

# TAZRI'A

## THE ANTIDOTE TO LASHON HARA

A large section of *parashas Tazri'a* discusses the mysterious affliction of *tzara'as*. In previous generations, the word "*tzara'as*" was mistranslated as "leprosy." *Tzara'as* was not a bodily disease, but rather the physical manifestation of a spiritual malaise. Our Sages understood it as a form of Divine retribution for the sin of *lashon hara*. *Tzara'as* does not exist in our times, but the continual challenge to avoid speaking slander and listening to gossip does persist. Therefore, we must ask the following: how can we overcome this widespread problem? Let us examine two fundamental concepts that empower us to uproot *lashon hara* from its source.

Negative speech is a central contributing cause of our current *galus* (exile). Rabbi Tzvi Meir Silverberg, in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov, offers<sup>138</sup> a baffling explanation for why this *galus* is so lengthy, as compared to previous exiles: the delay of the *Mashiach's* (the Messiah's) arrival is due to our neglecting to focus on the prayer of *ahavah rabbah*.<sup>139</sup> How can we understand this seemingly simple answer to a complex issue? What deeper meaning is implied? Why does this *berachah* (blessing) have the power to hasten our redemption? If *lashon hara* is a pivotal reason for our exile, then how does *ahavah rabbah* represent a *tikkun* (correction /

---

138 Rabbi Tzvi Meir Silverberg, *Sichos Hischazkus*, p. 369.

139 The last section of prayer, preceding the recitation of *Shema*, begins with the words "*Ahanah rabbah ahantanu Hashem Elokeinu* (with a great love have You loved us, Hashem our G-d)" and concludes with the blessing "*Baruch atah Hashem, habocheh be'amo Yisrael be'ahavah*. (Blessed are You Hashem, Who chooses his people Yisrael with love)."

repair) for it? Let us attempt to understand the meaning behind *ahavah rabbah* from two different angles.

## For the Love of G-d

*Ahavah rabbah* is a prayer that focuses on the great love that Hashem has for the Jewish People.<sup>140</sup> It concludes with the words, “*habocheh be’amo Yisrael be’ahavah* (Who chooses His people Israel with love).” The very act of choosing us as His people is an open sign of affection. Choosing is an indication of personal preference – a greater desire for one over another. The advertising industry often labels products as “choice” or “select” to imply a higher quality.

Consider, on a human level, how it feels to be selected. Imagine a child getting picked for the baseball team or being cast in the lead role of a play; now magnify that experience to being chosen on a Divine level. If we were able to fully grasp the enormity of Hashem’s love for us, we would want nothing more than to be close to Him. The intensity of this relationship would most certainly hasten the *ge’ulah* (redemption).

This phenomenon also works in reverse. A loving bond between us and Hashem hastens the *ge’ulah*; therefore a rocky relationship with Hashem delays our redemption. In Moshe Rabbeinu’s admonition of *Klal Yisrael* in *parashas Devarim*, there is a *pasuk* (verse) that reads,<sup>141</sup> “*Vateiragnu ve’oholeichem* (you slandered in your tents), *vatomru besinas Hashem osanu hotzi’anu me’Eretz Mitzrayim* (and said ‘because of Hashem’s hatred for us did He take us out of Egypt’).” The *Yalkut Shimoni* offers<sup>142</sup> this *pasuk* as proof that slander was a cause for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

---

<sup>140</sup> *Sichos Hischazekus*, p. 369.

<sup>141</sup> *Devarim* 1:27.

<sup>142</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bamidbar*, 643, as brought down by *HaLekach Ve’Halibuv* (see note 6).

Rabbi Avraham HaLevi Schorr explains<sup>143</sup> that the feeling that G-d hates us is a catalyst for *galus*. According to the *Sefas Emes*,<sup>144</sup>

a person who feels hated by G-d does not believe that G-d orchestrates his life for his personal benefit. This person lacks fundamental *emunah* (faith) in Hashem's Providence. A close, loving relationship with Hashem brings the *ge'ulah*; resentment and distance from Hashem is the cause of our *galus*.

The unique relationship between Hashem and the Jewish People was symbolized by the *keruvim*, the golden angelic figures that were affixed on top of the *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark). They embraced each other as a sign of Heavenly approval of the Jewish People and averted their faces to show Hashem's displeasure with *Bnei Yisrael*. A well-known vignette in the *Gemara* describes<sup>145</sup> our enemies entering the *Beis HaMikdash* after its destruction and witnessing the *keruvim* embracing. How then can we understand this story? Was Hashem showing Divine approval at that time? Surely the *churban* (destruction) was a time of Heavenly rebuke!<sup>146</sup>

To answer the above question, let us delve deeper into the meaning of *ahavah rabbah*. We must not interpret Hashem's love superficially, thinking that He simply shows preference for us as His people. Furthermore, we should not think that Hashem simply cares about us and takes care of us. These perceptions merely scratch the surface of reality. While we may attribute a human emotion such as "love" to the Divine, the truth is that our limited intellectual faculties are incapable of grasping its vastness. Hashem's love for the Jewish People is an eternal love; and its power stems from its being unconditional.

Hashem's love for us is steadfast, even when we do not reciprocate. That is why at the time of the *churban*, the *keruvim* were embracing. G-d's message was that even when we are in our

---

<sup>143</sup> Rabbi Avraham HaLevi Schorr, *HaLekach Ve'Halibuv*, 5762, p. 276.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>145</sup> *Yoma* 54b.

<sup>146</sup> As referenced by the *Nesivos Shalom, Bamidbar*, p. 208.

lowliest spiritual condition, His desire for us endures. Hashem's love is not dependent on our behavior. Our lack of *emunah* does not diminish His longing for us to return to Him. This relationship is the highest form of love because it is a selfless love. The destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* was not a cruel punishment, but rather a powerful lesson motivated by G-d's deep love.<sup>147</sup>

Rabbi Silverberg highlights<sup>148</sup> the importance of this Divine parting message before we went into exile. The *keruvim* embraced face to face to symbolize the intensity of Divine love. It is as if Hashem is telling the Jewish People, *There is going to be a long, painful exile, both physically and spiritually. You will witness national and personal tragedies. Rivers of pure, innocent Jewish blood will flow. Although on the surface, it will seem to be the complete opposite, remember the true inner reality. Remember that I love each individual Jewish soul with the greatest love possible.*

## Supreme Love

Hashem's affection for us is the highest kind of love. This supreme love is manifest in the unique mission He has given to every single person. The purpose of the morning prayer, *Modeh Ani* (lit. I give thanks; the prayer said upon awakening), explains<sup>149</sup> Rabbi Avraham Twerski, is expressing our gratitude for the daily opportunity to fulfill our Divinely-designed personal goals. Hashem lovingly imbues each soul with a distinct life-purpose that no one else can fulfill. *Rabbeinu* Yonah emphasizes<sup>150</sup> focusing on one's unique and exceptional nature when striving to improve in *avodas Hashem* (service of G-d).

---

147 *ibid.*

148 *Sichos Hisbazkus, Bein Hameitzarim*, p. 132.

149 Rabbi Avraham J. Twerski, *Let Us Make Man*, p. 113.

150 As quoted by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, p. 227.

It is a challenge for the human intellect to comprehend the nature of Hashem's bond with us. The closest model to which we can compare Divine love is parental love. In *Pirkei Avos* it says<sup>151</sup> that so beloved are *Bnei Yisrael* to Hashem that He calls us "my children." Parents know how important it is to openly express love to their children. Why is this so important? Because, when we tell our children how much we love them, how special they are, we build their self-esteem. Children often misbehave when they crave attention. At times, this is indicative of a low self-image. When children underestimate themselves, they need to be reminded of their significance. Hashem's love for us is like the unconditional, steadfast love of a parent who consistently encourages his children to reach their potential.

Awareness of our inner greatness inspires us. The *Ohr HaChaim* notes<sup>152</sup> the interesting placement of the verse "*vayamas Yosef vechol echav vechol hador habu* (Yosef died and all his brothers and that entire generation)." This phrase is juxtaposed with verses describing the rise of the new Pharaoh who oppressed *Bnei Yisrael*. The Egyptian exile did not begin until the entire generation of Yosef's brothers had passed away. This was not by accident. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz explains<sup>153</sup> that as long as someone in Yosef's generation still lived among them, *Bnei Yisrael* viewed themselves as honorable people. Once that generation of great stature had died, the Jewish People's self-image deteriorated. This low self-image made them susceptible to enslavement.

Although we are now a free people, we remain spiritually enslaved to many outside forces. It is possible to be enslaved only when one has a slave mentality. By contrast, if we have a self-

---

151 *Pirkei Avos* 3:18.

152 Commentary on *Shemos* 1:6.

153 Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar*, p. 116.

perception of our true potential, we feel empowered to be the masters of our own future.

*Modeh Ani* concludes with “*rabbah emunasecha*” – how great is your faith! If Hashem believes in us that we can fulfill our potential every day, then we need to believe in ourselves. We approach each new day fully cognizant of our ability to learn, grow and improve, despite our past mistakes. Consciousness of Hashem’s love builds our self-esteem and empowers us to triumph over the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). If we felt like Hashem’s royal family, created *betzelem Elokim* (in the image of G-d), we would never sin or behave in a way that is beneath our dignity.

## In G-d’s Image – A Figure of Speech

Let us explore the concept of *tzelem Elokim* and how it relates to our challenge of avoiding *lashon hara*. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin underscores<sup>154</sup> that we were created *betzelem Elokim* to elevate our self-worth. It is discouraging for us to witness the continual spiritual decline of the Jewish People during this lengthy *galus*. We feel increasingly powerless against the *yetzer hara*. If we would only remember that we were created *betzelem Elokim*, we would appreciate who we really are.

Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon asks<sup>155</sup> the obvious question: if Hashem has no form or substance, how can we be created *betzelem Elokim*? What does it really mean to be created in Hashem’s image? Humans were created with characteristics that bear a certain similarity to G-dly characteristics. The name *Elokim* is defined as the solitary power in creation, the only one in control of the world.

---

<sup>154</sup> As quoted by Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon, *With Hearts Full of Faith*, p. 152.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid*.

Hashem fashioned human beings in a way that empowers them to affect the upper and lower worlds.

What is our unique power? Man is called *medaber* (one who speaks); speech is the defining attribute of a human being. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains<sup>156</sup> that a person can participate in the spiritual realms that impact our world only through his speech. In the same way Hashem creates and controls the world through His “words,” so too our words are the tools through which we manipulate this world.

Moreover, the speech of the Jewish People affects the world beyond our imagination and comprehension. The Hebrew word *dibbur* (speech) also means leading and controlling, as in the verse, “*yadber amim tachteinu* (He will lead nations beneath us).”<sup>157</sup> This explains,<sup>158</sup> according to Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, the meaning of the term *yiras Shamayim* (fear of Heaven). *Yiras Shamayim* does not mean that we are afraid of heavenly punishment. Having “fear of Heaven” means being frighteningly aware of the impact we make both below and above. Those with *yiras Shamayim* are concerned with how their speech will affect the Heavens.

We live our lives without realizing the power of our words. We think to ourselves, *Who am I? Will what I say really make a difference?* Let us not underestimate ourselves and the potency of our speech. Having *yiras Shamayim* means speaking with a consciousness of how our words could either build palaces or wreak havoc in the Heavens. When we are approached regarding a *shidduch*, how often do we give a casual response? What about when we are solicited to give a personal recommendation for a job applicant? Are we thoughtful about our answer? Our speech can bring people to the *chuppah* and build families, or do the opposite. Our words can provide *parnasah* for another, or not.

---

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, alluding to *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Mitzvah* 70.

<sup>157</sup> *Tebillim* 47:4.

<sup>158</sup> *With Hearts Full of Faith*, p. 152.

A story is told<sup>159</sup> of a businessman who was once running to catch the subway. Out of the corner of his eyes, he barely noticed a bedraggled man sitting on the sidewalk, shaking a tin can and calling out, “A pencil for a quarter!” The businessman quickly threw the beggar a quarter, then turned to run down the stairs. The beggar called after him, waving the pencil, “Mister! Here’s your pencil!” The businessman looked back and said, “Oh, I’m sorry. I did not realize you were a merchant. Thanks.” He took his pencil and left.

Three years later, this same businessman was buying a newspaper at a stand. As he attempted to pay for the paper, the cashier said with a smile, “Take it. It’s on the house!” The baffled man asked him why. And the reply was, “Do you not remember? A few years ago, you gave a quarter to a beggar and he gave you a pencil.” The businessman nodded, so the cashier continued, “I was that beggar. Now I own several newspaper stands like this one, and I make a fine living. You changed my life!” The astonished businessman asked, “I changed your life because I bought a pencil?!” And the cashier replied, “No, you changed my life because you called me a merchant. I realized that if this was what you thought of me, then I had the potential to become that.” Our words can help a person perceive himself in a different light and allow him to truly flourish.

This story illustrates two points. First, if we view ourselves metaphorically as the businessman, we remember our power to influence others through our speech. One word can change a beggar into a merchant. Second, if we see ourselves as the beggar, we underscore another important aspect of being created *betzelem Elokim*. Hashem loves us and created us *betzelem Elokim*. *Rabbah emunasecha* – He believes in us and calls us “merchants.” The question is whether or not we believe in ourselves. Remembering Hashem’s love enables us become merchants, to better refine our speech, and to strive toward His vision of our potential.

---

159 Rabbi Hanoah Teller, *The Mini A Midrash and A Maaseh*, p. 145-155.

Our speech not only makes an impact on those around us, but also on a very deep level, on our own souls. In our morning *berachos*, we ask Hashem to rescue us from all sorts of negative influences, including *azei panim*, *chaveir ra*, and *shachein ra* (brazen people, bad friends, and bad neighbors) among many others. Interestingly, the Sephardic rendition of this prayer adds the following to the list: “*mei’ayin hara, milashon hara* (from the evil eye and negative speech)” and after a few more additions, surprisingly concludes with an appeal to save us daily from *Gebennom*. Even if we do not recite this version of the *tefillah*, we are still faced with the following question: why ask to be saved from *Gebennom* every day? Is not our soul’s final resting place determined at the end of life, and not on a daily basis?

Keeping in mind the above discussion about being created *betzelem Elokim*, and our ability to impact the world with our words provides the answer. The Divine spark within us is called speech. There is a Chassidic concept that we are given a fixed amount of words to speak in our lifetime. The *Arvei Nachal* elaborates<sup>160</sup> that every time we speak, a tiny bit of our human essence leaves us. Each utterance represents the departure of a speck of soul. But where does it go? When we speak holy words, the pieces of soul ascend to *Gan Eden*, where they wait to be reunited with the rest of the soul when the body expires. If we speak *lashon hara* or any other kind of forbidden talk, our bits of soul go straight to *Gebennom*. Therefore, in this morning *tefillah*, we fittingly beg for *siyata diShmaya* (heavenly assistance) to avoid *lashon hara*, thereby rescuing pieces of our soul from entering *Gebennom*.

Thus far, we have discussed one aspect of *ahavah rabbah*: Hashem’s great love for us and how it should define our self-view. One approach to avoiding *lashon hara* is to have faith in our own

---

<sup>160</sup> As quoted by Rabbi Eliezer Meizlish in *Sichos Be’Avodas Hashem*, p. 96.

significance and remember the potent influence of our words. We need to use our power of speech for building a world of good.

## Read My Lips – Praise or Slander

The prayer of *ahavah rabbah* should not only shape how we view ourselves, but it should also change the way we view others and the world. Our Sages enumerate six *zechiros* (remembrances) that we are obligated to recall daily.<sup>161</sup> Some people have the custom of reciting them after *tefillah* in the morning. Rabbi Avraham HaLevi Schorr, quoting the *Magen Avraham*, mentions<sup>162</sup> that all six of them are hinted at in the prayer *ahavah rabbah*.

One of them, *zechiras Miriam* (remembrance of Miriam) is alluded to in the words “*lehodos lecha* (to praise You)”. Miriam was punished by Hashem with *tzara'as* for speaking *lashon hara* about Moshe.<sup>163</sup> How does praise of Hashem allude to Miriam’s act of negative speech? On a simple level, we can learn that the *tikkun* for *lashon hara* is to use our speech for good, for praising Hashem. Let us delve into the deeper meaning of this connection.

Rabbi Schorr highlights<sup>164</sup> the source of *lashon hara* as the human tendency to see the world with “dark eyes,” to always see the negative side of everyone and everything. When praises for Hashem are on our lips, we express our *bakaras hatov* (lit. recognition of the good – appreciation) to Him. *Lehodos lecha* refers, then, to the ability to recognize the good. And when we

---

161 1) The Exodus from Egypt, 2) Receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai, 3) Amalek’s attack, 4) the Golden Calf, 5) what Hashem did to Miriam, 6) The Sabbath day.

162 *HaLekeach VeHaLibur*, 5761, p. 61.

163 *Bamidbar* 12:10.

164 *HaLekeach VeHaLibur*, p. 61.

see the good in Hashem, we condition ourselves to see the good in others. This quality is an antidote to the roots of *lashon bara*. When we see only the positive side, we have nothing to criticize and no one to slander.

In light of this idea, we gain a new understanding of the well-known verses from *Tebillim*, “*Mi ha’ish bechafetz chayim ohev yamim liros tov?* (Who is the man that desires life who loves days of seeing good?) *Netzor lesboncha meira usefasecha midaber mirmah* (Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit).”<sup>165</sup> We normally read these as words of advice: avoid *lashon bara* to assure longevity. The *Sefas Emes* comments<sup>166</sup> that *chayim* – real life – is full of praising Hashem. His proof is in the words of our *tefillah*,<sup>167</sup> “*Vechol bachayim yoducha, selah* (and all life will praise You).” Life – all of life – is praising Hashem.

His novel interpretation of the above verses from *Tebillim* is as follows: *mi ha’ish bechafetz chayim* – who is the person who really wants to live by praising Hashem? The one who sees good – *liros tov*. When we recognize Hashem’s goodness and praise Hashem, we merit a special ability: the power to watch our tongues – *netzor lesboncha meira* and protect our speech – *usefasecha midaber mirmah* – from *lashon bara*.

## All in the Eyes of the Beholder

*Hakaras batov*, the ability to see good in others and in the world, has been a challenge for mankind since the beginning of time. Before his downfall, Adam *HaRisbon* saw with clarity a world filled with Hashem’s goodness.<sup>168</sup> One of the consequences of his *cheit* (sin) was that good and evil became mixed together and

---

<sup>165</sup> *Tebillim* 34:14-15.

<sup>166</sup> As quoted in *HaLekeach VeHaLibuv*, 5762, p. 62.

<sup>167</sup> See the conclusion of the *Modim* blessing in the *Shemoneh Esreh*.

<sup>168</sup> *Sichos Hischazekus, Devarim*, p. 64.

indistinguishable. Our lifelong struggle is to untangle them from each other and define them once again as separate entities.

This inborn challenge is the origin of the human tendency alluded to above, to look at the world with “dark eyes.” We are often critical and quick to judge others negatively. Fighting this inclination is actually a battle to repair the sin of *Adam HaRishon*. When we make a conscious effort to have *hakoras hatov*, to recognize the good in everyone, we begin to triumph in that struggle.

The *Gemara* lists<sup>169</sup> seven names of the evil inclination. Rabbi Silverberg underscores<sup>170</sup> why the label “*yetzer hara*” is the one most commonly used. The essential power of the evil inclination exists in its ability to cause a person to always see “*hara*” (the bad) – the negative side. A person looking at the world with an *ayin ra’ab* (lit. bad eye – criticism) is the most susceptible to sin. Being judgmental is the step that precedes *lashon hara*; perceiving something as “*ra*” generates the negative thoughts that lead to forbidden speech.

We discussed above that having *hakaras hatov* to Hashem enables us to recognize the good in others. The reverse holds true as well. Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon offers<sup>171</sup> the following idea from the *Gra*: someone who denies how another has helped him also denies *siyata diShmaya*. Having an *ayin ra’ab* means refusing to identify the kindness of others. This tendency to have an *ayin ra’ab* for others promotes an *ayin ra’ab* toward Hashem, denying the countless blessings He bestows on us daily.

Consider the comparison in the *Gemara*<sup>172</sup> between a good

---

<sup>169</sup> *Succah* 55a.

<sup>170</sup> *Sichos Hischazekus, Devarim*, p. 64.

<sup>171</sup> *Matnas Chaim, Ma’amarim*, Volume 2, p. 101.

<sup>172</sup> *Berachos* 58a.

guest and a bad one. A good guest accepts what he is given with graciousness; he appreciates every detail. *Look how much trouble she went through for me! She remembered that I enjoy vegetables and she prepared a fresh salad! How much time and thought she put into this meal! Thank you!* A bad guest looks with a critical eye and ignores the goodness. *Oh, they were sitting down for a meal anyway. She did not have to prepare any more than usual. They just feel obligated to host a newcomer.* Next time we are hosted by another, let us consider how we accept what they offer.

Seeing others with an *ayin tovah* (lit: good eye – positive outlook) is something that is equally important for receiving and for giving. A *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avo*s details<sup>173</sup> the key distinctions between the students of Avraham *Avinu* (our Patriarch) and Bilam *HaRasha* (the wicked one). One of them is that Avraham's students have an *ayin tovah* and Bilam's students have an *ayin ra'ah*. Avraham's essential *middah* (trait) was *chesed* (loving kindness). According to *Pirkei Avo*s, *ayin tovah* was an identifying feature of Avraham *Avinu*, the quintessential giver in the Torah. Just as we receive the goodness of others with an *ayin tovah*, so too we need to give to others with an *ayin tovah*. Performing acts of *chesed* and having an *ayin tovah* are interdependent, as we will soon see.

A verse in *Mishlei* praises this quality of an *ayin tovah*, as it says<sup>174</sup>, “*tov ayin hu yevorach* (a good eye will be blessed).” Rabbi Salomon stresses<sup>175</sup> how critical it is to have an *ayin tovah*. He says that even if a person spends all his time learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, his life is limited if he views the world through an *ayin ra'ah*. Why? How does an *ayin ra'ah* deflate the value of his Torah observance?

---

<sup>173</sup> *Pirkei Avo*s 5:22.

<sup>174</sup> *Mishlei* 22:9.

<sup>175</sup> *Matnas Chaim, Ma'amarim*, Volume 2, p. 100.

An *ayin ra'ab* is the foundation of the other two defining features of Bilam's students, as listed in the *Misnab*:<sup>176</sup> *ru'ach gevohab* (an arrogant spirit) and *nefesh rechavab* (a greedy soul). Torah and *mitzvos* are channels that lead us to a close and loving relationship with Hashem. An *ayin ra'ab* neutralizes the power of a person's *mitzvos* by blocking these Divine channels. A haughty person is blind to G-d's goodness; he is so full of himself that he has no room for Hashem. His hands might be going through the motions of *mitzvos*, but his heart is unmoved and he remains distant from Hashem. A Torah-observant Jew with an *ayin ra'ab* has a selfish soul. Even if he gives *tzedakah* (charity), he gives with a cold heart, out of a sense of obligation. His *ayin ra'ab* prevents him from developing a generous spirit and identifying with G-d's quality of loving-kindness.

Our life's work, according to Rabbi Salomon,<sup>177</sup> is to uproot this tendency to be judgmental and critical. He elaborates on the concept of *tzarus ayin* (lit: a narrow eye), which is a quality inherent in *ayin ra'ab*. A narrow eye has limited vision, focusing only on negative aspects. *Rabbeinu* Yona exhorts<sup>178</sup> us to be scrupulous in eliminating the quality of *tzarus ayin* and instead foster an *ayin tovah*.

He quotes the verse<sup>179</sup> regarding charity to the poor, "*Nason titten lo* (You shall surely give to him) *velo yeira levavecha besitecha lo* (and let your heart not feel bad when you give him)". The action of giving with the hands is not enough. Our giving needs to foster the *middah* of generosity in our hearts; that is why the verse warns us *velo yeira levavecha* – to "not let the heart feel bad" – to uproot any hidden resentment we might feel. Rabbi Salomon explains<sup>180</sup> that the sole reason for the act of giving is to soften our hearts, to make us into generous givers. If we give with stinginess or

---

<sup>176</sup> *Pirkei Avos* 5:22.

<sup>177</sup> *Matnas Chaim*, Volume 2, p. 81.

<sup>178</sup> *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 3:35.

<sup>179</sup> *Devarim* 15:10.

<sup>180</sup> *Matnas Chaim*, Volume 2, p. 86.

resentment, we have defeated the very purpose of giving in the first place.

There is a puzzling *Gemara* that reads,<sup>181</sup> “*aval mikdash sheni shehayu oskim baTorah uveitzvos uvegemilus chasadim, mipnei mah charav?* (but the Second Temple, when they were involved with Torah study and acts of kindness, why was it destroyed?) *Mipnei shehaysah bo sinas chinam* (because baseless hatred was in it).” Rabbi Salomon challenges<sup>182</sup> an apparent contradiction in this statement. How could that generation have performed *gemilus chasadim* and simultaneously felt baseless hatred? Are not acts of kindness acts of love?

The generation described in the *Gemara* was Torah-abiding. They learned, they did *mitzvos*, and they even gave *tzedakah*. But they did not give with an *ayin tovah*, with the kind heart and sensitivity of Avraham *Avinu*. Instead, their *avodas Hashem* was performed with an *ayin ra'ab*. Their acts of kindness were stained by their *sinas chinam*. They hosted guests, but only to show off their greatness and wealth. They gave charity to the poor, but only to display their superiority over others. This kind of *gemilus chasadim* destroyed the *Bayis Sheni* (Second Temple).

## From the Mouth to the Heart

When we are not able to give or receive with an *ayin tovah*, with open hearts and appreciative eyes, we suffer dire consequences. Our Sages warn that those who speak *lashon hara* are punished with *tzara'as*. Despite its physical signs on a person's body, clothing or house, Rabbi Silverberg elucidates<sup>183</sup> that the word *tzara'as* implies a spiritual affliction of the soul. What is spiritual suffering?

---

181 *Yoma* 9b.

182 *Matnas Chaim*, Volume 2, p. 86.

183 *Sichos Hisbazkus*, *Bamidbar*, p. 280.

Someone with *tzara'as* is compared to a dead person.<sup>184</sup> The *Targum* translates *tzara'as* as one who is closed; he has become closed in. Inside each of us is a Divine spark, a soul that pulses with the life-force that is fueled by Torah learning, prayer and closeness to Hashem. Rabbi Silverberg explains that speaking *lashon hara* shuts off a channel to that life force, and subsequently extinguishes a part of that passion and sweetness. Each forbidden word is a bit of spiritual death; the person can no longer easily access the fire of *kedushah* within him.

The word *netzor*<sup>185</sup> used in the expression for guarding one's tongue has the same letters as *ratzon* (will) and *tzinor* (conduit).<sup>186</sup> We protect our speech when we use our mouths as a conduit for the Divine – a tool for Hashem's Will. When we use our mouths to encourage others and praise Hashem's goodness, we tap into the fiery passion for Torah and prayer within us.

When *Bnei Yisrael* arrived at Mount Sinai, the verse<sup>187</sup> describes their camping as “*vayichan sham Yisrael neged habaar* (and Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain).” Our people's *achdus* (unity – camaraderie) at that moment is highlighted by the use of the singular form of the verb: “*vayichan* – he encamped,” as opposed to *vayachanu* – they encamped.<sup>188</sup>

The Vorker Rebbe adds<sup>189</sup> a compelling insight: the word “*vayichan*” is related to the word “*chen*” (grace – favor). What was so beautiful about the unity of the Jewish People at *Har Sinai*? They only saw *chen*, they found favor in each other's eyes. The people looked at each other and the world around them with an *ayin tovah*. They overlooked the negative points and focused on the

---

184 *Nedarim* 64a.

185 *Tehillim* 34:15.

186 *Sichos Hischazekus*, p. 280.

187 *Shemos* 19:2.

188 See Rashi's Commentary on *Shemos* 19:2.

189 *Sichos Hischazekus*, p. 280.

positive. Their *ayin tovah* earned them the merit to receive the Torah and return to the spiritual level of *Adam HaRishon* before the sin.

Just as an *ayin tovah* was critical for our ancestors at *Har Sinai*, so too is it crucial for our generation. A positive perspective is the strongest antidote to *lashon bara*. An *ayin tovah* enables us to ignore others' faults, thereby dissolving the roots of criticism and negative remarks. Our mission is to fight our natural tendency to look at other people darkly. We need to condition our eyes to view the world through lenses of appreciation.

The antidote to *lashon bara* is in our hands; we find it in the power of *ahavah rabbah* – how we view ourselves, others and the world. First, we need to remember that Hashem loves us unconditionally and empowers us to impact the lower and upper worlds. Once we recognize our awesome potential, we will never speak in a way that is beneath our dignity. Second, when we look at the world with an *ayin tovah*, we will appreciate all the ways Hashem blesses us. We will have *bakaras hatov* for others, seeing only the good in them, and have nothing negative to say about them.

May we use our speech to build up others and the world. May our mouths be filled with praise to Hashem for creating a world of good, and may we merit to bring *Mashiach* and our final *ge'ulah*.