

Candle Lighting

7:30

S"Z Kriat Shema

10:03

Sunset

7:49

Motzei Shabbat

8:26



Parshat HaShavuah

תזריע-מצורע

TAZRIA-

METZORA

ו' אייר תשע"ה

APRIL 25, 2015

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# Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR LASHON HARA RABBI BEN SUGERMAN

The Talmud is replete with the idea that one of the root causes of צרעת is the speaking of לשון הרע. It affords us the opportunity to examine one aspect of this prohibition.

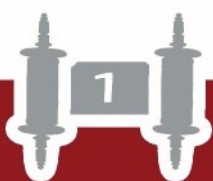
In the seventh perek of הלכות דעות, the Rambam writes:

“Our Rabbis teach us that lashon hara kills three people: the one who says it, the one who accepts it and the one who is spoken about. And the one who accepts it is more severe than the one who speaks it.”

A quick look in the מפתח of the Frankel edition of the Rambam tells us that although there is no discussion in the gemara that speaks directly to this notion, there are a number of sources within the Talmud that indicate that it's a worse error to listen to lashon hara than speak it, and based on a comment that the Rambam makes in his commentary to Pirkei Avot, it's clear that the Rambam had a גירסא (text of the gemara) that states this explicitly.

The question is obvious. Why should this be true? Without this Rambam, left to my own thought process, I would naturally have argued that speaking lashon hara is worse than listening. Speaking is active while listening is passive. Throughout the gemara we always find that *aveirot* that require action are more culpable than *aveirot* that are accomplished passively.

A consideration....The Gemara Shabbat, after listing the 39 *melachot*, is bothered by the order of the first two. The mishna first lists planting and then lists plowing. Anyone (myself excluded) knows that in the farming process, first you plow the land and then you plant. Shouldn't the mishna present the *melachot* in the correct order?



Continued page 4





## SAFE AT FIRST BASE

JESSICA GRIFF ('15)  
PAST ASHREINU EDITOR-AND-CHIEF

For some, springtime means cleaning clutter from closets and garages and preparing for Pesach, but for sports fans, springtime signifies the start of baseball season. Do you know the six ways to get to first base safely? The first three are obvious – get a hit, draw a walk, or be hit by a pitch. But you can also get to first base if the catcher drops the ball after strike three, the ball gets caught in the umpire’s mask or gear, or the pitcher throws the ball out of the field.

How do the often esoteric rules of baseball coincide with this week’s parshiot? Tazria and Metzora serve as our warning not to speak lashon hara. Watching what we say about others will enable us to “be safe at first base” in Hashem’s game of life.

While some laws in Judaism might seem esoteric and complex, not speaking lashon hara is simple. This commandment ensures that our mouths remain pure and do not get us into trouble because we have said something offensive. As we have all observed during high school, a rumor or even a side comment behind someone’s back can end a friendship.

Just as in baseball, where the object of the game is to score as many runs as possible, so too in life, we must strive to do our best to follow Hashem’s laws. And before we can reach home plate, we must initially tag first base. Cleansing ourselves from negativity and lashon hara is the perfect way to start building and growing our spiritual relationship with Hashem.

## A NATURAL HOLINESS

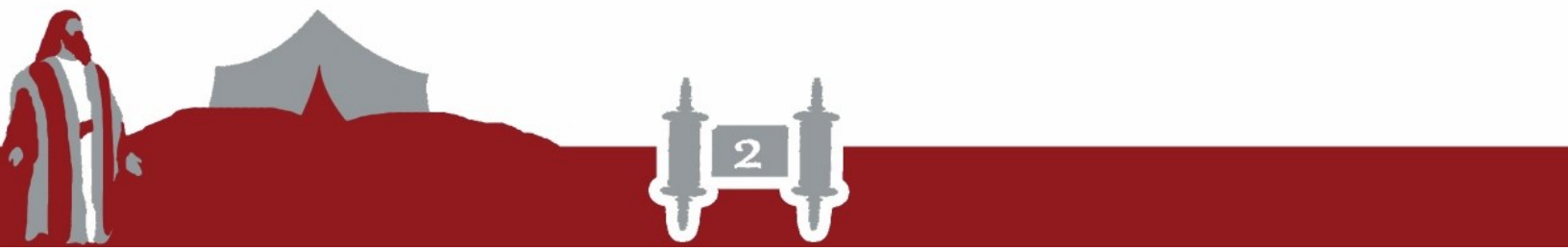
ARIEL BUGAY ('15)  
MONTHLY WRITER

This week we have the privilege of reading two parshiot. Batting first is Tazria, which addresses the purification period after childbirth and deals with skin afflictions. On deck is Metzora, which discusses *tzara’at*.

While there are many important topics within these two parshiot, let’s direct our attention to the end of Parshat Metzora, which deals with *tumah*. *Tumah*, which can be translated as “ritual impurity,” is a difficult concept to understand in our contemporary world. *Tumah* can occur when a person comes in contact with a dead body, has certain bodily emissions, or is afflicted with a skin condition (*tzara’at*). If a person is *tamei*, he cannot enter the Mishkan. It seems strange that the causes of *tumah* are such natural occurrences, a normal part of being human, and yet they make a person impure.

The Eitz Hayim suggests an interesting idea. He says that these causes of *tumah* are life-cycle events – birth, creating life, recovering from illness, and death; they are all miraculous in their own ways. We are given a structure for contact with God in the Mishkan, but during these notable events we often have a spiritual experience that is holy unto itself. Witnessing birth is a miraculous experience, just like witnessing a death or recovering from a serious illness.

Thus, perhaps the status of ritual impurity should not be viewed as a punishment or banishment, but an acknowledgement of a natural kind of holiness that was different from the holiness to be found in the Mishkan: a holiness that can only be experienced through an event such as creating life or encountering death.





## KNOW YOUR LIMITS

CHAYA COHEN ('16)

MONTHLY WRITER

Regarding spots of *tzara'at* found on the walls of one's house, the Torah emphasizes that one must tell the kohen that he found a spot that **looks** like *tzara'at*. Rashi elaborates that even if the homeowner is a *talmid chacham* and knows with certainty that the spot is indeed *tzara'at*, he may not declare that he found *tzara'at* in his house; rather he must say that he found something that looks like a *tzara'at* spot. At first glance, it would seem that the lesson here is one of humility. One must not presume that he knows the law with certainty; rather he must humbly say that the spot on his walls appears to be *tzara'at*.

But, if that is the case, doesn't it seem like false humility? If the homeowner is indeed a *talmid chacham*, maybe even one who regularly receives other questions of halacha that span the entire Torah gamut, why would it be arrogant for him to say that it is definitely *tzara'at*? Furthermore, why is this lesson of humility for the *talmid chacham* being taught here? Isn't humility a general idea that would be more appropriate in the section of the Torah that teaches us about the authority of the *chachamim* and instructs them in how to *pasken*?

Chazal reveal that the main cause of the affliction of *tzara'at* is lashon hara. What brings one to speak lashon hara? The Chafetz Chaim teaches that if a situation arises whereby one could judge one's fellow favorably and he instead speaks negatively of that person, he has violated the prohibition of lashon hara. Although this is but one example of a violation of the prohibition of lashon hara, we can nevertheless learn from here that judging one's fellow unfavorably is one of the root causes of slander.

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## A BASIS FOR COMMUNICATION

MAYA BORZAK ('16)

Perek 13 of Sefer Vayikra begins with God speaking to Moshe and Aharon, dictating the laws of *tzara'at* for the duo to relay to B'nei Yisrael. Why does God specifically direct both Moshe and Aharon with these laws? Typically God speaks to Moshe, Moshe communicates the information to Aharon, and Aharon lectures the Jewish people.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch provides us with an answer. In a general case of *tzara'at*, one would go to the kohen to examine these newly-discovered spots, the kohen would perhaps confirm the "infection," and a series of *korbanot*, separation tactics, and rituals would have to take place in order for the individual to be cured of sin and purified. It therefore makes sense that Aharon, the Kohen Gadol, would need to know the laws that correlate to his priestly duties; he is involved with each step before and after diagnosis.

But sometimes, God neglects to address Aharon alongside Moshe when kohanim are directly involved in the mitzvah, and in other cases God includes Aharon when kohanim are not directly involved. So the question resurfaces: why would Aharon be mentioned here, specifically, if he is not addressed in all other cases that concern his priestly duties?

*Tzara'at* is so significant that not only Moshe, but also Aharon, had to be spoken to, thus indicating its noteworthiness. The law holds importance practically, as it was necessary for everyday life and observance and was therefore told to Moshe because God regularly spoke to Moshe. Rav Hirsch argues that the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, as they pertain to speech, are central; they relate to how Jews communicate with and about each other. Flaws in interpersonal communication, i.e., lashon hara, lead not only to an embarrassing rash and growth on the house, but also to isolation from other Jews until one performs teshuva and brings *korbanot* for spiritual purification. Interpersonal relationships form the basis of all mitzvot *bein adam lechavero*. For this reason, God communicated the laws of *tzara'at* to Aharon as well.



The gemara answers that the ground in Israel is so hard that they would first plow the land once just so that the seeds would collect in the ground and then plow again afterward sowing the seeds so that the ground would be an even more fertile environment for the growth of the seeds; the double plowing both before and after the laying of the seeds creates a rich environment that promotes growth. The speaker of lashon hara needs a receptive audience. When nobody is there to listen, there is simply no temptation to speak. The audience lays the fertile ground both before and after the speaker speaks so that the speaker knows that he has a rich environment in which to plant his lashon hara. The piqued interest of the listener invites someone with juicy information to share the goods, knowing that he or she has a captive audience. All this may be a way to explain the Rambam's suggestion that listening is worse, as the listener is the real catalyst to the exchange of information.

Perhaps within this context we can also now understand the prohibition of listening to lashon hara a little better. How can someone be faulted for overhearing lashon hara being spoken? Is it my fault that I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time? What if someone just blurts out a comment about another person without asking first if I was interested in hearing? Am I guilty? Based on the discussion above, one could argue that listening to lashon hara is very different from simply hearing it, and that listening isn't actually completely passive after all (this is just a suggestion; for a halachik ruling, consult your local Rabbi).

Cohen continued

Chazal continue to teach us, "Do not judge your fellow until you reach his place" (Avot 2:5). When we see another person doing something, we do not know the details which lie behind his action. Every person is an entire world of thoughts, emotions, life circumstances, life experiences, challenges, and intellect. Therefore, it is quite presumptuous indeed for one to jump to a negative conclusion about something they really don't know too much about. Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place. True, the homeowner may be a knowledgeable scholar who knows the law with complete clarity. Nevertheless, if he attempts to make a pronouncement that the spot is *tzara'at*, he is presuming to assume a role that is not his. The Torah states very clearly that only a kohen is authorized to pronounce whether the spot is pure or impure; nobody else can. So, with all of his knowledge and understanding, this *talmid chacham* must still know his place and limitations.

This point is crucial in avoiding lashon hara: No matter how intelligent, knowledgeable, and wise you may be – you must nevertheless recognize your limitations. Do not jump to judge your fellow negatively – know your limitations, know your boundaries. Do not judge your fellow until you have reached his place – and realize that that place is so multidimensional and complex that the chance that you have reached or ever will reach it is practically nil. To approach such matters from a presumptuous, arrogant stance is wrong and will inevitably lead one to violate the prohibitions even though, in his arrogance, he is convinced of the truth and justice of his assertion. Rather, one's outlook must be exceedingly humble, and with that approach one will certainly be able to find ways to judge others favorably, or at the very least think of mitigating factors that greatly lessen the negative impression of the subject. And this, in turn, will greatly assist us in avoiding the terrible sin of lashon hara.

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