sameach, Rav Meir Simcha, said that in addition to quantitative *bittul Torah*, there is also such a concept as qualitative *bittul Torah*. This takes place when someone does not learn enough *be'iyun* (in depth). How much in-depth study a person is supposed to accomplish depends on his abilities.

It is brought down that the Vilna Gaon learned more during the *Sefirah* period than the rest of the year as a way of preparation for *kabbolas haTorah*. On *erev* Yom Kippur, the Vilna Gaon made a *cheshbon hanefesh* about how many minutes during the previous year he had been *mevatel Torah* according to his standards. We see that the Gaon was particular at all times about not being *mevatel* even a minute, so it is not likely that his intensification of his Torah learning during the *Sefirah* period consisted of a quantitative difference; rather, this increase must have related to the *quality* of his learning.

## MESSAGE FROM HEAVEN

*Something like a lesion has appeared to me in the house (14:34)*

The Torah uses the phrase "something like a lesion" rather than simply "a lesion", to teach us that even though the lesion appears to be a bad thing, it is actually for the person's

good, since thereby the person will be careful from uttering forbidden speech and repent until the lesion has been removed.

The Vilna Gaon wrote that it is preferable to engage in the self-abnegation of refraining from forbidden speech rather than fasting and other forms of self-denial.

Rav Chaim Berlin and Rav Itzele Blazer made a pact that whoever died first would appear to the other one in a dream and tell him about what was happening in the judgement before the Heavenly Court. Rav Itzele died first leaving a will that no eulogies should be made for him after his death. Rav Shmuel Salant ruled that they were bound by this will, but Rav Berlin, the good friend of the deceased, decided that even though based on his will his late friend should not be praised at all, he nevertheless aroused the public by telling them what they were now missing with Rav Itzele's passing.

Rav Berlin related that Rav Itzele had come to him in a dream thanking him for honoring his request, and that he had not been given permission to appear to him in a dream until *Shabbos*. Rav Chaim Berlin then asked Rav Itzele what was happening with his judgement before the Heavenly Court. Rav Itzele replied that nobody in this world could fathom the depth of Divine Judgment. They were particularly exacting about forbidden speech, even in the case of a *talmid chochom* with many merits (this is because a person who learns Torah has to be especially careful to keep his mouth holy and not defile it with forbidden speech).

## HOLY WALLS

*And I will put the plague of tzora'as in a house of the land of your possession (14:34)*

If a person engages in forbidden speech in his house, its very walls absorb the *tumoh* created by his words. Conversely, words of Torah and *mussar* spoken in our homes permeate the air and sanctify the walls, transforming it into something resembling a *beis hamikdash*, a *mikdash me'at*.

This phenomenon explains both the great sanctity of *botei keneisiyos* and *botei medrash*, which absorb so many *divrei kedusho*, and the reason why forbidden speech in those places is considered such a terrible transgression, and the equivalent of being *metame* the *mikdash*.

## NEIGHBORS

*The kohen shall order that they remove the stones upon which the lesion is (14:40)*

The *medrash* says that the neighbor of the *metzora* helps him to remove the stones of their joint wall which contains the *nega*, and cites this situation as an example of the maxim "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor".

Someone who finds himself with neighbors who habitually engage in forbidden speech, or who lead a licentious or overly materialistic lifestyle has to move elsewhere, lest he becomes enmeshed in their pernicious habits. If he does not do so, he himself will be punished together with his neighbor, because he made light of the prohibition not to live next to a wicked person.

When choosing a place to live, it is paramount to find a group of neighbors who will influence one only for the good.