

THE SAITSKIY FAMILY EDITION



PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA EDITION – VOLUME 15, ISSUE 14 – 5TH OF IYAR, 5785/MAY 3RD, 2025

TORAH QUESTION OF THE WEEK BY RAV MOSHE KLEIN: - HOW TO SOLVE THE LASHON HARA PLAGUE ONCE AND FOR ALL

Last week's question: What is the whole idea about Lashon Hara (evil speech) and Tzara'as? There are so many programs and conversations about it. What is the big deal about saying something negative about another person?

Answer: The truth is that every time one speaks Lashon Hara, it's really an expression of an emotion or a thought. This should be our discussion. The *issur* (prohibition) of Lashon Hara is how one expresses these negative emotions and thoughts. Until you get there, it's not considered Lashon Harah. Yet, if we want to fix the issue, we must look at the source of the emotions that the Lashon Harah speakers possess.

First, let's mention the teaching of **Rav Aharon Kolter**, ZT"l, (*Mishnas Rav Aharon*, 3 – p.114). He writes that even if we look at it philosophically, certain things happen with speech. If one doesn't keep a promise, they are not a trust-worthy person in the secular world. In Judaism, however, words accomplish a lot. If one says "*harei at mekudeshes li*" to a girl, it constitutes a marriage, and the lady can't marry anyone else.

Also, if one makes a *neder* (takes an oath) regarding something – they now may not transgress that *neder*. Speech is not just words said with no significance; it's actually very strong tool that uphold requirements. He also writes (quoting **Rabbeinu Bachye** in *Kad Hakemach*) that if one understood the power of speech, they would sooner spend money on nothing rather than speaking. Money is not an item people don't want to waste, but people would be more lip-fisted with words than with money.

Let's think: the times we have felt good about ourselves is usually when someone has given us a genuine compliment. We've also felt crushed when another said a true word that made us feel vulnerable. Positive words can build people, creating a belief system while negative words destroy people, as the words stick to a human being's soul. Sometimes, it's something that was said years or decades ago. These words help us form opinions of ourselves and affect our essence. The positive words we hear create the belief system that we live with. Anyone who honestly analyzes their own life will find how true this is. Our words are so valuable and so powerful; are we ready to say something that can make or break someone?

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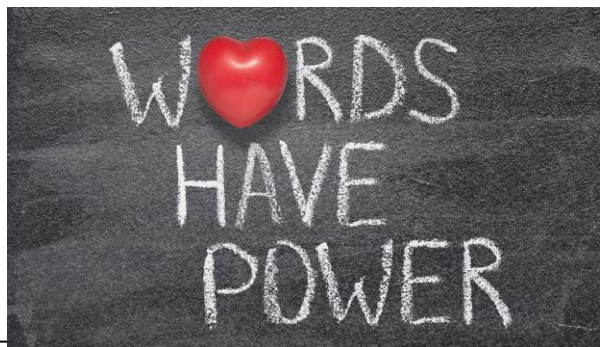
"I CAN'T APPROVE OF YOUR OFFICE GOSSIPING, FRANK... AND AFTER YOU TELL ME THE LATEST I WANT IT TO STOP!"

Let's take a step back and consider the emotions involved. One would never speak negatively about another unless anger spurred him. **Rabbi Chaim Vital**, ZT"l, asks (in *Sha'arei Kedusha*): why is it that Middos (character traits) are not found to be a Mitzvah in the Torah. He explains that middos are just an expression of the soul. One's middos allow them to do the 613 Mitzvos of the Torah. So, when one does not have the proper character trait, it's much, much worse than the *aveirah* (sin) itself.

One who has a poor Middah is plagued in the soul itself, by extension so is one's expression of the Torah and Mitzvos. This is why the Gemara (Shabbos 105b) states: "*When a person becomes angry - that is a form of Avodah Zarah (idol worship).*" We know that Avodah Zarah is worse, so what does it mean? The Gemara (Sotah 71a) writes that a haughty person is like a heretic and deserves to be cut down like an *asheira* tree (idol-worshipping plant).

There's no place in the Torah says one is not allowed to get angry, but an angry person's Mitzvos will not be quality. On the flip side, *anavah* (humility) brings a person to *Ruach Hakodesh* (Divine Spirit). Yet, nowhere does it say in the Torah that one should be humble. However, the Middos one has can catapult their soul to the greatest heights or the lowest depths. Now, we can understand that negative emotions are the lens of a troubled soul; one therefore needs to get to this core before he speaks bad of others. →

TAZRIA-METZORA – ALWAYS USE A FILTER



Rav Vital writes that just as the world was created using four elements – earth, air, fire, and water – so too, each person's Middos are formed using those same elements. When used properly, they spell out Hashem's Name. Yet, when used improperly, they represent the four forms of *tza'aras*. One who is accustomed to saying negative things about others will truthfully find it hard to change. Many of us have heard speeches about Lashon Harah and tried to work on it; then one day we get into a conversation and mess up again. What do we do about it?

When we review the power and potency of speech and how it's an expression of our soul and if we are negative, that this flaw cuts to our core, we will be spurred to truly improve ourselves. The change starts from inside. The moment we start looking at something in a dark way, we should ask ourselves, "Is it worth holding on to this or am I better off trying to run away from such thoughts like the plague?"

When one challenges themselves this way, they will start transitioning into positive modes of thinking. One may not change overnight but the mindset shift of finding the good in others and themselves will begin. This can become truly life-changing.

On a final note, the **Chofetz Chaim**, ZT"l, writes (in *Shemiras Haloshon*) that when one starts thinking about others positively and then start speaking positively, they attract the same kind of attention from Hashem. This is what the **Vilna Gaon** comments on the Pasuk in Mishlei (18:7) that says, "*A fool's mouth is his breakdown, and his lips are a snare for himself.*" The fool only hurts himself with negative thoughts and words. Yet, if someone's mindset is to build people positively, then they attract that kind of energy from *Shomayim* (Heavens) and end up building themselves.

This week's question: The Torah tells us to be Kadosh (holy). What is Kedusha and how does one look at Kedusha in a positive light (when, at glance, it sounds restrictive and so abstract)?

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The laws of the Metzora on the day of his purification are a formula for successful communication vs unsuccessful communication. The Pasuk (Vayikra 14:4) tells us, "*The Kohen should command; and for the person being purified there should be taken two live, pure birds, cedarwood, a crimson wool, and hyssop*". **Rashi** tells us when the Pasuk refers to pure birds, it is signaling to us that since afflictions of *tzara'as* come about because of malicious talk, which is an act of verbal twittering, therefore there is a requirement to have two birds that twitter. Rashi elucidates that the cedarwood is necessary because *tzara'as* comes about through haughtiness. Rashi asks: what is the remedy for someone who is speaking in a way that is malicious and haughty? How can he be cured of his affliction? He should lower himself from his arrogance like a worm and like a hyssop.

Let's put this all together and see the formula for healthy and holy communication. A metzora who has done teshuva and has been cured of his *tza'aras*, as the last part of his purification, takes the representation of his mistake, the twittering birds and the cedarwood and contrasts that with crimson wool and hyssop.

The twittering birds have no filter; they twitter whatever comes to mind indiscriminately. The cedar is a very tall tree - it is high and haughty, like someone who tries to aggrandize himself at someone else's expense and does not have a healthy sense of self-esteem. This can lead them to behave in a high and haughty way. Contrast that to wool dyed red by a certain worm's secretions, and the hyssop which is one of the lowest plants and frequently grows in cracks and crevices. Wool-dyed with worm secretion reminds the metzora where he goes at the end of life, to worms in his grave, so he should never feel higher than anyone else. The hyssop plant will always remain low to the ground which also reminds the metzora to stay humble.

Our relationships are based on the gift of speech that Hashem gave to mankind. How we communicate with the people in our lives is the key to successful and thriving relationships or the opposite. If we take to heart the lessons of the rehabilitated metzora, we can enhance our most important relationship, the relationship we have with our spouses. Whatever we want to communicate to our spouse, it behooves us to keep in mind the message of this parsha. Communication that comes from a place with no filter - just say whatever, whenever, like the twittering of birds - does not work. Unfiltered speech easily becomes toxic, the message of the metzora is to make sure to think before we speak. Communication that comes from an "I-know-better-than-you" place, like the haughtiness of a cedar tree, high above everyone else, also does not work to build relationships.

Only communication that comes from a humble place, like the dyed wool and the hyssop, is the definition of speech where everyone is valued and respected. This type of communication has the power to connect us to our spouses. Stopping ourselves from blurting out whatever comes to mind is not an easy task. Realizing we are valuable even if we don't pretend to know everything and instead communicating from a place of humility takes a lot of effort, but the dividends are worth the effort.

Let's think of communication as a way through which to connect and speak with forethought from a humble place and may Hashem see our efforts and bless our homes with the light of Shalom Bayis!

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Rashi writes that the Parshiyos of Tazria and Metzora are the source of human tumah/impurity (as opposed to the animal tumos listed in last week's Parsha, Shemini). It's interesting to note that all Tumah has its source in death. Tumah came in Gan Eden when Adam and Chava ate from the Eitz Hada'as and brought death into the world, until which there was no such thing as decay. It's strange that when you come to Parshas Tazria, the first tumah that's listed is *yaledes*; when a woman gives birth, she becomes tamei for 40 or 80 days (depending on the kid's gender – girl is 40, boy is 80). Why should one who gave life become tamei? This sounds counterintuitive.

The answer is that there is a big difference between "all dead" and "mostly dead." In Judaism, we don't have "all dead". We only have "mostly dead". *Techiyas Hameisim* means that the dead come back to life; they have a spark inside of them that can return. We never completely die. The Journeys song, "*Conversations in the Womb*" comes to mind where the unborn think their life is ending when they are being born. When we die, we are not dead – we are just living someplace else.

From a woman's point of view, her womb once held life, and it doesn't anymore. Oh, but it's living someplace else, so what's the big deal? Well, the same applies to death in this world. Inside the woman, there's a hollow space where there is no life. One of the reasons why a woman is *tamei* twice longer after having a girl than a boy is that when she was pregnant with a girl, there was a womb within a womb, so it's doubled.

When we speak of death, we mean there is no more life here – and tumah takes its place. Just like in a physical world, nature abhors a vacuum, the same goes for spiritual life. When there is a hollow place with no life, tumah moves in. We look at something like childbirth and say, there is a new life happening, but an aspect of life is lost within the womb. This idea can also serve as a reminder that when we pass away from this world, we move on to another world.

There is a purification process that the Metzora must go through. Part of the process is shaving off all his exposed hair. This includes his hair, his beard, his mustache, and *peyos*. This is the eggshell special, he must appear completely bald. Everything has a reason – nothing is by chance. So, what's the reason for this? The **Sefer Hachinuch** describes this as a case of *Middah-K'neged-Middah*, measure-for-measure. Life has consequences and every action demands an equal and opposite reaction.

When someone speaks Lashon Harah, they create division amongst people. Sometimes a person speaks Lashon Hara about another – let's call him Reuven – and suddenly people start to look at Reuven differently and he doesn't even know what happened. It turns out someone was trash-talking him behind his back and now he is encountering difficulties in social relationships. They call it the "whispering campaign" and one can do very little to not fall victim to it or protect oneself.

As a result of their actions, the one who spreads the Lashon Harah gets afflicted with tza'aras and must now get the taste of what he did to others: be separated and isolated. How does it feel to go outside of the camp and when the speaker sees others coming, he must let them know he is *tamei*. How embarrassing! When one finally straightens themselves out and realizes that it's not nice to say nasty things about people, the person comes back bald. When someone is seen as bald, one looks at them as being weird, possibly pointing at them and snickering.

It's a therapeutic effort wherein one gets to feel what it's like being the person who is an outcast. Jack Handy once said, "*Before you criticize someone, walk a mile in their shoes. That way, if they still want to fight you, you'll be a mile from them, and you'll have their shoes*". The point is to take a moment to consider how our actions are affecting others. We may not realize the things we say and do until we put ourselves in their place and ask, "*how would I like it if that happened to me?*" The way we regain our humanity and our *tahara* is by allowing ourselves to feel the pain of the people we've hurt.



TAZRIA-METZORA: HIDDEN TREASURES

Rashi tells us (Vayikra 14:34) that the Jewish people were informed of a type of tza'aras that would strike their houses. The Emori inhabitants of the land knew of the impending invasion of Eretz Canaan, prompting them to hide their valuables in the walls of their homes. When Bnei Yisrael conquered the land, they took possession of these houses. Later, when the house would be plagued by tza'aras, they would need to vacate and, in some cases, demolish part of the house. In this process of purification, the homeowner would discover the treasures that had been hidden there, providing a silver lining to what had been a difficult experience.

What seems a bit odd is that on the surface it seems that the people who are the ones to get to find these hidden treasures are the people who have moral failings and conduct themselves in anti-social behaviors. Why should THEY be the ones to get the payoff?

Perhaps, the approach to understanding this is as follows. We don't have to assume the only people finding the treasure are those whose houses are coming down with a tza'aras diagnosis. If the family living in the house is meant to find the treasure they will find it - the question is what will be the circumstances that bring the discovery about.

One *middah* that brings tza'aras is stinginess when generosity is called for. On one hand, you have a fellow who understands that everything he owns - his house, his possessions, his status in life - is a blessing from Above for him to use in furthering his growth, his community's growth, and in increasing *Kavod Shamayim*. Naturally, he will wish to share his resources with others. When Hashem sees how His investment is furthering His Ratson (Will), he invests more. Our friend starts requiring more room for his growing family, growing enterprise, and a greater need to give more. He will need a larger house. In the process, he discovers that his Investor has covered the expense with the valuables he discovers in the walls.

However, what if his perspective is faulty? He sees that the assets he has accumulated as an extension of his own self-worth. Without them, he feels that he does not amount to anything. Therefore, he becomes more guarded about them. When neighbors ask if they can borrow an item, he responds that he doesn't have it. This person is unaware of the treasure he has inside of himself.

The process of tza'aras gives him pause as he must bring out all his possessions out of the house; otherwise, they will become tamei. Everything he owns is out there for all to see. He feels so exposed and limited. He feels broken; must break down the walls of his inner beliefs. In this cathartic process, he discovers that his most valuable assets are not the ones that everyone sees, but those hidden inside his walls that only he and Hashem are aware of.



TAZRIA-METZORA - THE POWER OF OUR MOUTHS

CAUTION WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

The **Zohar** explains when a person speaks Lashon Harah, the words go up to Shomayim and when they are about to go to Hashem the angel takes those words and holds on to them. We might think that the angel is our friend. However, it's not so. Later, when we pray for our needs ranging from health to livelihood to *Shalom Bayis/Shidduchim* - the angel throws the Lashon Harah words we said to Hashem with our prayers and the result is one big mix. Then, we wonder why our Tefillos are not being answered. We now see that it's the Lashon Harah we speak that messes it up for us. This is just one of the dangers and harms of speaking evil about others.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (the Father of the Mussar Movement) wrote there is a very important reason why Parshas Shemini which discusses Kashrus (what to eat and not eat) precedes Parshas Tazria (which deals with a Lashon Harah speaker). The reason is to teach us that we must be just as careful with what comes out of our mouths as we are with what goes in. The Torah tells us that as atonement, the person with tza'aras should offer two birds. Birds talk - they chirp all day - and the Mishna (Pirkei Avos) tells us that one who speaks excessively will come to sin, as the Metzora did. Metzora comes from "*Motzi Ra*", bad emerged (from one's mouth). We must be careful what we say.

There is a story of two girls who were speaking Lashon Harah about a third girl who had just gotten engaged. The lady sitting behind them leaned over and told them that it was her son who was engaged to this girl, and she was so glad to have overheard all their earnest remarks about the girl, as now the mother knew to save her son from this relationship, and she was going to break off the shidduch.

The embarrassed girls attempted to convince the woman that they had just been joking and exaggerating, and that really, she was a great girl, but the mother refused to be convinced. The girls began to cry, but the woman remained unmoved. Finally, before getting off the bus, the woman told them that she wasn't the boy's mother, but then added that she could have been. Everything we say and do, writes the Pirkei Avos, is documented and recorded by Hashem. Let's use our mouths to speak words of Torah, Tefillah, and build people through positive speech and compliments.

“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Vayikra 12:3)

The **Mechilta** writes that we can see the greatness of Shabbos in the fact that a baby cannot have a *bris milah* until he has experienced a Shabbos. Since Shabbos is a basic foundation of Judaism, he cannot have a bris until he has gone through a Shabbos. This is difficult to understand. A baby is not capable of understanding Shabbos and is unaware of what day it is. What difference will it make to the baby if he lives through a Shabbos?

The answer is that Shabbos is not only about the physical eating and resting. There is a spiritual enjoyment and tranquility that can be derived from Shabbos. The neshama of the baby can sense this spirituality that is inherent in Shabbos and this has an effect of him. Thus, although the baby is unaware of the physical aspects of Shabbos, it does have a spiritual impact on him and is an important prerequisite for having a bris milah. **Rabbeinu Bachye** (Lech Lecha) explains the idea behind bris milah. He writes that the milah serves as a permanent sign on a person's body of trust in Hashem. Wherever a person goes, he has this special sign with him. The Midrash relates that King David was in the bathhouse and became distressed that he was not able to occupy himself with any Mitzvos. When he realized that he had a bris milah, he was happy because he realized that he was never without mitzvos.

On a deeper level, Rabbeinu Bachye writes that a bris milah brings about an atonement, much like sacrifices do. In fact, we find many similarities between a sacrifice and a bris milah. Just as an animal cannot be offered as a sacrifice until it is eight days old, a baby has a bris milah on the 8th day. Just as the blood of the sacrifice is the catalyst for atonement, so is the blood of milah. Just as the Kohanim had to eat the sacrificial meat to complete the atonement process, so too a bris milah is not complete without the ensuing festive meal. Yet, the bris milah achieves a greater atonement than a sacrifice because the vehicle for this atonement is the person's body, rather than his possessions. Nevertheless, milah is the only time that we are permitted to cause harm to any person. One is never permitted to wound his fellow man or to wound himself. Putting one's life in danger is never allowed.

“If a person will have on the skin of his flesh a s'eis or a sapachas or a baheres, and it will become a tza'aras affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the Priest, or to one of his sons the priests” (ibid.13:2)

Chazal tell us that tzara'as comes as a punishment for seven sins, the most prominent of which is Lashon hara. The Midrash tells the story of a peddler who was going around announcing, “Who wants life?” R' Yanai went over to the man and expressed some interest. The peddler told R' Yanai that what he had was not for a great talmid chacham. R' Yanai insisted so the peddler pulled out a Tehillim and read him the verse: *“Who is the man who desires life? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking falsehood.”*

R' Yanai exclaimed that he had never been able to satisfactorily explain this Pasuk until now. What did he not understand about this? The answer, says the **Kochav M'Yaakov**, is that he thought not speaking Lashon Hara guaranteed a good life in Olam Haba, but not necessarily in this world. Now he understood that avoiding gossip leads to a pleasant life in this world as well.

Many times, people get stressed out and cause great pain through their speech. If one is careful, he will spare himself much hardship. The **Ksav Sofer** says that Rabbi Yanai learned that it is not enough for one to watch his own mouth but to tell others to do the same and be careful as well. This is why the Pasuk continues: “Avoid evil and do good.” It is not only enough to avoid evil but one must make sure to also do good.

The **Ketzos HaChoshen** writes that there are many people who do not live for today. They are constantly looking forward to some important event in the future. This is not the proper way to live. Every single day has a potential to be used for certain accomplishments. No day serves only as a stepping stone to the next. One who “desires life” is also one who “loves days.” Each day is special and is to be cherished. There is always work to be done. It is not just another day in the countdown to some special day.

A similar message is conveyed about Avraham Avinu. Why does the Torah repeat itself and say that *“Avraham was old, he came with days?”* Isn't old the same as coming with days? The **Alshich** explains that every day in the life of Avraham was full of meaning and was lived to its fullest. Not only did Avraham live a long life in years, but he also “was coming with days”, and each day had been meaningful and lived with a purpose. The **Vilna Gaon** quotes a Chazal that some people merit old age, but their days are nothing because each day wasn't meaningful, while some have meaningful days without old age.

Avraham merited to have both. He was an old man whose every day had been lived with meaning and purpose. We should also strive to make each day of our lives meaningful and be sure to accomplish something every day. This is a central theme of Sefiras HaOmer. We count *“Today is 18 days of the Omer”* rather than saying, *“Today is 32 days until Kabbalas HaTorah”* because the Omer is not just a seven-week waiting period. It is seven weeks to improve ourselves, seven weeks of preparation for Shavuos, the day on which we accept the Torah anew every year. Today is another day in the Omer, another day to climb closer to the pinnacle of Shavuos. Kabbalas HaTorah does not happen on its own. We must use each day of the Omer to attain it.

“The priest shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop” (ibid. 14:4)

The Torah instructs the metzora to take two birds for his purification process, one to be slaughtered and one to be sent away. Rashi says that a bird is constantly chirping and thus symbolizes a person whose mouth is always running. **Rav Dovid Feinstein**, ZT”L, says that the slaughter of the bird represents the fact that this characteristic must be eradicated.

However, one might say that he will never talk because talking only leads to tzara'as. Therefore, the Torah says to take another bird and send it out to the field. One should not necessarily avoid talking, just stay away from groups of idle talkers and engage in Torah study and other noble pursuits. Avoid associating with gossipers and attaching yourself to them and there will be no need to be concerned about the problems of talking.



Summary: We have been discussing the Ramchal's approach to treating the holy Torah writings with respect since part of honoring Hashem is honoring His word. We had discussed last week that Torah texts are to be treated with no less sanctity than one would treat precious family heirlooms.

The **Ramchal** mentioned that one may not place a Book of the Prophets on top of the Chumash. **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski**, ZT"l, (in "*Lights Along the Way*") adds that we learn respect for and deference to a greater authority from this. There are levels in sanctity, and we indicate this by extending this to not placing a volume of the Gemara atop the Books of Prophets for the same reason. Although all works of Torah are sacred and must be treated with utmost respect, we must recognize the levels of sanctity. The Chumash is supreme, and no prophet, even with Divine revelation, can alter a single word of it. Nor can the sages of the Gemara go against the word of the prophets. This principle has been extended throughout the ages so that after completion of the Gemara, no Torah scholar interprets a halachah not like the Gemara.

Furthermore, the scholars of a later area (*acharonim*) may not dispute the halachic position of earlier scholars (*rishonim*), although they may favor one rishon over another. Regardless of how erudite a person may be, regardless of his genius, one must defer to prior generations of authorities. Rabbi Twerski added that this is not only a halachic requirement but also represents a worldview. For a secular world that ascribes to evolution, man is constantly growing wiser and more sophisticated. Modern man is a vast improvement over Cro-Magnon, and it does not take much to extend this to mean that all children are wiser than their parents.

We've witnessed the complete social breakdown and anarchy that has resulted from this refusal to defer to authority and considering one's mind to be the final judge of it all. When one sees another Torah volume lying atop the Pentateuch and removes it, one is making a statement of deference to a greater authority. Each ensuing generation is a bit further from those who witnessed the revelation at Sinai. True, we may have computers and mind-boggling scientific advances, but these have not given us greater wisdom.

We certainly can get from one place to another faster than our ancestors did, but their destinations in life were superior to ours. Reverence for Torah shown by recognizing the levels of sanctity should remind us of the fact that the understanding of Torah that previous generations had is beyond our reach. We can only build on their works, not dismantle them.

The Ramchal adds that ***"Included in this category is the cleanliness and purity required for the words of Torah - to not study the Torah, in filthy places, even if this is only in thought, nor with unclean hands. Our sages already abundantly warned us on this in many places (Yoma 30a)."*** (*Mesilas Yesharim*, Chapter 19)

Filthy places include a bathroom or a bathhouse and their proximity, as well as any proximity to excrement, urine, or something that emits a putrid odor. Thinking Torah thoughts in such places is an act of extreme irreverence, whereas refraining from such thoughts is considered an act of honoring the Torah. **Sefer Chassidim** (771) adds that chassidim who normally spend their thoughts on Torah use such places to contemplate finances or other permitted topics to avoid inadvertently thinking Torah thoughts. The Ramchal also mentioned unclean hands. Hands that have touched parts of the body that are usually covered are considered by halacha to be unclean (even if there is no excrement on them). It is prohibited to say words of Torah until they have been washed or cleansed in some other manner (see **Shulchan Aruch**, O.C. 92:7).

The Ramchal implies that merely thinking Torah thoughts with unclean hands is prohibited (as the **Ritva** in Pesachim 46a attests to). However, many authorities rule that mere thought is permitted in such a situation. Perhaps, when the Ramchal writes "even in thought", he refers to only the case of filthy places and not to the case of unclean hands. *To be continued next week, Be'H.*

SUGAR RUSH ON THE 613 MITZVOS BY R'ELI REIT **MITZVAH # 161 – SEFIRAS HAOMER**

We are supposed to count Sefiras Haomer. We start on the second night of Pesach and continue counting every night until Shavuos. As the Pasuk (Vayikra 23:15-16) says, *"You shall count after the first day of Pesach... 50 days"*. On the first night we say, *"Today is one day of the Omer"*. On the second night, we say *"Today is two days of the Omer"*. And so, it continues, until the seventh night when we say, *"today is the seven days, which is one week, in the Omer."*

On the eighth night, we say *"Today is eight days which is one week and one day in the Omer."* So, it goes until 49 days which are seven weeks in the Omer. The counting is in anticipation of the upcoming Matan Torah on the Yom Tov of Shavuos.

SPLENDID QUOTE OF THE WEEK **BY RABBI MENACHEM LOMNER**

"Train yourself to say, 'I don't know'."

Most people enjoy being the one who knows everything or at least the one who knows most. Therefore, we all tend to give answers even though we might not be sure about them, and even if we know they're not true. If there was someone in the past millennia who knew everything it would be **Rashi**, and yet, in explaining a certain detail about tza'aras, he is not afraid to say, "I don't know". **Rabbi Akiva Eiger**, ZT"l, makes a list of all the places that Rashi says that he doesn't know. This might actually be why he knew almost everything – simply because he was willing to admit that he didn't know.

PERSPECTIVES ON PIRKEI AVOS

BY RABBI PINCHAS LANDIS, CHAPTER 2 – WALK A MILE IN THEIR SHOES: THE JEWISH ROOTS OF A POPULAR PROVERB

“Hillel teaches: ‘Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place.’” (Avos 2:5)

At first glance, this might seem like a gentle encouragement to be empathetic. Yet, in truth, it's a profound statement about the limits of human understanding and the moral imperative to withhold judgment until all the facts - and emotions - are known.

We Rarely See the Whole Picture

So often in life, we believe we have the full picture. We see someone make a questionable choice, act out of character, or struggle in a situation we think we would have handled better. In our minds, we quickly craft narratives about them:

“They’re irresponsible.”

“They’re lazy.”

“They just don’t care.”

However, as a dear friend once said, *“You always have to leave room for the possibility that there’s something you don’t know.”* That single idea can change the way we see the world, and that’s exactly what Hillel is teaching us. When he says not to judge until you’ve reached another’s place, he’s not just talking about physical space. He means their entire context - their upbringing, emotional burdens, trauma, stressors, relationships, cultural background, and internal struggles. And the truth is, you can never truly occupy someone else’s place. So, what’s the takeaway? Be slow to judge - because full understanding is impossible.

Modern Lessons from Ancient Wisdom

This lesson is especially urgent in the age of social media, where judgment is swift and merciless. One tweet, one misstep, one imperfect sentence - and the world is quick to pounce. Hillel reminds us to pause and to reflect - to consider that what we’re seeing is just the tip of a much deeper story. Moreover, the Jewish tradition doesn’t just encourage us to *refrain* from judgment. We are commanded to *judge others favorably* whenever possible. That means actively giving people the benefit of the doubt, assuming good intentions, and believing in their potential - even when they stumble.

A Call to Empathy

In a world so quick to label, criticize, and condemn, let’s internalize the quiet strength of Hillel’s wisdom. Before we rush to judgment, let’s remember that we haven’t walked their mile. We haven’t worn their shoes. If we had, we might understand them a whole lot better. So, the next time you see someone falter, pause and ask: *“Have I really reached their place?”* If the answer is no - and it almost always is - then hold your judgment. Choose empathy instead. That’s not just a good quote; it’s a better way to live.

Rabbi Pinchas Landis is a motivational speaker, educator, and author known for inspiring people to live intentionally rather than passively. He has captivated audiences around the world with his powerful blend of Jewish wisdom, historical insight, and engaging storytelling. Rabbi Landis is the Director of JewishAnytime and the author of the bestselling book Today in Jewish History.

HALACHA DISCUSSION OF THE WEEK BY **RABBI DOVID OSTROFF: RETURNING FOOD** **TO THE FIRE ON SHABBOS**

If the flames or electricity has gone out from under my pots, may I take the pots to a neighbor’s blech or hot plate?

Yes, you may. Since you never took your mind off heating the food, it is as if you are standing all the time holding the pots in your hand with the intention of returning them to the fire. If the cholent is burning, what may be done to save it?

Option #1. Move the cholent away from the heat source or place a metal plate below the pot.

Option #2. According to the Sephardim: there is a machlokes amongst the poskim as to whether one may pour boiling water from the urn into another pot that is on the fire. According to the Ashkenazim: it is mutar to pour hot water from an urn on a blech, or from an electric urn, directly into the cholent pot. **HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach**, ZT”L, holds that it’s also mutar to pour from the urn into a cup and from the cup into the cholent pot. Whatever happens, the cholent must be on a blech/hot plate for one to add the hot water to it.

If the fire was extinguished under the blech, may I ask a non-Jew to relight the fire?

Dealing with issues addressing non-Jews is always a tricky one, since many are under the pretense that everything is mutar. One may not ask a non-Jew to relight the fire because lighting a fire is an *issur d’oraissa* (a Torah prohibition) and the halacha is that one is forbidden to ask a non-Jew to do an *issur d’oraissa* even for the sake of a mitzvah, unless in dire circumstances, where a Rav should be asked. If a non-Jew relit the fire on his accord and the food was still warm, it may be eaten.

Food was cooked for an ill person, is it mutar for someone healthy to eat the leftovers?

Food may be cooked on Shabbos, when necessary, for a *choleh sheyesh bo sakanah* – an ill person in life danger – but other people who are not in that category (even other sick people but are not life threatened) may not partake of that food. The reason is that Chazal were afraid that others would take advantage of the fact that food is being cooked and add food to the pot.

May one eat that food after Shabbos?

Yes, and one need not wait the usual *bichdai sheya’asu* (the time it takes to cook the food) because the food was cooked in accordance with the halacha.

If a non-Jew cooked the food, does the rule of bishul akum apply?

The ill person may definitely eat it on Shabbos. As for eating the food after Shabbos (the sick and the healthy), we find opposing opinions in the **Mishna Berura**, and a *shailah* (a question posed to a Rabbinical authority) must be asked.

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SHORT STORY OF THE WEEK BY YONI SCHWARTZ

Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, ZT"L, the Rosh Yeshivah of Mir, was an absolute genius in Torah and a Tzaddik in his own right. Unfortunately, however, he suffered from Parkinson's Disease, which made walking, moving, and even speaking a significant challenge. One day, Rav Nosson was at a wedding at a hotel in Bayit V'gan, which was famously known for its absolutely spectacular view of Yerushalayim from its rooftop. Before leaving the wedding, Rav Nosson asked to be taken to the roof of the hotel. From there, one could see almost the entire Yerushalayim.

It was truly breathtaking. The reason he wanted to go was not because he wanted to see his own yeshiva, but to see the "Chevron" Yeshiva. The Chevron Yeshiva was one of Israel's greatest pre-state yeshivas. Yet, after the 1929 massacre in Chevron, it was forced to relocate to Yerushalayim. At that time, the Yeshiva was undergoing a massive expansion, building a Beis Midrash bigger than most people had ever seen.

Although it could be viewed as a "competitor yeshiva" to the Mir, Rav Nosson did not see it that way. He wanted to go to the hotel's roof to take joy in witnessing Chevron's expansion. His only focus was spreading Torah, regardless of who was achieving it. When he first caught sight of the construction, his aged yet lively eyes lit up even more as he thought about the spreading of Torah and Yiddishkeit that would come from it.

Comment: In this week's parshiyos, Tazria-Metzorah, we learn about the laws for someone who spoke Lashon Harah and how he is forced to separate from the community. What often causes Lashon Harah is an Ayin Harah, the evil eye. When we focus on our own honor instead of the goal that needs to be achieved - and feel threatened by others' success - we tend to speak negatively about those who are succeeding.

However, when we are focused on the goal itself (like Rav Nosson was) regardless of who achieves it, and do not selfishly seek the respect of others, our words become a beacon of light - a safe haven of Lashon Hatov - in a world all too often filled with Lashon Harah.

MAY THE LEARNING IN THIS MAGAZINE BE A ZECHUS FOR THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF OUR FAMILY IN ERETZ YISRAEL. IT SHOULD ALSO BE A ZECHUS FOR A FULL REFUAH OF LEEBA MIRIAM GEULAH BAS LEAH.