

METZORA

HATING SINS, NOT SINNERS

A

Three *Korbanos* of Metzora

The *parsha* discusses the skin disease called *tzara'as*, a divinely inflicted ailment that comes from sins. *Tzara'as* is commonly—and mistakenly—translated as leprosy. The *psukim* say that houses and clothing can contract *tzara'as*, so it is clearly different from leprosy. This unique ailment disappeared with the destruction of the First Temple.

The Gemara (Arachin 16a) states that *tzara'as* can come as a result of several types of sins. Primarily, though, it comes on account of *motzi sheim ra*, the sin of spreading negative stories about someone. The word *metzora* is similar to the words *motzi ra*.

This week's *parsha* discusses the *taharas hametzora* and his reentry into society. In Parshas Tazria, the Torah says that one consequence of being afflicted with *tzara'as* is that the person must stay outside of the camp, he cannot enter a walled city, and he must call out to people who come near him, “*Tamei tamei*, I am impure,” stay away from me (Vayikra 13:45).

As part of his rehabilitation, the *metzora* must go through a purification process. He must bring three sacrifices: *olah*, *chatas*, and *asham*. The *olah* is fully burnt on the *mizbei'ach*. The *chatas*

comes as an atonement offering, which is partially eaten by *kohanim* and partially burnt. The *asham* has some of the *chatas* procedure in how it is eaten—for example, only *kohanim* partake of it—but it is like an *olah* in the way the blood is thrown on the *mizbei'ach*.

Why does the *metzora* have to bring these three sacrifices? As mentioned above, we understand from many sources that the ailment of *tzara'as* comes as a result of *lashon hara*, evil speech. For example, later in the Torah, Miriam spoke badly about Moshe Rabbeinu and, in response to her speech, was afflicted with *tzara'as*.

B

Baseless Hatred

Lashon hara, speaking badly about other Jews, is basically an expression of unjustified hatred. It is not clear that hatred is ever justified. The Tanya writes that occasionally, the Torah does make reference to a *sonai*, a hated enemy. For example, when you see “*chamor sona'acha roveitz tachas masao*. the donkey of your enemy struggling under its burden” (Shemos 23:5), you should go help him. The Gemara (Pesachim 113b) asks: How is it possible for a Jew to have an enemy? The Gemara answers that it is permitted to hate a great sinner. But the Tanya questions this based on a contradicting verse. “*Lo sisna es achicha bilvavecha*. Do not hate your brother in your heart” (Vayikra 19:17). This *pasuk* does not make any exceptions for sinners.

The Tanya explains that you can hate sinning, but you can't hate the person who commits the sin. Bruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, told him the same thing (see Brachos 10a). Apparently, there was a group of ruffians who bothered Rabbi Meir very much. Rabbi Meir was going to pray that they die, but his wife objected based on the verse, “*Yitamu chata'im min ha'aretz*. Sins should

disappear from the land” (Tehillim 104:35)—sins should disappear, not sinners.

The Tanya teaches that, sometimes, getting angry at the inappropriate actions of fellow Jews may be warranted. However, it is important to maintain awareness that the sins themselves are external actions of a person. The person who committed the sins, however, should not be the object of hatred. We are supposed to love every Jew and pray for every Jew to repent. All of us would hope that nobody would ever hate us. If I did something evil (God forbid) to someone else, I would want him to understand that I am weak and that I made a bad decision. I would want him to have sympathy for me. We must resent the sin itself, for it is detestable. But we shouldn't resent or hate the sinful person himself.

C

Kamtza and Bar Kamtza

Lashon hara comes as a result of hatred of another person. The Gemara (Yoma 9a) says that the Second Temple was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, unjustified hatred. To illustrate the hatred of the time, the Gemara (Gittin 55b-56a) tells us the fascinating story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. These two Jews with similar names lived in the city of Yerushalayim. Kamtza was well-liked by the people of the community while Bar Kamtza was not. They had good reason not to like him. He was an informer and spy for the Romans, who were oppressing Jews at the time. The Romans had outlawed Shabbos, *milah*, and *tefillin*. They disrupted the temple service, and Jews had to do *mitzvos* in secret. Bar Kamtza would tell the Roman authorities when Jews were doing *mitzvos*, and some were killed by his word.

A member of the Yerushalayim community made a party and sent an invitation to be hand-delivered to Kamtza. The messenger mistakenly delivered the note to Bar Kamtza instead. Upon

receiving the invitation, Bar Kamtza was surprised, but, since he received an invitation, he decided to go to the party. When he arrived, the host saw him and was furious. He said, "It is a disgrace to have this informer here. Get out!" Until that point, Bar Kamtza had been in a good mood. He pleaded, "Don't embarrass me by throwing me out. I'll pay for half of the expenses of this party." The host again demanded that he leave. Bar Kamtza, with one last desperate plea for consideration, said, "I'll cover the entire expense of this party." But the host demanded publicly that he leave and had him thrown out.

Ejected and dejected, Bar Kamtza thought about all the rabbis who had witnessed this humiliating exchange. "They did not stop the host from embarrassing me," he thought. Bar Kamtza then decided to extract revenge upon the whole Jewish community, since their leaders were complicit in his humiliation. He went to the emperor of Rome and said, "The Jews are rebelling against you. Try sending a sacrifice to them to be brought in their temple, and you will see that they will not accept it. This is because they despise you and are rebelling against your authority." The emperor did send the sacrifice. On the way to the Beis Hamikdash, Bar Kamtza nicked the lip of the animal to disqualify it as a sacrifice.

In the temple, the rabbis made the fatal decision not to allow the sacrifice. They could have allowed it under the circumstances, but were afraid to break the regular rule. Bar Kamtza went back with witnesses to the emperor, who was furious and sent his army to Yerushalayim and destroyed it.

I will share with you my understanding of this story.

The Gemara says that all of this happened because of baseless hatred, *sinas chinam*. But this hatred was not baseless! Bar Kamtza was indeed a traitor to the Jews! Even before this story, he had Jewish blood on his hands. Jews had been killed because of him. Why do the rabbis call this *sinas chinam*?

The answer is that we are supposed to hate the sins of the scoundrel, not *him*. There was apparently a spark of *teshuva* that

Bar Kamtza felt when he received his invitation to this prestigious occasion. He thought, “Maybe I should change my ways and stop being an informer.” Enmity begets enmity, but friendship also begets friendship. In his mind, when he received the invitation, he felt friendship. He thought, “Maybe I will change in response.” Sadly, his invitation was only a mistake. He was ignominiously ejected and thrown out. This was unjustified hatred. The hatred of the host and of the onlookers in this case went beyond hatred for Bar Kamtza’s horrible deeds. They hated him personally. Had they not, they would have been open to his rehabilitation and desire to become an integrated member of the community again.

Lashon hara results from *sinas chinam*; such speech is the result of this disease of hating a Jew. But there are two kinds of evil speech: *lashon hara* and *motzi sheim ra*. The difference is that *motzi sheim ra* is false, while *lashon hara* is true. Even though the bad words are true, they are still not justified. It is only justified if you’re trying to correct behavior, like the principal of a school talking to a teacher about a student. They desire to correct the child’s behavior. Such a discussion has nothing to do with hatred. But if someone does hate another and speaks negatively about him, even if it is true, it is prohibited *lashon hara*. If it is false, it is called *motzi sheim ra*, an even greater misdeed.

D

***Sinas Chinam* Is Equivalent to the Three Cardinal Sins**

The sinner received a terrible affliction called *tzara’as*. After the *metzora* does *teshuva*, sitting in isolation for a week while thinking about his sins and mistakes, God removes the *tzara’as* wound and the *metzora* brings his three sacrifices: *olah*, *chatas*, and *asham*. Why these three?

The Gemara (Yoma 9a) states that the first Beis Hamikdash

was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins: idolatry, promiscuity, and murder. In the Second Temple era, these three sins did not exist. But they did speak *lashon hara* and had *sinas chinam*. In this way, this fourth sin is equal to the three cardinal sins. Just as the three cardinal sins led to the destruction of the temple, so too *lashon hara* and *sinas chinam* led to the destruction of the temple. *Lashon hara* and *sinas chinam* are a disease that destroys society. Society cannot function properly unless it has harmony between people. Harmony enables people to get along smoothly. It is the oil that lubricates the joints of society. If a society has evil talk, petty jealousy, and hatred, it is like a joint that rubs against itself and eventually wears down and breaks. That society will be a fractured and sick society. How can Torah and *mitzvos*, which are so dependent upon a healthy Jewish society, be performed in a society sick with hatred?

E

Three Levels of Soul—and a Fourth

These three cardinal sins operate on the three levels of the Jewish soul. According to Kabbala and Chassidus, every human soul has three levels: *nefesh*, the biological life force level; *ruach*, the emotional level; and *neshama*, the intellectual level. Idolatry is a breakdown of the intellect. There is total confusion about the uniqueness of God and a misunderstanding of the fact that God doesn't have a physical form. Promiscuity has to do with a person's emotions and passions. And murder is destruction of the basic life force of a person, the *nefesh*.

Lashon hara has the possibility of destroying people on all three levels. It is the mistake of focusing on the evil of a person instead of on his mistaken actions. It is thus a distortion of intellect. *Lashon hara* also causes a breakdown of *ruach*, arousing passion, anger, jealousy, and crimes of spirit. On the *nefesh*-level, *lashon*

hara is destructive to the fundamental fabric of society in a very real way.

F

Why Three Sacrifices

The three sacrifices that the *metzora* brings address these three levels of human activity. The *olah* is completely burnt on the *miz-bei'ach*. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 7:3) says that the *korban olah* atones for bad thoughts, because the *olah* is completely burnt; it goes completely to heaven. Thinking is the most unworldly part of us. It is our highest faculty, closest to our heavenly soul, the *neshamah*. Thought is not visible, it is within a person's soul. Since the *olah* is the total sacrifice, it has to do with the thought and soul of man, atoning for improper, misguided thoughts. Since *lashon hara* comes from a misguided conceptualization of a sinner, it is a sin of thought. The *korban olah* atones for the evil thinking of *lashon hara*.

The second sacrifice is the *chatas*, which is generally brought as an atonement for doing a sin. It relates to action. If someone accidentally and unintentionally desecrates the Shabbos in action, he brings a *korban chatas*. In order to be obligated to bring a *chatas*, a person must do an action; if he does not perform any action, he will not be obligated to bring a *chatas*. This *korban* thus atones for his sinful act. Since *lashon hara* affects a person's actions, the atonement of *lashon hara* must include a *korban chatas*.

Finally, the third *korban* is an *asham*. This is a special kind of *korban* that is hard to define precisely. It is uncommon, brought only under special circumstances. It is somewhere between thought and action, says the Shem Mishmuel. Thoughts of the mind flow into the heart and emotions. Then they flow into a person's body and are translated into action. The *asham* atones for

the process of transition from thought into action, for the distorted emotional medium.

The person who speaks *lashon hara* has a distortion at every level of his being, rooted in anger, jealousy, and resentment. These are not proper ways of thinking, feeling, or acting. Therefore, he must bring all three kinds of sacrifices. He must bring an *olah* for his distorted thinking, an *asham* for inappropriate emotions, and a *chatas* for prohibited action. These atone respectively for the three levels of the soul involved in *lashon hara*.

G

***Nega* and *Oneg*, Affliction and Enjoyment**

The Hebrew word for the affliction of *tzara'as* is *nega*, meaning wound. *Nega* is spelled *nun*, *gimel*, *ayin*. There is a strange statement in one of the Kabbalistic works that if you rearrange the letters of *nega*, you can spell the word *oneg*, pleasure. What does this signify?

We all enjoy Shabbos. The prophet Yeshaya (58:13) says you should call Shabbos a pleasure, an *oneg*. Sefer Yetzira, one of the earliest Kabbalistic books, says that the solution to the affliction of *tzara'as* is the *oneg*, enjoyment, of Shabbos. How does this work?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the *tzara'as*, rooted in the sin of *lashon hara*, goes into the depths of the human soul. The enjoyment of Shabbos also touches the three levels of the human soul. In the Aseres Hadibros, the Torah alternately uses two different words for the commandment of Shabbos: *zachor* and *shamor*. *Shamor* is the level of action. On Shabbos, we have to behave in a particular way. We have to avoid doing the *melachos*. *Zachor* is the level of thought, meaning to be aware and think of Shabbos. Additionally, Chazal say that on Shabbos we should focus on Torah. We have special *shiurim* on Shabbos. On Shabbos, we have a very long *leining* with seven *aliyos*. Shabbos is a day of Torah study. Torah

provides the connection between thought and action, channeling human thoughts into proper actions. It is a process of thinking, learning, analyzing, and conceptualizing about Torah ideas and topics and translating them into healthy emotions and actions.

Torah is in the thought of the person who studies it; it is in his emotions, and it is in the actions and *mitzvos* which he performs. Torah is a bridge that carries the concept from the highest faculty, the brain, to the heart and then into action.

By keeping Shabbos on three levels, the *metzora* can find the antidote to his *nega* of *tzara'as*. We can also keep the Shabbos fully by observing it on all three levels. The *zachor* of Shabbos means thinking of proper ideas on Shabbos. The *shamor* of Shabbos means acting appropriately, refraining from prohibited actions. We also bridge the gap between thoughts and actions through the Torah study of Shabbos. This kind of Shabbos observance fixes the senseless, destructive hatred that people feel towards each other. This is the destruction of the *nega*. If a person keeps Shabbos the proper way, his approach to other Jews will not be *nega*, hatred and affliction. Rather, it will rather be *oneg*, an enjoyment and pleasure.

H

Fighting Evil with Goodness

The Mishna (Avos 4:3) says, “*Al tehi baz lechol adam...she'ein lecha adam she'ein lo sha'ah*. Never totally disregard anyone. You never know when you might need that very person.” This is sagacious advice. You may think you can yell and insult someone and call him names. But you never know; you may need him later. You might need a reference from him. This occurs frequently between employees and employers. Don't be so gruff and hasty in mistreating a person.

This advice of our Sages relates to our discussion of hating

and being nasty to people. You might need that person one day, so it doesn't pay to be nasty today. But there is a deeper idea here, as well. Ever since Adam ate from the Eitz Hada'as, we all have a mixture of good and evil in everything we do. Our challenge is to distinguish between the good and evil. Hashem told us that He is placing the decision before us. "I have placed life and death, good and evil before you ... Now choose life!" (Devarim 30:15-19). Hashem wants us to choose good. But this commandment itself teaches us that evil is an option. We cannot avoid the struggle between good and evil. It is fundamental to our existence as human beings and especially as Jews. This mixture is ever-present within us.

If someone does something cruel to me, how should I think about it? It is acceptable and honest to think that, unfortunately, he gave in to his evil side. His good side would not have wanted to him to do this, but he is a human being and, sometimes, the bad overpowers the good. Sometimes, we don't choose life. If I am the victim of that person's horrible choice, what am I supposed to say? I should say that *nebach*, unfortunately, he fell and gave in to his evil side, as we all do sometimes. If, however, I respond to him with vindictiveness and hatred, I am only making things worse. I am providing more energy for his hatred to feed on. It will create even greater hatred in the world. Instead of a small fire of discord or even a moderate one, there will be a huge conflagration. When my hatred and his hatred combine, we share a great hatred together, and we are then both responsible for it.

The Mishna says, *al tehi baz lechol adam*. Don't be nasty to anyone, even if he was nasty to you. *Ein lecha adam she'ein lo sha'a*. Every person has his time. This person has a good side, too. Right now, his bad side is dictating his actions. But that's not really him. The good within the person is the true essence of his soul. The good is central to his personality, even though in this situation it was inoperative. If I broadcast goodness with a smile instead of *sinas chinam*, then my goodness will awaken within him his own

goodness. My goodness will light the flame of goodness within him to conquer the evil within his soul.

Every stimulus causes a response. If the stimulus is love, it will one day evoke a loving response, even if not today or even anytime in the immediate future. There is no person who doesn't eventually have that potential moment of *teshuva* when he can get back on track. The goodness that you broadcast to your supposed enemy will eventually reach him and change his attitude.

This is more than good practical advice. It is correct moral and spiritual advice. No matter how bad that person is now, he can change if given a good chance. If we respond to hatred with hatred, the Gemara calls it *sinas chinam*. It is *not* justified. You cannot hate the person himself. That kind of hatred is false and for nothing. It is destructive. Our response must be goodness. By showering goodness on a fellow Jew, we will light the goodness within his soul.

I

Had Bar Kamtza Stayed

Imagine if the Jews wouldn't have thrown Bar Kamtza out of the party. Bar Kamtza might have been willing to change. If they would have showered him with goodness, he could have become a *ba'al teshuva*. Instead of encouraging Rome to become a mortal enemy of Israel, he could have turned Rome into a friend. By being mean to him, however, the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed.

I would like to add the following true story one of my students told me. His wife went shopping in a Jewish neighborhood. At the end of the month, they received their bank statement and saw that on that day, a check had been cashed for a *sheitel*—a Jewish wig—for approximately \$2,000 with his wife's check. When he asked his wife about it, she said that she never bought that *sheitel*. Upon examining the check, they realized that the signature had been

forged. They also discovered that the particular checkbook was missing. It was a clear case of fraud.

They contacted the *sheitel* merchant, who investigated and was able to identify the lady who bought the *sheitel* with the forged check. All kinds of accusatory thoughts entered their minds. How could a religious woman write a forged check to buy a *sheitel*, a religious article? Should they press criminal charges against this wicked person in order to recover the *sheitel* and recover their money from the merchant?

The merchant told them to wait a little longer so she could do some more investigating. After a short time, the merchant reported to my student and his wife that the client was a poor woman, sick with cancer, who had lost all of her hair due to chemotherapy. My student then decided not to press charges, and the merchant returned the money. What happened to the *sheitel* is confidential.

This is a vivid illustration of how to deal with evil. Always think of the goodness of the Jewish person who had a moral lapse and did the evil deed. In this way, we atone for the sin of *sinas chinam* and become worthy for the ultimate and complete redemption of Israel.

We cannot give up on anybody, even on our worst mortal enemy. This is the lesson of the *metzora*. The Shem Mishmuel's deep and enlightening insight about Shabbos should inspire us. Shabbos is a day of love. On Shabbos, we must never fight and must only shower love upon one another. This is the way to bring us back to *ahavas Yisrael*, the right way for our society to function. May it be a society of peace, friendship, love, and all goodness.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to Tanya, can we hate sinners?
2. What are we allowed to hate?
3. What was the *sinas chinam* in the Bar Kamtza story?
4. Why does a *metzora* bring three sacrifices?
5. How does Shabbos fix *lashon hara*?

EXERCISES

1. Try to list for one day:
 - a) When you felt hatred and anger
 - b) When you spoke *lashon hara*
 - c) When you felt friendship and love
 - d) When you spoke nicely
2. Try for another day to improve your love for people and avoid hatred.

