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Shabbat Tazria / Metzora

שבת פ' תזריע / מצורע - פרקי אבות - פרק ב'

Sat. 25 - 26 Apr. 2020 - 1st of Iyyar, 5780

א' באייר תש"פ

Issue Number 949

Parasha - <i>Yom Shabbat Kodesh</i>	Tazria / Metzora	(Page-608).
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Rosh Hodesh Iyyar Fri. & Sat 24 & 25 Apr.

Yaaleh Veyavo, Hallel & Musaf, on Shabbat special Mosaf.

ראש חודש אייר יום ששי ושבת 24 ו-25 אפריל.

THE SYNAGOGUE IS CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

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Shahrit Sunday to Friday on ZOOM at 07:30

Please call Ghassan to join the service, tachanun from Sunday

Daf Hayomi with Rabbi Asher Sebbag on ZOOM

Sunday to Thursday at 18:00, Friday at 17:00

Please call Ghassan or David to join the Shiur

Shabbat Candles.	19:55
Latest Shema GRA.	09:21
Sunset.	20:14
Arbit Motzei Shabbat.	21:11
Next Friday: Candles. Shabbat. Achari Mot / Kedoshim.	20:06

When is the Truth the Biggest Lie?

Tazria (Leviticus 12-13)

Apr 25, 2020 | by [Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig](#)

GOOD MORNING! In response to my manifesto last week on the COVID-19 virus (it was a “bonus” Shabbat Shalom Weekly – for those of you who missed it, you can find it [here](#)), some readers wrote in suggesting that perhaps the sin of *loshon hora* – gossip – also played a role in this terrible disease that has plagued the planet.

Several weeks ago, we discussed the motivation for engaging in gossip; this week we will discuss some of the basic elements as to what qualifies as *loshon hora*.

This week's Torah reading is particularly pertinent to this issue. This Shabbat we actually read **two** Torah portions – and each one discusses details of laws regarding the consequences that, according to our tradition, comes as a result

of speaking *loshon hora* (gossip). Interestingly enough (and I am sure why many readers drew the parallel), one of the more severe requirements, if the disease continues unabated, is a quarantine and isolation outside of the encampment.

The punishment of which we speak is called *tzora'as* – this has been commonly mistranslated as leprosy. Leprosy mentioned in the Torah is not Hansen's disease caused by the germ *mycobacterium leprae*. Rather, it was a physical symptom caused by a spiritual defect. This affliction only came to individuals on an elevated spiritual level, those whose body functions were subject to their spiritual state. Thus, *tzora'as* isn't merely a disease caused by a bacterial infection (which is what leprosy is); it is a very specific punishment sent from heaven for the sin of *loshon hora*.

The Torah first introduced this concept at the beginning of the book of Exodus when Moses' hand turned white "like snow" from *tzora'as* (*Exodus* 3:6). The commentators (ad loc) explain that it was because he spoke *loshon hora* of the Jewish people. Similarly, his sister Miriam was afflicted with *tzora'as* when she spoke negatively about him (*Numbers* 12:10).

Strangely enough, *loshon hora* is considered one of the worst sins a person can commit, as heinous as murder, adultery, and idol worship (*Talmud Arachin* 15b). Yet the punishment, *tzora'as*, seems to be a minor one. After all, the size of the *tzora'as* discoloration of the skin can be relatively small, around the size of a nickel. It is difficult to understand how a relatively small mark on one's body is a fitting punishment for something considered to be such a sever sin. According to our traditions, God punishes in a very strict system of quid pro quo, nothing more and nothing less than a transgression deserves. How is this small discoloration a proper

punishment for the terrible sin of *loshon hora*?

Though, perhaps the most perplexing aspect is that gossip only qualify as *loshon hora* if what is being said about the victim is true. As an example: If I know someone failed the bar exam three times and I start telling people simply to hurt him I have transgressed the sin of *loshon hora*. Similarly, if I know someone who in his youth was a fall down drunk with a gambling addiction and I share that information to hurt him I have transgressed the sin of *loshon hora*.

However, if I make up a complete lie and say that while serving in Iraq he committed heinous war crimes or that he was a dishonest businessman, all the while knowing that what I am saying is a lie, I have not violated the prohibition of *loshon hora*. In such a situation I have violated a different prohibition against slander known as *motzei shem ra* – giving someone a bad reputation. This sin is not treated as severely as *loshon hora*. This begs the question; how can telling the truth about someone be more heinous than fabricating a lie about them?

One of the most famous photos of the 20th century was taken by famous war photographer Eddie Adams. The photo, named "Saigon Execution," depicted a general in the South Vietnamese army (America's ally) killing, in appalling cold blooded fashion, a Vietcong prisoner. This famous photo has appeared in just about every school textbook and history book written on the Vietnam War. Eddie Adams was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the photo and, perhaps more importantly, his photo deeply contributed to the American public's conflict and ambivalence as to whether or not to support the Vietnam war.

The New York Times (when they still had a conscience) was extremely hesitant to

publish his photo for it depicted the brutality of America's ally, and only consented to run it side by side with a photo of a child slain by the Vietcong army, to give the story some measure of a balance. Nonetheless, Eddie Adams' photo was the one that burned into the American psyche.

Yet, Adams himself lamented, “Two people died in that photograph: the recipient of the bullet and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. The general killed the Vietcong; I killed the general with my camera. Still photographs are the most powerful weapons in the world. People believe them; but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths.”

The actual circumstances from the incident (obviously not captured on film) were that the prisoner had just ambushed this general's regiment and murdered three of his soldiers. It was a hot and miserable day and tempers were running very high. The general, who actually had a reputation for compassion, made the decision to execute the prisoner for he feared he would lose control of his regiment who were furious that this Vietcong had just murdered three of their fellow soldiers.

So General Nguyen Ngoc Loan made the perhaps questionable decision to enact vigilante justice. But because of the terrible backlash from that photo, the general was stripped of his command and discharged from the army. Eddie Adams felt so guilty that he supported him and his family until the end of his life.

This story gives us a great insight into the evil of *loshon hora*. *Loshon hora*, while technically true, (the general did in fact murder the Vietcong who ambushed his regiment) is actually the most horrible kind of lie. *Loshon hora* is exactly like a photograph – a fleeting glimpse of a terrible act that a person committed. But what are the circumstances? Who is that person in

reality? Is it fair to paint that person's entire being by that fleeting act; is that who they really are?

No one is proud of every moment of their life (there is a well known saying that no one growing up in the digital era will ever be elected to public office because there are photographs of just about everyone in compromising circumstances). Herein we find the depth of why saying something true about someone is worse than telling a lie about them.

If someone spreads an evil lie about me I can vehemently deny it. After all, I know it isn't true and I can hold my head up high because I know it's a lie. Yes, it may be frustrating to prove my innocence but I can look myself in the mirror knowing that it isn't true. But when I repeat a true story about someone, they have to admit that it was true. There is simply no easy way to defend it. At that point the burden of proof is to explain how you aren't that type of person and why that one episode shouldn't define you. In essence, that one episode, small as it might be in terms of the entirety of a person's life, has now come to define them. It is perhaps the greatest lie of all.

This is why the punishment for *loshon hora* is *tzora'as*. A little discoloration, even the size of a nickel, comes to define the whole person as a sinner who needs atonement. This is a perfect example of God's attribute quid pro quo justice; for it is exactly what the person speaking *loshon hora* did – he took a relatively small (when compared with a person's entire life) and embarrassing vignette and portrayed that to be the entirety of an individual's identity. So too *tzora'as*, a small discoloration, comes to define the entirety of the sinner.

In these trying times, when most of us are under stress and confronted with many challenges, we mustn't allow ourselves to fall into the trap of gossip. The

primary motivation in speaking gossip is to try and feel better about yourself by pushing others down. Thus, when we find ourselves in a situation where we feel less than optimal about ourselves, we may fall prey to gossiping about others. It is therefore especially important that during this time of isolation and uncertainty we maintain our vigilance and take extra care to treat others as we would want to be treated ourselves.



TORAH PORTION OF THE WEEK

Tazria, Leviticus 12:1 - 14:9;
Metzora, Leviticus 14: 1 - 15:33

The Torah continues with the laws of physical and spiritual purity. The focus of this portion is upon *tzora'as*, a supernatural physical affliction sent to warn someone to refrain from speaking badly about others. The disease progressively afflicted home,

clothes, and then one's skin — unless the individual corrected his ways and followed the purification process stated in the Torah.

There are three types of speech transgressions: 1) *Loshon hora* (literally "evil tongue") — making a derogatory or damaging statement about someone even though you are speaking the truth. 2) *Motzie shem ra* — slander — where what is spoken is negative and false. 3) *Rechilus* (literally "tale bearing") — telling someone the negative things another person said about him or did against him. Check out PowerOfSpeech.org for daily lessons in *Shmirat HaLashon*, proper speech.



In loving memory of
 Rabbi Kalman Packouz
 Kalman Moshe ben
 Reuven Avigdor
 1950-2019
Shabbat Shalom,
 Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

Condolences to: the famely of **Abraham** Haim ben Aaron Jacob who pastaway last Friday 17/04/2020, buried 19/07/2020.

THE KEHILLA WISHES חיים ארוכים "LONG LIFE" TO THE FOLLOWING WHO HAVE YAHRZEIT

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 01 Iyar Miss Florence David | 12 Iyar Mr Jack Fattal |
| 01 Iyar Mrs Bekhor | 12 Iyar Mr Meir Fattal |
| 04 Iyar Mrs Annie Benjamin | 15 Iyar Mrs Esther Silas |
| 06 Iyar Mr Abraham S. Cohen | 18 Iyar Mr Saul Ceasar Hannuna |
| 08 Iyar Mr Joseph Laniado | 19 Iyar Mr Abraham S. Cohen |
| 12 Iyar Mr Harry Fattal | 26 Iyar Mrs Tiba David |

Quote of the Week

The mouth of a fool brings destruction to himself