

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Tazria Metzora



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Torah Wellsprings - Tazria - Metzora

Nature is controlled by Hashem

Tzaraas (leprosy) is an illness, that one might think is natural; something that goes around. The Torah elaborates on the laws of *tzaraas* to teach us that even those matters that appear natural are really from Hashem.

As the Chinuch (169) writes, "The purpose of this mitzvah is to implant in our hearts that Hashem's *hashgachah* is over each person, and that He pays attention to all the details of our life. As it states (*Iyov* 34:21), *כי עיניו על דרכי*, 'Hashem's eyes are on the ways of man. He sees every step he takes.' Therefore, Hashem commanded us to recognize that the illness [of *tzaraas*] comes from sins. As Chazal (*Eiruchin* 15:) say, *tzaraas* comes, mostly, from *lashon hara*. We shouldn't think it happened naturally... The *metzora* (person afflicted with *tzaras*) is quarantined for [a week], so he will have time to examine his deeds and do *teshuvah*. Sometimes he needs to be in confinement for a double term [two weeks]. This is because perhaps his *teshuvah* during the first confinement was incomplete. We can compare this to someone who stole and decides to give back half of what he stole. Hashem tells him to go into confinement a second time, in the hope that perhaps this time he will complete his *teshuvah*."

These words remind us that everything, including those matters that seem natural, are from Hashem.

As Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l* said: "I never said this before, but now that I'm at the end of my life - extremely close to the end - I will tell you that I can swear while holding a sacred item that when a person moves his pinky, or when a person moves his eyes, it is solely with Hashem's strength. One can't carry a piece of straw without Hashem's help."

From the Distance

The *parashah* (12:2) begins, *אשה כי תזריע וילדה*, "If a woman gives birth to a boy, she is *tamei* for seven days." The Midrash (*Vayikra* 14:2) compares this *pasuk* to (*Bereishis* 22:4), *וירא את המקום מרחוק*, "[Avraham] saw the place [of the *akeidah*] from the distance." What is the connection between these two *pesukim*?

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* answers that the Midrash is explaining why a woman who gives birth, becomes *tamei*. She gave birth to a holy, Jewish child. Why should that cause impurity? It is possible that this child will become the *cohen gadol*!? Does it make sense that the mother should become *tamei*?

The Midrash answers that *tumah* represents being distant from Hashem. And everyone, including great *tzaddikim*, experience times in their life when they feel distant from Hashem.

During these times, they think Hashem isn't happy with them, and that He isn't interested in their service. It is a very painful experience, but they continue performing their obligations, nonetheless. Their devotion to Hashem's laws during such times, raises them to very high spiritual levels.

So, it shouldn't surprise us that a mother becomes impure after giving birth to a holy child. The impurity represents the great challenges that her child will go through in life.

We quote the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* who teaches this lesson:

"The *Zohar* states that *וירא את המקום מרחוק*, Avraham saw that he is very distant [from Hashem]. *מרחוק ומיותר*, [he felt] distant and unimportant. Nevertheless, Avraham said to

himself, 'Why should this make a difference for me? I will do what Hashem commanded me.' It was truly a very great test... All his levels (*madreigos*) were taken away, and yet he said 'Why should this make a difference' [and he continued serving Hashem] ... This happens to every person at a time when he finds himself very distant... Every Yid has times when he feels close and other times when he feels distant. As it states (*Yeshayah* 57:19), שלום שלום לרחוק ולקרוב, 'Peace. Peace! to the distant [ones] and to the close [ones].' The Midrash's question is, why should a woman who gave birth to a Jewish child cause *tumah*? The answer is this is how man is created. There should be times of ריחוק, distance. And there is a great benefit earned from those times. Therefore, every *oved Hashem* shouldn't ask why he sometimes feels very distant, because it is all certainly for the good."

The feeling of "distant" generally happens after one commits an *aveirah*. He thinks Hashem doesn't want him anymore. But if he will continue serving Hashem, he will reach extremely high levels.

The Severity of *Lashon Hara*

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 155:) teaches, לית דעניא, מכלבא וליה דעתיר מחזירא, "Nothing is poorer than a dog and nothing is wealthier than a pig."

Rashi explains, a pig is wealthy because, "It can eat all types of food, it finds food on its own, and people tend to feed it."

A dog is poor, as Rashi explains, "No one has compassion on a dog to give it a lot of food."

Why is this written in the Gemara? Why do we need to know that a *chazir* (pig) is wealthy and a dog is poor?

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* explains that the wealthy pig signifies the prohibition of eating *chazir*. The poor dog represents the *aveirah* of speaking *lashon hara*. (As the Gemara [*Pesachim* 118.] says, "Whoever speaks *lashon hara*...

it would be proper to throw him to the dogs.") The *chazir* is very wealthy. This means this prohibition is very well kept. There isn't another sin in the Torah that is upheld as scrupulously as this one. Even many non-religious Yidden refrain from eating *chazir*.

In contrast, people are, unfortunately, not very careful with *lashon hara*. It's the poorest sin, as it is so neglected.

Every mitzvah has its *mazal*. The prohibition of eating *chazir* has a very good *mazal*, while *lashon hara* has a bad *mazal*.

It isn't because the *aveirah* of *lashon hara* isn't severe. The Gemara compares *lashon hara* to the three cardinal sins: ע"ו, גילוי ערויות, ושפיכות דמים, idol worship, murder, and adultery. And the Or Hachaim HaKadosh (14:9) writes, "Nothing distances a person from his Creator like *lashon hara*."

Lashon hara also causes a lot of suffering in this world. Rashi (14:4) writes, לפי שהנגעים באים, על לשון הרע, "Tzaraas comes from speaking *lashon hara*..."

There is no more *tzaraas* in these days. But the punishments of *tzaraas* continues in other forms. As the Chofetz Chaim (*Shemiras HaLashon, Zechirah* ch.6, 8) teaches:

"The *Tikunei Zohar* writes that this severe sin [of *lashon hara*] causes poverty, *chas veshalom*. Therefore, someone who desires to live well should be cautious about speaking *lashon hara*... I also saw in holy *sefarim* that when one speaks *lashon hara*, he has less food to eat, like the snake, who was cursed, and has less to eat. It is obvious that if a person speaks *lashon hara* constantly, his punishments of poverty and *tzaros* will also be constant... It isn't solely they who are punished. The entire world is punished because of them. There will be a lack of food for the entire world. As the Gemara (*Taanis* 7) states, 'Rains stop because of those who speak *lashon hara*...' Speaking *lashon hara* also causes wars and death in the world, as the *Zohar* tells. Therefore, someone who

cares about his life, and about the wellbeing of the world, should be cautious with his speech. It will be good for him in this world and in the next world."

So, we see that although one won't get *tzaraas* today for *speaking lashon hara*, poverty and suffering do make their appearance. That is how *tzaraas* appears in our times.

He will also have *tzaraas* on his *neshamah*. This form of *tzaraas* applies to all generations. It states (14:35), *כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבַּיִת*, "I saw something that *appears like tzaraas*..."

Rashi explains, "Even a Torah scholar who is certain that he has *tzaraas* shouldn't tell [the *cohen*] with a certainty that he saw *tzaraas*. He should say *כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי*, 'It appears like *tzaraas*.'"

Why can't he say, "I saw *tzaraas*"?

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* explains that the primary *tzaraas* is on the *neshamah*. Therefore, one says, *כִּנְגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבַּיִת*, "I saw something that appears like *tzaraas*," but it isn't the primary *tzaraas*. The primary *tzaraas* is on the *neshamah*.

It is also common sense that one should avoid speaking *lashon hara*. If one traces the origin of all disputes, he will find that negligence with the laws of *lashon hara* stands at the root.

The Dubno Magid expresses this point with a *mashal* (*parable*): Someone once came to his doctor and complained of chest pains. The doctor spoke to him about the importance of being cautious about getting angry. The patient interrupted the doctor, "If I wanted to listen to a *mussar drashah*, I would have gone to the *beis medresh*. I came here to hear medical advice..."

The doctor said, "You don't understand. I'm giving you medical advice. I'm explaining to you that for your health, you must be cautious with your anger. If you become angry, you will suffer chest pains, which could lead to a heart attack..."

Similarly, guarding one's speech isn't good only for spiritual reasons. It is good in this world, too. It saves a person from a lot of trouble.

As a wise man said, "Before I speak, I rule over my words. After I speak, the words rule over me."

The *Beis HaLevi zt'l* would often open his *tabak pushkeh* (snuffbox), look inside, and then immediately close it. One of his students was curious about that practice, so when the opportunity arose he opened the snuffbox and found the letters *שפ"ו שמ"ו* written inside. He asked the *Beis HaLevi* about it. The *Beis HaLevi* told him that they are *roshei teivos* (acronym) for *שומר פיו ולשונו שומר מצרות נפשו*, "Someone who guards his tongue protects himself from troubles."

The Midrash (*Metzora*) teaches:

There was once a peddler who wandered from town to town and would announce in the marketplaces, *מֵאֵן בְּעִי סִמָּא דְחַיִּים*, "Who wants the elixir for life?"

Reb Yanai told the peddler he wants to buy that medicine.

The peddler replied, "People like you don't need it."

When Reb Yanai insisted that he wants to buy it, the peddler opened a *Tehillim* and read (*Tehillim* 34), *מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים... נִצּוֹר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ מִרַע*, "Who is the person who desires life...? He should guard his tongue from speaking bad."

Reb Yanai said, "I've been saying this *pasuk* my entire life and I never knew its meaning until that peddler explained it to me!"

What did Reb Yanai learn from this peddler that he didn't know before?

The Dubno Magid *zt'l* explains that Reb Yanai originally thought the *pasuk* was saying that the reward for cautious speech is longevity. The peddler taught Reb Yanai

that long life isn't a reward. Rather, it is a natural effect. When one is cautious with his speech, he will avoid disputes and many hardships, and thereby he will live a long life.

After learning all the above, we can understand the severity of *lashon hara*. Yet people are still negligent with this prohibition. As we explained, it is the poorest mitzvah. But those who are cautious will earn immense benefits in this world and in the next.

Why People Speak *Lashon Hara*

It states (*Koheles* 10:11), אם ישוך הנחש בלא לחש ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון, "A snake bites...and there is no gain for the person who speaks *lashon hara*."

The Gemara (*Taanis* 8.) explains, "In the future, all animals will go to the snake and ask him, 'A lion pounces and eats, a wolf attacks and eats, but what benefit do you gain from biting [and poisoning people]?"

"The snake will reply, 'And what benefit does a person who speaks *lashon hara* gain?'"

There is no pleasure in speaking *lashon hara*. There is no gain. So why do people speak it?

The Pela Yoetz (*Kinah*) says that it is caused by jealousy. He writes, "A person's heart is bad. He wants to be the only person who has wisdom, does good deeds, owns wealth, receives honor, etc. And therefore, he is upset when someone else reaches his level, or is greater than him. He is jealous, he wants his [fellow man's] downfall, and he wants to slander him... If a person desires life, he should run away from this attitude. He should be a warrior and conquer his *yetzer hara*. He can do so by believing with *emunah sheleimah* (complete faith) that no one can take away from him what is destined for him. Even if he would be the only person in the world, he won't earn more than the amount that was decreed for him. And even if there would be thousands of merchants,

all selling the same products as him, it wouldn't take away from the amount that was destined for him. He should be happy with Hashem's will, Who does what is best for each person."

If the Pela Yoetz wouldn't have mentioned it, we wouldn't recognize the connection between jealousy and *lashon hara*. But now that the Pela Yoetz (and other holy *sefarim*) teach us that the origin of *lashon hara* is jealousy, a person can test himself and recognize how true it is. When one is jealous of someone who has wealth or honor that he hoped would be his own, this causes him to be angry with that person and to speak *lashon hara* about him. The solution is to come to the realization that everyone gets what's destined for him, and no one is taking anything away from you.

It states (*Metzora* 14:9), והיה ביום השביעי יגלח את כל, "שערו את ראשו ואת זקנו ואת גבות עיניו ואת כל שערו יגלח", "It will be on the seventh day [of the purification of the *metzora*], he should shave off all the hair on his head: his beard, his eyebrows, all his hair shall be shorn."

The Ben Ish Chai explains this mitzvah based on the following Gemara (*Bava Basra* 16):

"Hashem says, 'I created in man many hairs. Each hair has its own pore, so that two hairs won't draw their nourishment from the same pore. If two hairs grew forth from the same pore, the person would become blind...'"

When they *מצורע* shaves his head, he discovers that each hair has its own root. No hair can take away the nourishment that was destined for another hair. He thereby realizes that likewise, no one can take away *parnassah* (livelihood) that was destined for him.

As he cuts his hair, he remembers the Gemara (*Yoma* 38), "No one can touch what is destined for his friend – not even a hairsbreadth." These ideas help him overcome jealousy. There is no reason to be

jealous, because no one is taking anything away from him. By remembering this, he won't be jealous, and he won't speak *lashon hara*.

The Gemara (*Eiruchin* 15:) says, "Whoever speaks *lashon hara* is *kofer be'ikar* (denies Hashem)." What is the connection between *lashon hara* and denying Hashem?

As we explained, *lashon hara* comes from jealousy. Jealousy is roused when one doesn't believe that everything is *bashert*. Because if he believed that everything is *bashert*, and no one can take anything away from him, he wouldn't be angry, jealous, or slander anyone. If he nevertheless speaks *lashon hara*, this is a sign that he didn't internalize this truth. He is *kofer be'ikar*, because he lacks the fundamentals of *emunah*.¹

A second cause, that brings people to speak *lashon hara*, is disrespect to others. They look down at people, and therefore they don't consider it wrong to speak badly about them.

It states (13:46), *בדרך ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו*, "He should sit alone. His place is outside the camp." Reb Zalman Sorotzkin zt'l (*Oznayim LaTorah*) explains that people speak *lashon hara* about others when they look down on them and they don't recognize their importance.

The Torah therefore obligates the *metzora* to sit outside the camp. As he sits there alone, he will need people to bring him food and care for his needs. That's when he will realize how much people are dependent on one another. And with that recognition, he will come to respect his fellow man. He will know that each person is important, as each person brings something to the world that is beneficial for mankind.

Ahavas Yisroel

Our holy *sefarim* teach that every Yid must keep the entire Torah, with all of its 613 mitzvos.² How is that possible? The Torah has laws for several types of people, and each category has their own mitzvos.

1. Many people own summer homes in the Catskills. Some of their summer homes are often just as comfortable as their homes in the city. However, going back around thirty years ago, the Catskills didn't offer such comfortable summer accommodations. Families lived for the two or three summer months in shabby bungalows. The rooms were few and small, and when one walked, the entire bungalow shook. When it rained, the rain beat noisily on the tin roof. In the winter the homes were inhabited by critters. Yet, that was the home they chose to live in for two or three months, each year.

It doesn't make sense. How can people, accustomed to comforts, agree and even desire to spend a couple of months in a small, dinky bungalow?

Some will say that it's because it was only for two or three months. But that isn't a satisfactory answer, because those same people wouldn't go to a hotel for a short weekend, if it isn't a five-star hotel. Even when they travel for a few hours they want first-class seats. They don't want to endure a few hours of discomfort, so why did they desire to live in a bungalow for two or three months? This question has roused people's curiosity for years, and few good answers were given.

But one wise person came up with the following:

There were other well to do people in the bungalow colony, and they were also living that way. That made living there bearable; even enjoyable...

Because a person doesn't want to be less than his peers. But if his peers are also living in a shabby bungalow, that makes it good enough for everyone to live that way.

2. He must keep the entire Torah because his 365 sinews and 248 limbs receive their *chiyus* by keeping the 365 *lavin* of the Torah and the 248 mitzvos asei.

There are laws exclusive for *cohanim*, for a *cohen gadol*, for a king, etc. It is impossible for a single individual to keep the entire Torah.

The Toldos Yaakov Yosef (*Korach* 1) explains that the solution is *ahavas Yisroel*. Klal Yisroel, as a collective whole, keeps the entire Torah, and when one is united through love with all Yidden, it can be considered as if he kept the entire Torah.

The question is, how does one attain *ahavas Yisroel*? How can you love someone who took something away from you, or harmed you in some other way?

The solution is *emunah*. When you believe that everything is *bashert*, and that no one can harm you if it weren't for Hashem's decree, you can love all Yidden.³

The Gemara (*Makos* 24.) says that although there are 613 mitzvos, בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת, צדיק, "Chabakuk came and established the entire Torah on one principle: belief in Hashem."

The Toldos explains that the Gemara doesn't mean that *emunah* alone is enough, because, obviously, one must keep all 613 mitzvos. Rather the Gemara is teaching us the path to keeping the entire Torah, with all the 613 mitzvos. That path is, העמידו על אחת, to be one (אחת) with all Yidden, with is achieved by *ahavas Yisroel*.

How does one attain *ahavas Yisroel*?

העמידו על אחת, צדיק באמונתו יהיה, when you believe that everything is from Hashem, you can love all Yidden.⁴

A group of people wrote a letter to Reb Yitzchak Elchanan Spector *zt'l* of Kovno, regarding a certain *psak* (ruling) that was handed down by the rav of their city. The *psak* was ruled in error, because the *rav* forgot a *Shach* (commentary on *Shulchan Aruch*) who *paskened* differently.

The letter seemed innocent enough. It looked like they were asking Reb Yitzchak Elchanan for his opinion, whether he agreed with the rav's *psak* or not. But Reb Yitzchak Elchanan understood what was written between the lines. The writers of the letter were hoping that Reb Yitzchak Elchanan would respond that the rav ruled in error. Then, they would use this to prove that the rav's incompetence and remove him from his post.

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan thus sent back a telegram stating that he fully agrees with the ruling of their esteemed rav.

The people were shocked. Had the rav of Kovno also forgotten the *Shach*?

A few hours later another telegram arrived. It said, "I retract my previous *psak*, because I just realized that the *Shach* says differently..."

In this manner, Reb Yitzchak Elchanan showed them that he respects their rav, and it isn't so terrible that the rav forgot a *Shach*. He showed them that even Reb Yitzchak Elchanan, from the *gedolei hador*, initially

3. When a person hits a dog with a stick, the dog will bite the stick in retaliation. It doesn't realize that it isn't the stick that is hurting him, rather the person wielding the stick.

The *nimshal* is, when someone harms you, it isn't the person doing it. He is just a staff in Hashem's hand. But instead of recognizing this, he fights with the person who harmed him.

4. The Toldos explains that העמידו על אחת has two translations, and both are implied in this Gemara. It means that the counsel to keep the entire Torah is to be אחת, one, with all Yidden. And there is אחת, one counsel, to attain *ahavas Yisroel*. That counsel is צדיק באמונתו יהיה, to have *emunah*.

forgot the *Shach*. And with his second telegram he made certain that the Torah law was upkept.⁵

Once, Reb Yaakov Kaminetzky *zt'l* met with Reb Moshe Feinstein *zt'l* and he saw that Reb Moshe was extremely happy. He asked him about this, and Reb Moshe told him the following:

"Three months ago, I was conducting a *din Torah* in my home and I ruled according to the Torah. Later that day, someone called me up. He said, 'I'm the person who you obligated to pay money in your *din Torah* today. I want you to know that you ruled erroneously...' and he said several disrespectful words.

"Today, this man came to me again, and he asked me to give him a *haskamah*, authorizing him to be a *shochet*. I thought to myself: Before, he spoke disrespectfully to me and now he wants me to do him this favor? But Yom Kippur had passed since then, and I had already forgiven him, so I agreed to test him. He knew the laws well, and I wrote him a letter of approbation,

attesting that he is fit to be a *shochet*. Then I rebuked him for speaking improperly to me.

"The man didn't know what I was talking about. He never called me... Then we figured out that it was another person (who was also involved in the *din Torah*) called up and pretended to be this person.

"That is why I'm happy," Reb Moshe concluded. He passed a difficult test; he put aside all his reservations to help his fellow man. If he had taken revenge, it would be against an innocent person...

One approach for studying Torah is *derech hapilpul* (an in-depth approach to understanding Torah). Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* liked to study Torah using this approach, and therefore he asked his children to buy him the sefer *Chidushei HaRim* on *Shas*, which is written in the *pilpul* style.

He explained why he likes this approach to Torah so much. He said, "With *pilpul* one can always find a way to explain a difficult *Yid*." By using the *derech hapilpul*, he was able to find innovative ways to find some merit, even for sinful Jews.⁶

5. Reb Yitzchak Elchanan Spector studied Torah day and night, and he hardly slept. Someone asked him, "Doesn't the Rambam say one should sleep eight hours a night?"

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan replied, wittily, "I spent many nights trying to understand and explain that Rambam as well."

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan battled the *maskilim* (those who followed the Enlightenment movement). There was another person working together with him, against the *maskilim*. However, that person wasn't really interested in battling the *maskilim*; he simply enjoyed the excitement of the dispute.

Reb Yitzchak Elchanan told him, "Do you know what the difference is, between me and you? I'll tell you with a *mashal*: Homeowners and cats both hate mice. The difference is that homeowners don't want to see the mice, while cats hope to find them."

6. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:6) teaches, "*Teshuvah* brings those who are distant closer. Yesterday, Hashem hated him. He was disgusting, revolting, and distanced. Today, [Hashem] loves him; he is precious, close, a friend..."

Reb Nachum Yasser *zt'l* heard some *yungerleit* discussing this Rambam, and they couldn't understand how a person's status could change so rapidly. Yesterday Hashem hated him, and today he is beloved! How could this change happen so quickly?

Reb Nachum had a son who unfortunately went off the *derech*. He never spoke about this son because it caused him too much distress, but this time he said, "If my son entered this *beis medresh* right now, come

The letter צ' (*tzaddik*) of the alef beis is holding a *yud* on its shoulders. (Because a צ' is a י' with a צ' on top.) The early *sefarim* say that this hints that a *tzaddik* is someone who helps others and tolerates others.

According to the Arizal, the *yud* on top of the *tzaddik* is written backwards. This hints that a *tzaddik* is someone who can tolerate even someone who is crooked and backwards.

Why isn't an *alef* called a *tzaddik*, too? Doesn't an א' also carry a *yud* on its shoulder? We can answer that it is because the א' is also standing on a *yud*. A *tzaddik* is good to all Yidden. Not someone who helps some, and tramples others.

There are concepts in this week's Torah portion, which allude to the importance of *ahavas Yisroel*.

We all know that the color white represents purity. As it states (*Yeshayah* 1:18), "אם יהיו חטאיכם כשנים כשלג ילבינו, "If your sins will be red...they will become white like snow." So why is *tzaraas* white? *Tzaraas* represents sins, it should be red. Why is it white?

The white *tzaraas* hints to a person who acts like a *tzaddik* in most ways. He davens with *kavanah*, he learns well, and his ways are praiseworthy. Only, he isn't cautious with *lashon hara*. The Torah is hinting to us that although he is white in all his ways, since he isn't careful with *lashon hara*, he is *tamei*. This isn't the type of *tzaddik* Hashem desires.

The birds a *metzora* brought for a *korban* are תור ובני יונה. This week's *parashah* states that when a woman gives birth, she should bring either a בני יונה or a תור for a *korban chatas*. As it states (12:6), "ובמלאת ימי טהרה לבן או לבת תביא כבש... לעולה, " [after a birth] of a son or

daughter, she should bring a sheep...for an *olah*, and a יונה or תור [bird] for a *chatas*."

There are two differences between this fowl sacrifice in comparison to all other fowl sacrifices stated in the Torah. One difference is that generally two תור or two בני יונה are brought together.⁷ This time, only one bird is brought. Furthermore, generally, the Torah writes תור first, and then it writes בני יונה. This time, the Torah mentions the בני יונה first.

The Baal HaTurim explains, "This teaches us that since he only brings one bird, if he finds a יונה, he shouldn't take a תור. This is because the spouse of the תור mourns for its partner, and it won't remarry another." The תור feels devastated when separated. The Torah wants to prevent the תור from going through this. Therefore, the Torah recommends taking a בני יונה, whenever possible.

This is a lesson in *ahavas Yisroel*, because if the Torah is so concerned about the feelings of a bird, we certainly must be cautious with the feelings of our fellow man.

Kashrus

At the end of last week's *parashah* the Torah discusses the *halachos* of *kashrus*. This week's *parashah* begins with the laws related to childbirth. The Ramban says that this is to teach us that to merit having good children one must be cautious with *kashrus*.

The Pri Chadosh (*Yorah Deiah* 81:26) writes, "Chazal tell us that קטן אוכל נבלות אין מצווין להפרישו, when a child eats non-kosher meat, we aren't obligated to stop him. Although this is the *halachah*, nevertheless, one *should* prevent him from eating it because the non-kosher

over to me and say that he is ready to be a religious Yid, I would love him and kiss him. His status with me would change in a moment. This is what happens when a Yid does *teshuva*."

7. For example, (*Vayikra* 5:7) it states, "והביא את אשמו אשר המא שתי תורים או שני בני יונה, the תורים are written before the בני יונה.

food will harm him during his older years. It will cause a certain flaw in his nature. The result will be that he will go לחרבות רעה, and stray from Yiddishkeit. In our generation we are not careful enough regarding these matters, and this is the reason that children go off עוין פנים לחרבות רע portraying chutzpah- שבדור, and their hearts don't fear Heaven. When we try to rebuke them, they can't accept *mussar* (rebuke)... Who was greater than Elisha ben Avuyah (called Acher) who ended up sinning? The Yerushalmi (*Chagigah*) says that this happened because when his mother was pregnant with him, she passed a house of *avodah zarah* and smelled what they were cooking. The smell entered the child's body like poison. Therefore, one must be very careful when it comes to matters of kashrus."

The *Zohar* (*Mishpatim* 125:) teaches, "How did Chananya, Michael, and Azarya pass the test [and allow themselves be thrown into a furnace, rather than to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol]? It's because they didn't become impure and consume non-kosher foods."

One mother told Reb Akiva Eiger *zt'l* that her son suddenly was unable to understand Torah. Reb Akiva Eiger asked her whether the child ate something that wasn't kosher. She replied, "He only eats at home, and we are always very cautious."

Reb Akiva Eiger asked to speak to the boy. In the conversation, Reb Akiva Eiger discovered that the boy ate at a wedding, to which the rabbanim forbade people from attending. The Baal HaTanya wrote a *teshuvah* (responsa) regarding the meat served at that wedding (printed in *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, vol.4, *teshuvah* 39), and he states that the meat is considered *neveilah* (forbidden food).⁸ Reb Akiva Eiger told him that this was the cause to his decline in his ability to understand Torah.

The *Mesilas Yesharim* (11) elaborates on the need to be cautious to eat only kosher foods. He writes, "Regarding forbidden food and drink one must be very cautious, because people naturally yearn for good foods, and they are concerned with the loss of money [involved, when one is scrupulous with kashrus] ... The laws of kashrus are very detailed, as they are spelled out in the works of the *poskim*, and those who are lenient with them, when they should be stringent, are harming their souls... Forbidden foods bring impurity into a person's heart and soul. Hashem's holiness leaves him, and he becomes distant from Hashem... Sins remove the clear thinking and true intelligence that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives his chassidim... He becomes like an animal immersed in the crassness of this world. The sin of eating non-kosher foods is worse than other sins since the food enters the body and becomes part of his flesh... A wise person will

8. The following is the Baal HaTanya's responsa:

"I was frightened to hear what happened nearby... Matters that should never happen among Yidden occurred. A *get* that was *pasul* from the Torah was used [because it didn't state the wife's correct name]. Even if when she was in her crib, she was named רהל, nevertheless, everyone now calls her ריאשי. Furthermore, it isn't even certain that she was named רהל. Therefore, you must prevent the one who gave the *get* from remarrying, *chas veshalom*, until he gives a kosher divorce to his wife, according to the Torah... Send forth a decree that there may not be a chuppah. [The husband may not remarry until the divorce is given]. Use all the rights and freedom that the government has given us [to enforce this]. Also, set forth a decree to the *shochtim* that they mustn't *shecht* cattle or poultry for the wedding, *chas veshalom*. If they won't obey, *chas veshalom*, their *shechitah* will have the *din* of גבילה, as this is the law of those who transgress [see *Yorah Dei'ah* 1:11]. And for those who obey, everything shall be good for them. They shall receive good blessings from the good Hashem..."

consider non-kosher foods like poison, or like food that has poison mixed into it. Would one be lenient, if there's just a slight chance that there's poison in his food? He certainly wouldn't! If he did, people would consider him insane. Non-kosher food is the same. It's poison for the heart and soul. Therefore, if he has intelligence, how could he be lenient when there's a possibility that it's not kosher? About this the *pasuk* states (*Mishlei* 23:2), וישמה סכין בלועך אם בעל נפש אהה, 'Place a knife in your throat [to prevent yourself from swallowing food that might be not kosher] if you fear Heaven.'

Living Wisely in Insane Times

In Lubavitz, there was a *meshuganer* (insane person), renowned as "The Meshuganer of Lubavitz."

Once, this *meshuganer* desperately wanted to speak with the Rebbe, Rebbe Shmuel of Lubavitz *zt'l*. He asked the *gabaim* to arrange a *yechidus* for him (private conversation) with the Rebbe. Understandably, the *gabaim* never arranged the appointment. Why should the Rebbe spend his precious time with a *meshuganer*?

But as much as the man lacked intelligence, he made up for it with his persistence. Once, when Rebbe Shmuel was traveling in his wagon, the *meshuganer* jumped onto the Rebbe's wagon and spoke with the Rebbe for a full hour.

When he got off the wagon, his face shone with satisfaction. The *gabaim* asked him, "What was so important, that you had to speak to the Rebbe for a full hour?"

He replied, "A friend of mine, from Vitebsk advised me to move to Vitebsk. Vitebsk is a much larger city than Lubavitz, and he says that it is more honorable and

prestigious to be known as a *meshuganer* of a large city than a small one.

"But I wasn't certain he was right. Here, in Lubavitz, I am renowned as 'The Meshuganer of Lubavitz' - I'm the only one. If I move to Vitebsk, I will be a *meshuganer* there, among several others. So, I asked the Rebbe which is a greater honor, to be the sole *meshuganer* of Lubavitz, or to be one of the insane people of the larger city, Vitebsk?"

The *gabaim* were astonished and admonished him, "For such matters you bothered the Rebbe?"

The insane person replied, משוגע משוגע, אבער, שכל דארף מען האבן, "Maybe I'm insane, but I need *sechel* to know what I should do."⁹

We repeat this story, because we are presently living in *meshuganeh* times. Life isn't the same as it was just a few months ago. However, although times are *meshugah*, one needs *sechel* (wisdom) to know how to live during these times.

One wise counsel is to invest in *tefillah*.

Tefillah

It states (13:45), והצרוע אשר בו הנגע...טמא טמא יקרא, "The person who has *tzaraas*...must announce and call out that he is *tamei*." The Gemara (*Shabbos* 67.) explains he must announce that he has *tzaraas* so that people will daven for him.

The Gemara writes that this is also the reason why one should paint a sick fruit tree, whose fruits are falling off too early, with a red dye. This is a signal to let people know that this tree is ill, and they should pray for the tree.

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein *zt'l* explained: The Gemara obviously doesn't mean that

9. Reb Mendel Putterfus *zt'l* told this story. The lesson he brought out is that people sometimes come to their rebbe and their questions are essentially how they can earn more honor. In a way, they are like the *meshuganer* of this story...

the people who notice a tree with red dye should drop everything that they're doing and pray for hours for the tree. Rather, the Gemara means that while walking on the road, when one spots a tree painted with red dye, he should say a few words of prayer for the wellbeing of the tree. It doesn't need to be long. For example, one might say, "Hashem, help that this tree should grow good fruits, and that they shouldn't fall off prematurely." Similarly, when one hears that someone is ill, *chas veshalom*, he should say a chapter of *Tehillim* for him. We aren't expected to do much more than that.

It is important to mention this because many people feel that since it is impossible for them to daven so long and intensely for every sick person they hear about, they may as well not daven at all. But this way of thinking is a mistake. This Gemara teaches us that everyone's *tefillah* is necessary, and a brief *tefillah* is also sufficient.¹⁰

Miriam was punished with *tzaraas* for speaking *lashon hara* about her brother, Moshe. The Torah says (*Devarim* 24:9), זכור את, אשר עשה ה' אלקיך למרים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים, "Remember what Hashem did to Miriam...when you left

Mitzrayim." When we remember her punishment, we will remember the severity of speaking *lashon hara*.

Rebbe Leibele Eiger *zt'l* asks: Miriam didn't intend to speak negatively about Moshe. So why is it important for us to remember this story?¹¹

Rebbe Leibele Eiger answers that this mitzvah isn't about reminding us of the severity of *lashon hara*. Rather, the mitzvah is to remind us of the power of *tefillah*. Moshe davened for Miriam. He said, א-ל נא רפא נא לה, "Please Hashem, heal her now" and she was healed, immediately.¹² This teaches us the power of *tefillah*. It tells us that Hashem can take away a severe case of *tzaraas* in a moment.

Klal Yisroel is in need of a lot of *tefillas* now. With *tefillah*, everything can be fixed.

A wealthy Yid was invited to a meeting by a government official in Pressburg. The wealthy Yid went to the meeting together with his non-Jewish butler.

The butler noticed the official's wallet left unattended on a counter, and he took it.

10. On the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 32:7), שאל אביך ויגדך ויקנך ויאמרו לך, the Noam Elimelech (*Ha'azinu* וזכור וזכור) writes, "שאל אביך, ask your needs from Hashem, because he is your Father. ויגדך [means to draw]. With your *tefillas*, you will draw down blessings and *parnassah*... Perhaps you will ask, 'How do I know my prayers will be answered?' ויקנך ויאמרו לך, this means: Behold *tzaddikim*...draw down *parnassah* and bounty for you with their pure [*tefillas*]. Certainly, when you pray from the depths of your heart to Hashem [you will receive your needs]."

These words reveal that when a person prays for himself, he davens with all his heart and soul, and therefore his *tefillas* will be answered. Such *tefillas* are even more effective than the *tefillas* of *tzaddikim*, who pray for him.

11. The Rambam (*Tumas Tzaraas* 16:10) writes, "Miriam was older than Moshe; she raised him, she risked her life to save him from the Nile, and she didn't say anything negative about Moshe, only she made a mistake, because she compared him to other *nevi'im*. Moshe wasn't upset about it, as it states (*Bamidbar* 12:3), והאיש משה, ענו מאד, 'Moshe was very humble.' Nevertheless, she was immediately punished with *tzaraas*. *Kal vechomer*, certainly then, *resha'im*, the fools, who speak a lot of [negative words on their fellow man, will be punished]."

So according to the Rambam, the Torah tells us about Miriam's punishment, although she hardly did anything wrong, so we can see the severity of *lashon hara*. Even for this slight transgression, she was punished.

12. The Or HaChaim (*Bamidbar* 12:14) writes, "Apparently, due to Moshe's *tefillah*, Miriam's *tzaraas* left her immediately, as Moshe requested רפא נא, which means 'heal her now.'"

He was afraid to keep the wallet in his own home, because people knew he was at the meeting, and he would be a prime suspect. So he placed the wallet in the home of the wealthy Yid, his employer.

The government official soon realized that his wallet was stolen. Police were immediately put on the case, and the wallet was found in the wealthy Yid's home. They arrested him, and a date was set for his trial.

The Ksav Sofer *zt'l* (who was the rav of Pressburg) did whatever he could to save this Yid. He tried with bribery, and he went to speak with influential people in Budapest (Hungary's capital city) but it was all to no avail. All doors seemed to be closed.

On the night before the trial, the Ksav Sofer saw his father, the Chasam Sofer *zt'l*, in his dream. The Chasam Sofer told him, "They are about to murder an innocent Yid tomorrow! How can you sleep?"

The Ksav Sofer cried, "What can I do? I did everything I could."

The Chasam Sofer replied, "Did you daven?"

The Ksav Sofer awoke and sent his students to awaken everyone in Pressburg. They gathered in the *beis medresh*, in the middle of the night. The Ksav Sofer told them, "All doors were closed before me, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu's doors are always open. With *tefillos* we can save him."

They cried, and they prayed, and in the morning, at the trial, the judge, for some reason, decided to cross-examine the butler.

"Were you in the government official's home? Did you see the wallet?" He asked him many questions. The butler stumbled on his words, contradicted himself, until he finally admitted that he planted the wallet in the Yid's home.

The butler was hung on a tree that very day.

So, remember: Sometimes all hopes are dashed; people feel very lost, not knowing what to do or how to proceed with life, but the doors of heaven are always open for *tefillos*.¹³

13. Reb Yehudah Leib *zy'a* from Teveria used to travel to Slonim, Lithuania, to be with his Rebbe, the Yesod HaAvodah *zt'l*. The long trip entailed a boat voyage to Odessa, and a train ride all the way up to Slonim. And then, using the same long means of transportation, he would return to Eretz Yisroel.

Once, on the way back from Slonim, he suffered from hemorrhoids. A rabbinic-looking person who was on the same train saw that Reb Yehudah Leib was in pain, so he told him the following:

It states (*Tehillim* 89:27), הוא יקראני אבי אתה א-לי צור ישועתי, הוא יקראני אבי אתה, when a person says to Hashem, "You are My Father, therefore, help me" א-לי וצור ישועתי, Hashem will help him.

Reb Yehudah Leib shouted "*Tatenyu helf* - Father-in-heaven, help me." Immediately, the hemorrhoids healed.

Throughout the rest of the trip, Reb Yehudah Leib shouted many times, "*Tatenyu helf!*" For example, when they boarded the ship in Odessa, and he knew that he would probably get seasick, he shouted, '*Tatenyu, helf.*' The ship tossed in the waves, but he didn't get seasick the entire time. He said he never had such a peaceful voyage.

Hashem heard his *tefillos*.

Hashem hears the *tefillos* of every Yid. Here's a story to prove this:

On a stormy day, only one person turned up for Reb Yosef Parach's *zt'l* class at his *kiruv* organization,

Finding Hashem

Another wise counsel for these insane times is to seek for, and to find, Hashem.

The Baal HaTanya *zt'l* was once playing with his grandson, and the Baal HaTanya asked him, "Where is Zeidy?"

The grandson pointed to the Baal HaTanya's beard. The Baal HaTanya replied, "That's Zeidy's beard, but where's Zeidy?"

The grandson pointed to the Baal HaTanya's head. The Baal HaTanya said, "That's Zeidy's head, but where is Zeidy?"

Some moments later, the child needed help. He fell to the ground, crying, "Zeidy! Zeidy! Help me!"

The Baal HaTanya told him, "Zeidy is here."

When we call out to Hashem and we recognize that we need His help, that is when we find Him.

The Yalkut Shimoni (152 י"ג) describes Yaakov Avinu's thoughts, when Yosef invited him to join him in Mitzrayim. Yaakov Avinu asked himself, "How can I leave the land of my birth, the land of my parents, the land where the *Shechinah* resides, to go to an impure land and live among goyim who don't have *yiras Shamayim*?"

Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him (*Bereishis* 46:3-4), אל תירא מדרעה מצרימה, כי לגוי גדול אשימך שם. אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם עלה, "Don't be afraid to go down to Mitzrayim. You will become a

Niflaos Yisroel, in northern Tel Aviv. Reb Yosef Parach said, "I will go outside and try to get one more person to join us."

Reb Yosef Parach went across the street and knocked at a door. He thought he heard some rustling from inside, but no one answered the door. Reb Yosef returned to the street, asked a couple of pedestrians to join the *shiur*, but they refused, each offering their own reason. He went back to that house again. This time, he knocked harder on the door.

A very tall person answered the door. His arms were covered with tattoos, his long red hair hung down his back. To a gentle, religious person, this man appeared like Og Melech HaBashon. Meekly, he said, "Would you like to join us for a Torah *shiur*."

The man grumbled, "Who sent you here?!"

Reb Yosef repeated, "There's a Torah class tonight, across the street in Niflaos Yisroel. Would you like to join?"

The man brought Reb Yosef Parach inside his home and showed him a rope hanging from the ceiling. "I live in this house alone. I haven't spoken with my parent for years. I never got married. I'm completely alone. No one even knocks at my door. I decided to end my life.

"For the last two hours, I kept saying, 'Hashem, give me a sign, someone should speak with me, and make a connection with me. Otherwise, I will commit suicide.' I repeated this prayer for two hours, and I didn't get a response, so I put the rope around my neck. That is when you knocked on the door the first time. It was a sign from Heaven – a sign of life. I took off the noose and went to the door, but apparently you already left. I figured that I imagined the knocking, so I returned to my rope. Just a moment later, it would be too late, but you came back and you knocked loudly at my door. And here you are, asking me to join a Torah *shiur*."

This story was told at the *shivah* of Reb Yosef Parach 5769/2009 by that big man, himself, who by that time was a *baal teshuvah*.

Hashem listened to his *tefillos*. At the time, he wasn't the greatest tzaddik, but Hashem heard his prayers. Similarly, Hashem listens to everyone's prayers, when they turn to Him.

great nation there. I will go down with you to Mitzrayim, and I will bring you up from there."

Because when the Jewish nation goes through hard times, and when they go into *galus(exile)*, Hashem, *keviyachol* is even more with them, to help them and to support them.

So, during difficult times, Hashem is closer, *keviyachol*, and if we search for Him, we will find Him.

Yaakov's family numbered seventy souls when they went down to Mitzrayim. As it states (*Devarim* 10:22), בשבעים נפש ירדו אבתך מצרימה, "Your forefathers went down to Mitzrayim with seventy souls" Similarly, it states (*Bereishis* 46:27), כל הנפש, לבית יעקב הבאה מצרימה שבעים, "All the souls of Yaakov's family who came to Mitzrayim: seventy."

The question is, the Torah lists only 69 people. One is missing.

Also, the Torah (*Shemos* 12:27) says that 600,000 people left Mitzrayim, and once again, one is missing from the calculation. (There were 599,999 people who left Mitzrayim).

The Yalkut Shimoni replies that the answer lies in the words, אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלה, "I will go down with you to Mitzrayim, and I will go up with you." There were only 69 people going down to Mitzrayim, but Hashem went down to Mitzrayim with them. And when they left Mitzrayim, Hashem left with them too. Hashem completed the *cheshbon* (calculation). He was the seventieth one going down to Mitzrayim, and He was the One more needed to complete the number of 600,000 people leaving Mitzrayim.

Because although Hashem is always with the Jewish nation, when they go into exile and when they are going through hard times, Hashem, *keviyachol*, is even closer to them, to help them through their hardships.

Consequently, when we live in insane, difficult times, that is an ideal time to seek out Hashem. Hashem is closer to you than ever before. Turn to him in prayer, believe in Him, and you will be connected with Him.

We can also express it this way:

Sometimes, in life, the *cheshbon* doesn't fit. Things don't add up. Things aren't making sense. The counsel is, bring Hakadosh Baruch Hu into the calculation, and then everything makes sense.

In other words, when you know everything is from Hashem, you will be calm and tranquil. You will realize that it isn't chaos and insanity, rather everything is being led in the best way, although we don't understand it yet.

In *parashas* חקה, Moshe was tested to see whether he would speak to the stone or hit it. About this episode, it states (*Tehillim* 81:8), אבתך על מי מריבה מלה, "I test you with the Merivah waters, forever."

Why is this test called מלה, "forever"? It was a test for just that time.

We can answer that the *pasuk* is referring to similar tests, challenges as hard as "stone," which take place all the time, throughout exile. When we use the tests to recognize Hashem, we will have passed the test.

Seeing Right

We are all seeking wise counsel during this hard period. As we wrote, משוגע משוגע, אבער, שכל דארף מען האבן, even during insane times, we need *sechel* to know how to live our lives.

So far, we discussed prayer, and to use these times as an impetus to come closer to Hashem. Another wise and essential tip is to acquire the correct perspective, and to see things with the correct viewpoint.

When looking at a nice piece of embroidery, one side of the material looks

like a mess. Threads are strewn about without any order. But when you turn it over to the other side you see a beautiful picture.

Similarly, when life seems to have been turned upside down, recognize that a beautiful picture is in the making. When matters will turn back to normal again, the wonderful picture that was being embroidered will be seen.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* once told a *marshal* about a person who had a problem with his eyes. Everything he looked at appeared crooked. When he looked at the houses of his village, they all appeared to be drooping, about to collapse. But that didn't bother him so much, because they were small cottages.

Then he travelled to a big city, where there were tall buildings. He saw them crooked, and in his eyes, they were about to fall down. He shouted, "Yidden, we must escape! All the buildings are collapsing!"

People panicked and ran. One wise person calmed them down and said, "Everyone stay where you are. Don't panic. The buildings won't fall down. Just bring an optometrist, quickly."

The people of the city didn't understand how an optometrist could stop buildings

from collapsing, but they trusted his wisdom, and they summoned an eye doctor.

The optometrist checked the eyes of the person who was creating the panic, and confirmed that this man sees objects only slanted.

The *nimshal* is, people panic; they think everything is collapsing. But that's because they aren't seeing matters correctly. Everything is being led according to Hashem's will, for the ultimate best of His people.¹⁴

Once, when he was imprisoned in Siberia, Reb Yechezkel Abramsky *zt'l* began saying *ויודעה אני* upon awakening in the morning, and then he asked himself, "Why am I thanking Hashem for another day of life? I don't have my talis and tefilin here, and I don't have a Gemara to learn from. It seems to me that it would be better if I didn't wake up."

But then he told himself, "רבה אמונתך", how great is Your *emunah*. And behold I can have *emunah* in Siberia. I believe in Hashem; I believe that this is all orchestrated by Hashem for my good. And to have this *emunah* it is worth living."

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky repeated these thoughts to Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitz *zt'l*. The Rebbe told him, "The entire creation of Siberia was worthwhile, just so you could express your *emunah* in Hashem."

14. Rebbe Shayale Karisterer *zt'l* came to Tzanz, to daven at the *kever* of the Tzanzer Rav (Divrei Chaim) *zt'l* on his *yahrtzeit*. There were thousands of people there, and many of them came over to Rebbe Shayale to receive his *brachos*. He received a lot of honor there.

Someone accidentally stepped on Rebbe Shayale's foot (because of the large crowd and the pushing). The wound became infected, and his chassidim wanted to order a *שטנעל צוק* (an express wagon) so he could get home quickly and rest. He said, "It is a shame to spend Yiddishe money on that." He traveled home on the regular train.

While traveling, he felt very sick. His family and chassidim wanted to call a doctor, but Rebbe Shayale said that it won't help, because he was harmed by an *ayin hara*. He explained that people were jealous of the immense honor he received in Tzanz, and that gave him an *ayin hara*.

Rebbe Shayale added, "Also last year, when we came to Tzanz, and I received a lot of honor and I was harmed with an *ayin hara*. As we were crossing the border between Galitzia and Hungary, one of the chassidim traveling in my wagon was caught with a false passport. The delay and the arrest were all very difficult for us. That distress atoned for the death that would have come to me from that *ayin hara*."

We learn from this story that every distress has benefits.