

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Tazria-Metzora

1 Iyar, 5783 / Apr. 22, 2023

Vol. 14 Num. 28 (#572)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Esther and Craig Guttmann and Family  
in honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> yaahrtzeit of Max Guttmann ז"ל שמואל בן שמואל ז"ל

### Speak No Evil

Much of parshiyot Tazria and Metzora deal with the mysterious ailment of *tzaraat*. Though often translated into English as something similar to leprosy, it is unclear what this discolouring condition actually is. One thing, though, is generally accepted: the cause of *tzaraat* is spiritual, rather than physical. In fact, our Sages often assume one particular cause - *lashon hara* (roughly translated as improper speech). [See Arachin 16a-b.] Many commentators even note that the term *metzora* (meaning, one who suffers from *tzaraat*) itself is an acronym of *motzi shem ra* - one who indulges in *lashon hara*. The association with *lashon hara* stems most obviously from Bamidbar Chapter 12, in which Miriam and Aharon are stricken with *tzaraat* for speaking negatively of their brother Moshe Rabbeinu's actions. Narratively, this event is seen as important enough to be repeated in Sefer Devarim, when Moshe Rabbeinu implores the people to remember what happened to his sister.

But what is it that makes *lashon hara* a serious enough violation to warrant such an extreme response from on high? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ז"ל wrote that Judaism is fundamentally "a religion of words and silences, speaking and listening, communicating and attending." (*I Believe: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible*, Parshat Metzora) A major part of Judaism, after all, is emulating Hashem. Hashem created the entire cosmos in which we find ourselves, using only His words. So too,

we must use our words carefully and creatively.

But our obligations go deeper than that. Rabbi Sacks goes on to note that while most ancient religions put up physical monuments to their gods in order to feel some level of connection with them, Jews need only use our words to achieve the same sense of connection. As my teacher (himself a student of Rabbi Sacks), Rabbi Dr. Sam Lebens once put it, other religions might believe that divinity needs to be personified in order to enter the world, but Judaism believes that Hashem enters our world through the words of Torah that we study day and night. As the Maggid of Mezritch wrote, "A person is not entirely separate from the letters that he speaks; his physical body is distinct, but not his life-force. So it is with the blessed One, Who is not separate from the letters [of the Torah]." (*Magid Devarav L'Yaakov*, pg. 126)

If we realize the importance of our words, and seek to emulate Hashem through our use of them, then we will naturally come to realize that misusing words can be abominable. As Rabbi Sacks concludes, "we need the laws of *lashon hara* now more than almost ever before. Social media is awash with hate. The language of politics has become *ad hominem* and vile. We seem to have forgotten what *Tazria and Metzora* are here to remind us: that **evil speech is a plague. It destroys relationships, rides roughshod over people's feelings, debases the public square, turns**

**politics into a jousting match between competing egos, and defiles all that is sacred about our common life. It need not be like this**" (emphasis in the original).

Our words come with a tremendous amount of power, which requires a great amount of responsibility to properly wield. The way that we speak about ourselves and others directly impacts how we see the world and interact with it. It is, as a matter of fact, our ability to speak thoughtfully that makes us bearers of the Divine Image in the first place. As Rashi notes, the *nefesh chayah* that was granted to humanity is what gave us the ability to think and to speak. (Rashi on Bereishit 2:7)

Our words could set us up for good or cause us to trip and fall. Let us all try to be more mindful in our speech, and, in turn, our actions as well. As Rabbi Leo Dee so beautifully said in the wake of unimaginable tragedy, we humans are blessed with the ability to differentiate between good and bad. "If we move forward in doing good, more good will get done this week than last week."

[sgotlib@torontotorah.com](mailto:sgotlib@torontotorah.com)

#### OUR BEIT MIDRASH

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<b>SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH</b>	RABBI JARED ANSTANDIG, RABBI YEHUDA MANN
<b>AVREICHIM</b>	RABBI STEVEN GOTLIB, IDAN RAKOVSKY
<b>ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS</b>	RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING
<b>MEN'S POST-HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM</b>	YEHOSHUA BENDAYAN, DAVID KROO, ANDER MOSS, SHIMMY NAUENBERG, DANIEL SHEINIS, ELI WELTMAN
<b>WOMEN'S POST-HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM</b>	ORLY AZIZA, ATARA GASNER, CHAYA JUNI, MAXINE LEE-EWASCHUK, AILEEN MORRIS, HADASSAH NAUENBERG, YEJIDE OMOTOSO, FEIGA WERNER, RIVKA WERNER, KINNERET WITTY



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**Summary**

This chapter begins with G-d praising His chosen servant. This servant will be quiet and gentle, and will successfully pursue justice (42:1-4). G-d then turns His attention to the audience, presumably Israel, and explains their purpose – to bring light to the nations and to “open the eyes of the blind”. [This is also the beginning of the Haftorah for Parshat Bereishit.] (5-7). G-d declares that, as G-d, He will reliably bring about what He says He will do. (8-9)

At this point, the text shifts its focus to the rest of the world, calling upon all inhabitants – and in particular, seafarers and those on distant islands – to sing songs of praise to G-d for His righteous might. (10-13)

Next, G-d describes the physical destruction of mountains and rivers in the process of bringing the Jews back to Israel. Those who worship molten images will retreat and acknowledge G-d. (14-17)

The chapter comes to a close with a Yeshayahu calling to Israel and chastising them for refusing to obey G-d’s messages (18-23). The chapter’s concluding verses may be read as a continuing of that rebuke, but Ibn Ezra reads it as a

prediction that Israel will acknowledge that everything bad that befell them is due to G-d’s punishment, for their refusal to follow His ways. (24-25)

**Insight**

Who is the “servant” in the opening of this chapter (verses 1-4)? Classical commentators debate his identity.

Rashi contends that the servant is not a particular individual, but is the collective nation of Israel. According to this approach, when the prophet says that the servant will not raise his voice, the intention is that Israel will not have to seek out the nations of the world in order to teach them Torah; on their own the nations will come to Israel.

Rabbi Yosef Kara suggests that this servant is a reference to Cyrus the Great. According to Ezra 1:1-4, Cyrus, stirred by Divine inspiration, permitted and even encouraged all Israelites within his domain to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The justice that the servant will pursue will be vengeance against the Babylonians who destroyed the First Temple.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra argues that Yeshayahu’s servant is the prophet

himself. Quietly, yet convincingly, Yeshayahu will prophesy to the nations everything that will occur to them. According to Ibn Ezra, Yeshayahu’s objective will not be to convert the nations but rather to simply report to them what will happen to them in the future.

Finally, Radak writes that the servant is the Messiah. The Messiah will bring peace to the world not by coercion nor by loud protestation. Instead, he will draw his supporters by calmly speaking. It is worth noting, however, that Rabbi Yosef Kara wrote very passionately against this approach. Perhaps due to fear of Christians who saw these verses as direct references to Jesus, Rabbi Kara immediately dismisses the notion that this passage could be referring to the Messiah. In fact, he writes (on Yeshayahu 42:3) that only one who is “unknowledgeable in Bible and in the flow of verses” could take these passages so out of context so as to suggest that they refer to the Messiah.

*janstandig@torontotorah.com*

**Siddur Insights: LeSheim Yichud**

Ever since I was in preschool I remember that we counted the Omer in the daily davening, but not before we sang together “*Hineni muchan umezuman*” in unison. In many shuls, prior to the counting of the Omer at Maariv they say “*LeSheim Yichud etc.*,” which appears before *Hineni* in many siddurim.

The general meaning of the *LeSheim Yichud* prayer is that we are about to perform the mitzvah of Sefirat Ha’Omer, with intention related to the Divine Name. Some also have the custom to say a similar paragraph before they put on tefillin. The origins of this minhag are in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the book *Reishit Chochmah* by the Kabbalist Rabbi Eliyahu Di Vidas. It was then enthusiastically embraced by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, author of the sefer *Shnei Luchot HaBrit* (“The Shlah”).

However, there has been great dispute throughout the ages regarding this custom. The most famous rabbinic authority who wrote against this custom was Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, author of the *Noda BeYehudah*. The rabbi argued that the *LeSheim Yichud* is unnecessary, but his main objection seems to be that our sages instituted and wrote our prayers, including everything necessary for each mitzvah to be fulfilled in the best possible way. Furthermore, since this minhag is recorded neither in the Babylonian nor the Jerusalem Talmud, we shouldn’t add it to our prayers.

Many explain that the background for this ruling was Rabbi Landau’s objection to the Chassidic movement, which embraced Kabbalistic customs and said this prayer. This explanation makes sense since Rabbi Landau says that “regarding

this orphan generation I say, ‘For Hashem’s paths are straight. The righteous will walk on them, but Chassidim will stumble on them.’” He borrowed Hosheia 14:10, which says “For Hashem’s paths are straight. The righteous will walk on them, but sinners will stumble on them.” He switched “sinners” for “Chassidim”.

Although it is generally true that Chassidim say the *LeSheim Yichud* and Mitnagdim do not, it is recorded that several major Lithuanian Rabbis said it. This includes Rabbi Aryeh Leib Heller (who recommended it in his introduction to his *Shev Shemaata*). On the other hand, and some Chassidic masters didn’t say it, including Rabbi Chaim Halberstam of Sanz. It is interesting to note that Belz Chassidim have the custom to say it every single day during the Omer except on the yahrtzeit of the Noda BeYehudah, the 17<sup>th</sup> of Iyar.

Even those who normally say *Hineni muchan* for mitzvot have a unique reason not to say it when counting the Omer. The text says we are prepared “to fulfill the commandment of counting the Omer,” which seems to indicate that this is a biblical commandment. We generally follow the view that this is currently a rabbinic commandment. Treating a rabbinical commandment as a biblical commandment may be a violation of the law against adding to the Torah (*bal tosif*).

Sources were taken primarily from the Shiur of Rabbi Asher Weiss, found [here](#).

*yman@torontotorah.com*

**Biography**  
**Rabbi Yosef Schneerson**  
**Rabbi Baruch Weintraub**

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the sixth Rebbe of Chabad (also known as the Rebbe Rayyatz), was born in 5340 (1880); his father Rabbi Sholom Dovber was the fifth Rebbe of Chabad (the Rebbe Rashab). At the age of fifteen, Yosef Yitzchak became his father's personal secretary; he also represented his father at different rabbinical conventions. At the age of 18, a year after marrying, he was appointed as the head of the Tomchei Temimim yeshiva network. In that position he helped to spread Chabad's Torah, opening new yeshivot.

When he was forty his father passed away, and he formally became the leader of his father's movement. This was at the birth of the Communist Revolution, and dark clouds appeared in the sky of Russia's Jewish world. The Communists prohibited any religious activity, and killed or exiled to Siberia any opposition. Nonetheless, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak continued his efforts to enable and sustain rich Jewish life, including the establishment of new Chabad yeshivot. In 5377 (1927) he was caught and imprisoned by the Soviet police. Many stories are told of his courage against his interrogators. One such story relates that once the interrogator threatened him with a pistol; the Rebbe responded, "This toy can scare those who have one world and many gods – but not those who have one G-d and two worlds." Eventually, he was accused of counter-revolutionary activities, and sentenced to death. Worldwide pressure from Western governments forced the Communist regime to back down and release the Rebbe, but under the condition that he would leave Russia immediately.

The Rebbe dedicated his next few years for a journey around the world, including Eretz Yisrael and North America, where he tried to promote Torah and mitzvot. He refused to stay in America, though, stating, "America is an irreligious place, where even rabbis shave off their beards."

World War II found the Rebbe in Warsaw, where he was caught by the Nazis and then released due to international pressure. He fled to New York, where he rebuilt Chabad after the war.

Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef passed away on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Shevat 5410 (1950).

*bweintraub@torontotorah.com*

**Weekly Halachah: Propping Up a Siddur**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

**May I elevate a siddur by putting another *sefer* [sacred text] beneath it, to aid my davening?**

We treat our *sefarim* with honour, and so give honour to the Torah they contain.

One may not place a siddur or gemara atop a chumash; one may not even place a book of *navi* (Prophets) atop a chumash. This applies even when doing so temporarily, as in the case of cleaning up a room, and it applies regardless of why one does it. It certainly applies to elevating one's siddur by propping it on the empty boxes that normally hold tefillin.

Intentionally positioning a *sefer* to elevate another *sefer* while learning is also prohibited, for this function is more suited to a block of wood or similar object. However, one may put a *sefer* down atop another *sefer* if the lower *sefer* just happens to be there, and is not put there to serve as a support.

One may not use a *sefer* as a bookmark for another *sefer*. However, storing *sefarim* of equal status atop each other is permitted.

(Megillah 27a; Machzor Vitry 427; Tosafot Bava Batra 13b *madbik*; Sefer Chasidim 141; Derishah Yoreh Deah 282:5; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 282:19; Taz Yoreh Deah 282:13; Pitchei Teshuvah Yoreh Deah 282:17; Mishneh Halachot 12:216)

*torczyner@torontotorah.com*

**Sefer haChinuch, Mitzvot 19, 20, 21:**  
**Eating/Owning Chametz During Pesach**  
**Telling of the Exodus from Egypt**  
**By Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

Mitzvot 9 and 11 obligate us to destroy chametz before Pesach, and to ensure that we own no chametz during Pesach. Shemot 13:3 adds, "And chametz shall not be eaten," prohibiting eating chametz during Pesach; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah's 19<sup>th</sup> mitzvah. Shemot 13:7 adds that chametz shall not be seen in our property during Pesach, either; Sefer haChinuch counts this as the Torah's 20<sup>th</sup> mitzvah.

The Talmud (Pesachim 6b) asks why we search for chametz and eliminate it before Pesach; we already declare the chametz ownerless and of no interest to us, so that we are not viewed as "possessing" chametz. The Talmud responds that we are concerned lest we find attractive chametz and decide that we do want it. Tosafot (2a *or*) explains that because we have the added mitzvah prohibiting consumption of chametz, the Sages added a layer of obligation, requiring that we search for chametz and eliminate it.

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In Shemot 13:8, Moshe instructed the Jews, "And you shall tell your child on that day: Because of this, G-d acted for me when we left Egypt." As explained by Sefer haChinuch in Mitzvah 21, the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* [re-telling the account of leaving Egypt] is a two-part mitzvah: (1) To talk about the events of our departure from Egypt, and (2) To thank G-d for engineering that miracle. The Torah says we should do this while eating the korban pesach; in the absence of a korban, we do this at our Pesach Seder.

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (Tzlach to Berachot 12b) noted that there is a separate mitzvah of mentioning our departure from Egypt on a daily basis; the Talmud even discusses the possibility that such a mitzvah might apply nightly as well. Nonetheless, this on-going mitzvah is not included in the standard count of the 613 mitzvot. Rabbi Landau suggested that this omission may be because the verse regarding the daily memorial says, "So that you will remember," but does not command, "You shall remember."

*torczyner@torontotorah.com*



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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.

### Shabbat Apr. 21-22

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

30 min pre-minchah R' Steven Gotlib, Big Topics, Village Shul

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Milevsky Bais Medrash) (men)

After minchah, Idan Rakovsky, Halachah in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

### Sun. Apr. 23

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver, Clanton Park (men): New Zman—Niddah!

### Mon. Apr. 24

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Megillat Ruth, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

### Tues. Apr. 25 Yom haZikaron

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Sefer Emunah uBitachon, Village Shul

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university men)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon: Kohelet, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:00 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 19), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) *not this week*

8:30 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Women's Beit Midrash, Shaarei Shomayim (university women) *not this week*

### Wed. Apr. 26 Yom ha'Atzmaut

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Halachic Philosophy of the Rav, Or Chaim (university men) *not this week*

8:00 PM R' Steven Gotlib, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Differences, The Village Shul

8:15 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

8:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, Megillat Ruth, Shaarei Tefillah

### Thurs. Apr. 27

8:00 AM R' Steven Gotlib, Jewish Mysticism, Village Shul

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 31), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah (advanced), for location: [ymann@torontotorah.com](mailto:ymann@torontotorah.com)

8:30 PM Idan Rakovsky, Sefer haChinuch, Shaarei Tefillah Beit Midrash Night (men)

### Fri. Apr. 28

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*  
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

### COMING UP!

Sunday April 30: Limmud Toronto! Register at <https://limmud.ca>  
9:30 AM Rabbi Jared Anstandig, Unity Through Diversity: Elu v'Elu in Jewish Thought  
3:00 PM Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, The Ethics of Commercial AI

10 AM Wednesday May 3

Four-Part Series Begins: JEWISH MIGRATIONS: ORIGINS OF ASHKENAZI & SEPHARDI JUDAISM  
R' Mordechai Torczyner, ZOOM @ <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> Register @ <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>  
*There is a fee*

12:30 PM Wednesdays May 3, 10 and 17

The Ethical Challenge: Three Sessions on Business Ethics, on ZOOM  
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10 AM to 1 PM Sunday May 14

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6 Classes About Yom haZikaron, Yom ha'Atzmaut, Yom Yerushalayim  
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