

פ' תזריע-מצורע תשפ"ה

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, Gaavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email ravsternbuchtorah@gmail.com

SIYUM

Speaking at a *siyum* Rav Sternbuch once said the following. The joy we feel upon completing a *masechta* creates a great sanctification of the Divine name, since we thereby prove our love and joy for the holy Torah. It is therefore a time of great joy for all the participants, and everybody should feel take great delight in this *kiddush Hashem*.

The non-religious pity us for the yoke that we bear to keep the Torah, and how much happier we would be if we adopted their way of life. In truth, the Torah is the joy of our life, and it is they who have to be pitied. By participating in the *simcha* of Torah we prove how “happy we are and how good is our portion, and pleasant is our lot and beautiful is our inheritance” that we have merited to receive the Torah whose holiness we cannot fathom.

Moreover, through our joy in a *siyum* we inactivate the trait of justice and the accusations of the *soton*, because it is brought down that when we prove how much we love the Torah, this subdues the trait of justice and the prosecuting angels.

Bitul Torah is considered a great sin. This is because if a person would be aware that every moment of Torah study is of greater value than all the gold and diamonds in the world, he would not be wasting his time. By idling his time away, he is demonstrating that he does not believe in the value of Torah, and is therefore guilty of treating it with contempt.

During the current period, leading up towards *kabbolas haTorah*, it is extremely worthwhile to start setting aside the same time of day for one's *kevius*, and not give up this sanctified time even for very urgent matters. To do this consistently and tenaciously seems like a very difficult task, but once one gets used to it, it does not feel like a burden. On the contrary, those hours become a source of great joy and fulfillment.

YOKE AND SERVITUDE

And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised (12:3)

The medrash says, “If man is worthy, he is told ‘You preceded the whole of Creation’”. This implies that even after his *bris*, a person has to work to become worthy of becoming the pinnacle of Creation.

Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Dessler that for a person to become elevated and truly earn the title of “man” he must overcome and sanctify his animalistic desires and constantly subject himself to the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*. Someone who lives without such a yoke, and learns and performs *mitzvos* only when it is convenient, sleeps and reads newspapers whenever he feels like it, eats and drinks to his heart's content at any time, leads an animalistic existence even if he is punctilious about mitzvah observance, because his immoderation is akin to the lifestyle of animals who do not overcome their desires.

SEGULA FOR SONS, RIGHTEOUS CHILDREN AND WEALTH

Rav Sternbuch's father said in the name of a great *rov* that a *sandak* only benefits from the physical blessings associated with being a *sandak* if he pays for the costs of the *seudah*. If he does not do so, he only enjoys the spiritual blessings, the reasoning being that covering the costs of the *seudah* is an integral part of being a “*ba'al bris*” who enjoys the advantages stated in *Chazal* of being a *sandak*.

Moreover, added Rav Sternbuch's father, anyone who pays for the costs of the meal, and all the more so if he is physically involved in preparing it, has the status of a “quasi-*sandak*”, who enjoys part of the benefits associated with being a *sandak*. This is especially so when he pays the costs of the *seudah* to a ben Torah, thereby assisting him in his learning. This is a wonderful *segula* for wealth and righteous children.

We have a tradition that it is also a great *segula* for having sons, since by paying the costs of the meal the person proves his love of the mitzvah of *bris mila*, and how much he yearns to perform it on his

own. Hashem therefore rewards him with a son to provide him the opportunity to do so. Rav Sternbuch recalls that in his youth many people were eager to pay for the costs of a *seudas bris*, since people realized what a great *segula* it was, but in the past generation this seems to have receded, and it would be worthwhile to reinvigorate this great *mitzvah*.

A *seudas bris mila* is compared to eating a *korbon*, and it is worthwhile to have a proper meal with meat and wine. Women used to have the custom of cooking and baking the meal on their own, and when preparing the meal they should say “*leshem seudas bris mila*”, like we say “*leshem Shabbos kodesh*” when preparing *Shabbos* meals.

YEARNING FOR MITZVOS EQUIVALENT TO PERFORMING THEM

In *Sidduro Shel Shabbos* Rav Chaim of Czeranowicz writes that Avrohom had an intense yearning to perform the *mitzvah* of *bris mila* as soon as Yitzchok was born, but did not do so because he had been commanded to wait until the eighth day. However, Hashem deemed it as if he had actually performed this *mitzvah* each and every moment of those eight days.

This teaches us a principle that applies to all *mitzvos*: whenever a person yearns to perform a *mitzvah* he receives his reward as if he has performed the actual *mitzvah* itself.

Rav Sternbuch’s mother would complete all her *Shabbos* preparations on Friday about an hour before *Shabbos* came in. The table would be set, with the wine, *challos* and candles all set in their places. The children would all be dressed in their *Shabbos* clothes, and Mrs. Sternbuch would wait eagerly for the time that she could already light candles and accept *kedushas Shabbos* on herself. She would say that when a person waits for *Shabbos* in eager anticipation, that itself accords honor to *Shabbos* and is a *segula* for meriting righteous children. Accepting *Shabbos* early is also a sensible way of avoiding the tension and anger prevalent in some households in the final period leading up to *Shabbos* (although one should not of course light candles before *plag hamincha*).

Similarly, if a person resolves to do a *mitzvah*, he is blessed by Hashem and receives a reward even for the actual resolution (see Rashi on *Devorim* 15:10). For example, if someone undertakes to start and complete a *masechta*, Hashem blesses him and gives him a reward as if he has already started to sit and learn.

CREATING CHILDREN

In the beginning of the *parashah*, the Torah talks about a woman giving birth to a “male” and “female”, but then it says, “when the days of her purification have been completed, whether for a son or for a daughter . . .” (12:6). Only when a parent follows the path of purity, thereby setting a good example for his offspring, will his children desire to follow that path. Only then may the child be termed a “son” or “daughter” (not merely a “male” or “female”) who has a relationship with his parent and is likely to want to continue that relationship for a lifetime.

NO LEAPFROGGING

One as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering (12:8). Rashi: *The Torah places the oloh before the chatos only for the purpose of instructing how they must be read in the Torah . . . but the chatos is brought before the oloh*

Why, in fact, is the *olah* mentioned before the *chatos* in this *passuk*?

In principle, the *olah*, which is consumed entirely by the fire on the *Mizbe’ach*, and symbolizes complete subservience to Hashem and abstinence from the vanities of this world, is the superior offering, and is therefore written first. In practice, though, the *chatos* is offered first, because once a person has sinned, his first task is to cleanse himself and atone for his past actions. Only then can he advance to the level of the *olah*.

In *avodas Hashem*, it is impossible to leapfrog. The only option is to make step-by-step progress based on one's current situation and level.

PURE SPEECH

"And it forms a lesion of tzora'as on the skin of his flesh" (13:2)

Rav Itzele Peterburger appeared after his death in a dream to his close friend, Rav Chaim Berlin, and told him that the heavenly judgement is so severe in a way that no one in this world can imagine, and they are especially particular about forbidden speech. Even a *talmid chochom* who has many *melitzei yosher* (defending agents), if he has sinned with his tongue, they are very particular about it. In other words, even his defending agents will be of no avail to him.

The reason for this appears to be that specifically a *talmid chochom*, who has learnt Torah with his mouth, has to be especially careful about maintaining the sanctity of his mouth, so that it does not become defiled with forbidden speech. As the *Or Hachaim* (*Bamidbar* 26:23) notes in the name of Rabbenu Yonah, a person's mouth is like a holy vessel which has been designated to become sanctified with words of Torah, and if he defiles it, the merit of his Torah becomes a prosecutor, and cannot defend him as a defending agent against the sin of *loshon hora*.

This also helps to explain something Rav Sternbuch heard from Rav Zvi Hirsh Faber in the name of the Vilna Gaon. He said that even when it is permitted to speak *loshon hora* for a permitted constructive purpose (*leto'eles*), where possible, one should hint with one's hands rather than verbalize a statement. He brought proof from Yonason who was permitted to tell Dovid that Shoul was seeking to kill him, but instead, even though it was mitzvah to make the statement, he conveyed the message by a hint (throwing arrows), rather than saying a message verbally.

Since a person's mouth is a holy vessel designed to speak words of Torah, it must be preserved from becoming contaminated by forbidden speech. Therefore, even when it is permitted to speak *loshon hora leto'eles* one should endeavor to keep one's mouth pure even from such speech¹.

UNDOING LOSHON HORO

"And it forms [Vehoyo] a lesion of tzora'as (13:2)

The word "*vehoyo*" is always used in the context of a joyful situation. What joy was there to be found in the intense physical and emotional suffering endured by the *metzoro*?

The very existence of *tzora'as* proves the closeness of Hashem to us, Who cleanses us through miraculous means. Even though the *metzoro* suffers terribly we feel joy about the special connection to Hashem which facilitates the atonement of someone who has deviated from the path of Torah and spoken *loshon hora* (see also Alshich on this *possuk*).

Tzoraas is not leprosy or another physical disease but a purely spiritual one (see Rambam *Tumas Tzora'as* 16:10, *Sforno* and *Alshich* on this *possuk*). Nowadays, we are not on the level to witness the signs of *zora'as* with our physical senses, but the *Shlo Hakodosh* states in the name of the Zohar that these signs are still very much there because our physical limbs and sinews have their spiritual counterparts in our *neshomos*, and when we speak *loshon hora* they become contaminated. In the World to Come this will be evident for all to see, unless we cleanse our soul in time in order to return it to our Maker in the same unsullied state in which we received it.

Repentance is possible even for the biggest sins, such as *loshon hora*. If a person undertakes to bridle his mouth and ears, Hashem will have pity on him and help him. Moreover, the Vilna Gaon

¹ But not of course, at the expense of not conveying the message clearly, when this is necessary, because that could in itself be sinful, if the message has to be conveyed *leto'eles* for whatever reason, subject to all the conditions for making statements *leto'eles*.

writes in a letter that bridling one's mouth and desires in general achieves greater atonement than fasting and self-flagellation.

Rav Yehuda Segal said that he personally knew people who had undertaken to learn *hilchos loshon horo* every day and had experienced great salvations.

HUMBLING THE *METZORO*

"He shall cover himself down to his mustache and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!" (13:45)

The gemoro (Sota 32b) explains that the *metzoro* is obligated to announce to everybody that he is *tome* in order to announce his misfortune to the public so that they will pray for his benefit and ask Hashem to have mercy on him.

In the case of other misfortunes, everybody prays for themselves and goes to a *talmid chochom* to ask him to pray for him. Why was the misfortune of the *metzoro* singled out from other misfortunes, and he is instructed to announce his misfortune to the public?

It may be suggested that it is for the purpose of achieving atonement for the *metzoro*. The source of the sin of *loshon hora* lies in pride, and this can be rectified by becoming humbled and notifying one's misfortune to others. He is therefore required to ask everybody to seek mercy for him and seek assistance to be saved. This forces him to become humbled and feel himself to be despised by seeking public assistance, so that he will no longer be haughty against the public and speak *loshon hora* about them.

SPEECH

He shall dwell isolated (13:46)

The main aspect distinguishing man from animals is the power of intelligent speech (*ruach memalolo*). By uttering just a few words, a person has the ability to prohibit a certain object throughout the world in the form of a vow. In this week's *parsha* the *kohen's* indispensable verbal declaration of "*tome*" or "*tohor*" decides the future status of a *metzoro*.

Rav Yisroel Salanter said that *parashas Tazria* follows *parashas Shmini*, which deals with forbidden food, in order to emphasize that we must be as careful about the forbidden speech, which comes out of our mouths, as we are about preventing forbidden food going into it.

Rav Moshe Schneider told Rav Sternbuch that he asked the Chofetz Chaim why he did not emphasize in his *sefer* that the Rambam writes explicitly that someone who habitually speaks *loshon horo* loses his portion in the world to come. The Chofetz Chaim answered that he did not want to drop this "bombshell" on those learning his *sefer*. Rav Schneider explained that such a statement could cause a sinner to become so disheartened as to lose any motivation for improving his ways at all, figuring that he has nothing to lose by continuing in his evil ways. The *Maharsho* in *Bovo Basro* (119a) makes a similar point. He says that *Tzlofchod* desecrated *Shabbos* for the sake of Heaven in order to demonstrate that even after death had been decreed on all males over the age of twenty after the *chet hameraglim*, any future sins were not "swallowed up" by this decree, and any additional transgressions would have to be punished in addition to and irrespective of the previously existing punishment.

Rav Schneider added that when one mentions the severity of the sin, one has to emphasize at the same time that repentance for even severe sins such as *avoda zoro* is effective. Repentance may be more difficult in such cases, but where there is a will, there is a way.

A person's home is like a miniature *Beis Hamikdosh*, and the words he speaks are absorbed by its atmosphere. Words of Torah and *musar* constantly augment the inherent *kedusho* of a Jewish home, whereas words of *loshon hora* create the form of *tumo'h* known as *tzora'as*. People from previous generations would find it inconceivable that using various previously unknown technological methods a person could make himself heard to his friend at the other end of the world.

Similarly, we must realize that our words are not only captured, but also absorbed, by the walls of our homes.

In this vein too, can we understand the *Chazal* (*Megilla* 29a) that the *botei keneisiyos* and *botei medrash* of Bavel will be transferred to *Eretz Yisroel* in the future. This is not referring to a physical relocation, but rather to the permanent sanctity created there over the generations as a result of the Torah and prayers absorbed in those places, a sanctity reminiscent of *kedushas Eretz Yisroel*, and which will be transferred to there in the future.

The Vilna Gaon in his famous letter tells the female members of his family they should rather pray alone at home than go to *shul*, because it would be impossible for them not to hear some *loshon horo* there. Similarly, Rav Dessler told Rav Sternbuch that the women in Kelm never went to *shul*, because it would have been very difficult for them to keep away from women who spoke *loshon horo*. In previous generations the home was sanctified, and only those who left its safe quarters would be exposed to this most serious sin, but nowadays both the atmosphere in our homes and the technological means of communications are very different, so that the only way to be saved from it is to remain strong and teach our families *hilchos loshon horo*, to emphasize the severity of this transgression and the *tumoh* it creates, and the great rewards awaiting those who refrain from it.

PHYSICAL AND MORAL DISEASES

“All the days the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell isolated; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (13:46)

The Ramban (on *Bereishis* 19:17) explains that the Torah requires the *metzoro* to be distanced away from people and remain on his own, outside the camp, because looking at a *metzoro* or thinking about him is dangerous in terms of becoming infected by his disease. The Ramban adds that this is a general principle with regard to any infectious disease. When a person thinks a lot about it or looks at a person infected with it, he is likely to become infected because of the thought or sight. Based on this, the Ramban explains why Lot and his family members were prohibited from looking at the punishment of the people of Sodom, namely, that they would not be affected by their disease, “because looking at the air of a plague and all infectious diseases is very harmful and causes a person to become infected, and the same applies to thinking about them”.

This Ramban teaches us that although we are certainly obligated during a time of plague to take all necessary precautions, on the other hand, one must not become afraid or entertain exaggerated concerns about becoming infected with the disease, because this itself can be dangerous. In general, fear of death is worse than death itself, and one must make sure not to be afraid of the disease, but only of the Creator.

Furthermore, the Ramban’s explanation is not limited to physical contamination, but can also be applied to the influence of a *metzoro’s tumah* on his environment. It is forbidden to look at a wicked person’s face (more than fleetingly), and that is why the Torah removed the *metzoro*, who spoke *loshon hora*, away from people to be on his own, outside the camp, so that no one would look at him and come become infected by his *tumah*².

Rav Sternbuch recalls how the late Rav Shmuel Yosef Rabinov was asked about the issue of participating in Israeli elections. He replied that without going into the specifics of this topic, he was surprised at how anyone could actually sit together with these people, all the more so look them in the face, since they are heretics responsible for the spiritual death of thousands of Jewish souls (he was talking in the early days of the State), and just seeing them has a detrimental effect on the soul, all the more so is it certainly harmful to sit together with them.

Part of the preparation for receiving the Torah consists in separating ourselves from the wicked. Thus, before *matan Torah* the Jewish nation separated itself from the *erev rav* (see Ramban

² See also Michtav Me’eliyahu Vol. I, pages 155-157

on *Shemos* 19, 1-2), and we say in our prayers every day, “and He has separated us from those that have gone astray, and has given us the Torah of truth”. In other words, only once we have severed any connection with those who have gone astray (both wicked heretics and those who are less blameworthy) can we merit receiving the Torah of truth, because in order to attain sanctity we have to become completely detached from *tumah*.

We are situated in an exile amongst erring and wicked brethren. A *tzaddik* once said that in the *musaf* prayer we say, “Due to our sins we have been exiled from our country”, but nowadays we have not been exiled “from our country”, but to rather “to our country”, because in Hashem’s Palace decrees are enacted against the Torah, and there is no greater exile than that in the Holy land.

IMMERSION IN THE MIKVAH

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

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 chacham*, 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 a concept of 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 preparing 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 level. Clearly 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.