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Parashat Metzora

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CARS AND PEOPLE

by Rabbi Josh Kahn

Imagine you just purchased a new luxury car with all of the possible amenities. When you bring the car home, you will commit to take great care of it. If you have young children, they will not be allowed to bring snacks in the car, and you may even take the car for a carwash every other week. What would your face look like if someone took a cup of coffee or a Slurpee and proceeded to dump it all over the seats or took a key and began scratching the exterior of the car? We can imagine the look of horror on the car owner's face! Rav Dr. Abraham Twerski uses this analogy to help us understand the awful nature of one who suffers from substance abuse. The addict was given something more precious than a car – Hashem gave him a body that is so valuable, and it is his responsibility to care for it more than he would a car. How could he, or anyone, destroy it through substance abuse? Spiritually, the same is true. We are given a functioning body, and it is our privilege and responsibility to care of the life with which we are blessed.

The challenge of appreciating how special we are is at the core of Parashat Metzora. At the end of the Parashah, the Torah commands us, "And you should warn Bnei Yisrael about the impurities and they should not... contaminate the Mishkan that is within them" (VaYikra 15:31). The language used by the Torah is in the plural, focusing our attention on the notion that there is a Mishkan inside each of us. This description, that the Mishkan is within each of us, is reminiscent of the beginning of Parashat Terumah, in which God commands each of us to build a personal Mishkan in each of us (Shemot 25:8). Like our new precious car, we are commanded to protect this Mishkan that is inside of each of us.

This description is an appropriate ending of the Parashah that describes Tzara'at, which is inflicted on someone for speaking

Lashon HaRa. Rambam (Hilchot Tzara'at) points out that Tzara'at is a special affliction that plagues only Bnei Yisrael. It targets Bnei Yisrael for not appreciating the special Tzelem Elokim that exists inside each of us. More specifically – the Slonimer Rebbe, in his *Netivot Shalom*, comments – we are susceptible to Lashon HaRa only if we do not appreciate the Mishkan that is inside of each person. If we were able to appreciate the beauty of the other person, how would we be able to speak Lashon HaRa about him? If we appreciated how special we were, why would we need to speak badly about others?

Interestingly, the Metzora must be seen by the Kohein in order to be healed (VaYikra 14:2). Why does the Kohein serve as the doctor? Kohanim were known to be the teachers of Bnei Yisrael. Following in the footsteps of Aharon HaKohein, they were "Oheiv Shalom VeRodeif Shalom," "people who love peace and chase harmony" (Avot 1:12). Kohanim have the unique ability to see the good in each individual. It is precisely for this reason that they are tasked to deal with the Metzora, one who spoke Lashon HaRa and demonstrated that he did not understand the uniqueness and goodness of each individual.

As we turn our attention to Pesach and then Sefirat HaOmer, we have a dual focus. On the one hand, we are to focus on appreciating how blessed we each are to be born as a Tzelem Elokim, while on the other hand, we should appreciate the uniqueness of everyone else. As we internalize this message, it will serve to only enhance the respect with which we will treat others and ourselves. What emerges when a person respects himself and others is a person who appreciates the need to treat himself and everyone else with great dignity and Kavod. Together, we will all be able to continue to create a culture of care and respect for one another, in which we all benefit.

Why TZARA'AT?

Simcha Shron ('18)

This week's Parashah, Parashat Metzora, deals with many aspects of Tzara'at. The Torah goes into great detail to explain what Tzara'at is, how one contracts it, and what to do if someone gets Tzara'at. Interestingly, the Torah devotes two Parashiyot to the

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various laws of Tzara'at. Why does the Torah need to go into such depth regarding Tzara'at? To answer this question, we must first understand what Tzara'at is, and, more importantly, why one would get it. Chazal teach that Tzara'at was the punishment for speaking Lashon HaRa about another person (Eirachin 16a). For example, we see that when Miryam speaks Lashon HaRa about Moshe, she is punished with Tzara'at (BeMidbar 12:10). However, this seems like a strange punishment. On the one hand, what is so bad about speaking spitefully about someone else that would make one who speaks Lashon HaRa deserving of any punishment at all? After all, Lashon HaRa does not cause any physical harm. On the other hand, if speaking Lashon HaRa is as bad as the Torah makes it seem, why is there not a more severe punishment? Why just a temporary skin disease?

To answer the first question, we should note that speaking Lashon HaRa is extremely damaging. The old saying that "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is false. A physical pain heals in a few weeks or months. However, derogatory comments can leave lasting effects for years or even an entire lifetime. For instance, if someone is applying for a job and someone else makes a comment saying that this applicant does not seem trustworthy, that could result in that applicant not receiving that job. And when the gossip spreads, as it often does, other companies may not hire the applicant as well. The Torah here is making a point that Lashon HaRa may not seem so bad, but in reality, it can be devastating. People must always watch what they say, for Lashon HaRa can destroy, in one mere minute, a reputation that took years to forge. Regarding the laws of Lashon HaRa, the Gemara teaches that it is so imperative that one not speak Lashon HaRa that people should refrain from even mentioning the good traits of a person, for that may lead to mentioning the bad traits of that person (Bava Batra 164b).

Now that we understand how bad Lashon HaRa is, we must ask, how does the punishment of Tzara'at fit the crime of Lashon HaRa? How is it Middah KeNeced Middah, the punishment matching the sin? However, when we understand the reasons that someone may speak Lashon HaRa, it seems quite obvious why Tzara'at is the appropriate punishment. When someone says

something derogatory about someone else, it is because that person believes that by lowering the other person's status, he will raise his own status. However, belittling another person does not make one a better person. When someone speaks Lashon HaRa and is afflicted with Tzara'at (and checked by a Kohein), that person becomes a Metzora. A Metzora literally becomes an outcast in society; he must leave the camps of Israel and live in isolation (VaYikra 14:8). A Metzora is looked down upon and avoided by others; he is considered impure. This treatment of a Metzora is exactly how a Metzora treated the person about whom he spoke Lashon HaRa. When a Metzora is put into the situation in which he is treated like his victim, we hope that he learns his lesson and refrains from speaking Lashon HaRa ever again.

Lashon HaRa truly is one of the worst sins a person can commit. The many unforeseen consequences that emerge just from the small things one may say about another person are why the Torah goes to great lengths to forbid Lashon HaRa. We must learn from the example of the Chafetz Chaim, possibly the best role model for avoiding Lashon HaRa. He often said "Keep your mouth from evil talk and live a life of peace" (Derech Eretz Zuta). May we all be blessed with God's help to avoid speaking and even listening to Lashon HaRa.

REFLECTIONS ABOUT MORI VERABI HARAV

AHARON LICHTENSTEIN ZT"l

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter (Yeshivat Har Etzion '81-'83)

These thoughts were delivered at Congregation Beth Abraham on April 23, 2015, as part of the Bergen County Azkarah for Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l. We include this two-part presentation in this week's Kol Torah so that we can conclude it on Parashat Acharai Mot, the Yahrzeit of Rav Lichtenstein.

When we heard the bitter news, we cried. Father has died. It is appropriate for us Talmidim to speak of Rav Lichtenstein as father in the same manner that Elisha spoke of Eliyahu HaNavi upon the latter's departure from this world, "Avi Avi Rechev Yisrael UFarashav" (II Melachim 2:12). Rav Aharon was more than a Rebbe to us; he was a powerful father figure. We feel as if we lost a father, a revered father.

I know from firsthand experience that Rav Lichtenstein regarded his Talmidim as his children. In 1993, after receiving written authorization to administer Gittin from Hacham Ovadia Yosef zt"l and, Yibadeil LeChayim Aruchim, Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg, I immediately traveled to Rav Lichtenstein's

home (at that time in the Katamon section of Yerushalayim) to show him the Haskamot. Rav Lichtenstein read the documents and remarked, "I feel like a proud parent."

Great Trepidation

It is with great trepidation that I approach the task of eulogizing our great Rebbe, HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l. Delivering a proper Hesperid for any Jew is an awesome responsibility. The Midrash (Kohelet Rabbah 12:13) records that none other than the Malachim are charged by Hashem with the mission of listening to a deceased person's Hesperid and reporting its contents to the Creator! Moreover, the Gemara (Shabbat 105b) records that "One who is indolent in eulogizing a Talmid Chacham deserves to be buried alive."

This is ever so more the case with regard to our beloved Rebbe, Rav Lichtenstein. Rav Lichtenstein was adamant about the necessity of delivering a proper Hesperid. Rav Lichtenstein, in November of 1985, conveyed at a convention of the Orthodox Union his deep upset upon hearing the Hesperidim delivered in honor of Rav Aharon Kotler after his death in 1962. Rav Lichtenstein bitterly complained that other than Mr. Irving Bunim, each speaker simply repeated the same mantra of how learned Rav Kotler was – how saintly he was, and how devoted to his learning he was – without noting any of the unique characteristics of the great man. It was very rare to see Rav Lichtenstein get angry. However, on this occasion, there was a rare flash of anger at the failure to properly evaluate someone who made such an enormous contribution to Klal Yisrael, such as Rav Kotler.

As such, I humbly present my thoughts about Rav Lichtenstein zt"l and hope to add something substantial and significant to the many speeches delivered in his honor.

A Powerful Role Model

Although I never heard Rav Lichtenstein express this point, I strongly sense that Rav Lichtenstein felt a very deep responsibility to serve as a proper role model. He knew that everyone in our community admired him and looked to him for guidance and leadership. Rav Aharon rose to the occasion and served as quite the example in a stunning variety of ways. There are at least fifteen points of light that Rav Lichtenstein shined upon the world:

1. **Developing a Relationship with Hashem** – In his Shiurim, talks, writings and personal demeanor, Rav Lichtenstein showed us how to forge a deep and meaningful relationship with Hashem. One could learn how to Daven simply by watching Rav Lichtenstein

Daven. Moreover, Rav Lichtenstein taught us how to seek the Ribbono Shel Olam beyond the conventional arenas of Tefillah, Talmud Torah and Mitzvah performance. During a question and answer session with North American Talmidim at Yeshivat Har Etzion, Rav Lichtenstein described encountering the Divine when boarding a bus and watching children play in a park at dusk. A most stunning revelation, though, is Rav Aharon's poignant discussion of Emunah (in an impactful essay entitled "The Source of Faith is Faith Itself," Jewish Action 1992, reprinted in Leaves of Faith 2:363-367), in which he writes that "The greatest source of faith, however, has been the Ribbono Shel Olam Himself."

2. **Hatmadah** – Rav Leibel Dulitz, a classmate of Rav Lichtenstein, recalled (during a Shiur he delivered at Yeshiva University High School for Boys in 1978) Rav Aharon's learning regimen during the years he studied at Yeshiva College. He recounted that Rav Lichtenstein would learn in the Beit Midrash until 1:30 a.m. and then retire to his room and devote two hours to his university studies. On Thursday evenings, though, Rav Lichtenstein would learn until 4:30 a.m. and forego attending to his secular studies that evening. Rav Yitzchak Lichtenstein shared in the Hesperid he delivered in honor of his father that he never saw his father not engaged in some productive activity.
3. **Dikduk BeMitzvot** – We Talmidim witnessed Rav Aharon's passionate adherence to Mitzvot. We saw the sacrifice he made to adhere to the stringent opinions regarding Chadash and city Eiruvim. We saw how extraordinarily careful Rav Lichtenstein was to give a significant contribution to each and every Ani he encountered. A vivid description of Rav Lichtenstein's devotion to Mitzvot is presented by Rav Lichtenstein's Talmid, Rav Shmuel David, in his collection of responsa entitled "She'eilot UTeshuvot MeiRosh Tzurim" (20:1).

After Rav David presents the various opinions as to whether or not one must dip the bread upon which he recited HaMotzi even during the week, he concludes that it is preferable to make an effort to do so. He writes, “and I have seen Mori V’Rabi Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zealously (‘Tar Harbeih’) arrange for salt to be available before he recites the Bracha of HaMotzi.” A humorous exchange occurred in the first year I learned at Yeshivat Har Etzion that demonstrated Rav Lichtenstein’s deep devotion to Shemirat Mitzvot. Rav Lichtenstein had delivered a beautiful Shiur on Tevilat Keilim on the Motza’ei Shabbat of Parashat Toledot 5742. During this Shiur, Rav Aharon addressed the well-known challenge of immersing electric equipment, such as toasters, in water. Rav Lichtenstein mentioned that he solved this problem in his home by declaring his toaster to be Hefkeir, thereby obviating the requirement to immerse Keilim that one owns. The following Purim, one of the students visiting Rav Lichtenstein’s home unwisely chose (as a Purim prank) to grab the toaster. The next day at Yeshivah, the student presented the toaster (not an inexpensive item by Israeli standards of the time) to Rav Lichtenstein who, in turn, refused to take it. Rav Aharon explained that if he were to accept the toaster, it would indicate that his declaring the toaster Hefkeir was insincere. This week, in preparation for reading Parashat Metzora on Shabbat, we turn our attention to the prohibition of Lashon HaRa. In all of my interactions with Rav Lichtenstein, he never spoke a word of slander. Rav Yitzchak Lichtenstein also remarked that he never heard Rav Aharon utter even a bit of Lashon HaRa. Rav Lichtenstein conveyed that Mitzvah observance truly reflects the Divine Will, to which we must adhere scrupulously.

4. **Vast Torah Knowledge** – Rav Lichtenstein’s mastery of Torah, especially of the Rishonim that most Yeshivah students do not intensely study (such as Ra’avan and Rabbeinu Yerucham), inspires his Talmidim to strive for high levels of Torah knowledge. Rav Aharon was able to inspire his Talmidim to want to be like him not dissimilar, LeHavdil, to the manner in which youngsters seek to emulate their sports idols. Yet, despite the vast reservoir of Torah information, Rav Lichtenstein bore and presented his knowledge in a modest fashion, never even mildly appearing to be showboating.

5. **Modesty** – An entire book can and should be written describing Rav Aharon’s genuine and legendary modesty. It is simply stunning how such a great man could be so modest. In a Shiur devoted to the study of Avot DeRabi Natan, Rav Lichtenstein indirectly indicated how he maintained his modesty. He stated that even if one were to develop into a great Talmid Chacham, he should still bear in mind that he pales in comparison to greats such as Rabi Akiva Eiger. One story will suffice to illustrate Rav Aharon’s modesty. Once, two students (one of whom was named Aharon) were passing by in the Yeshivah halls, and one of the students said to the other “Aharon, Yeish Lecha Gafrur,” “Aharon, do you have a match?” Rav Lichtenstein, thinking that the question was addressed to him, responded “Mitzta’eir, Ein Li,” “I am sorry, I do not have one.”

In our next issue, we will, God willing, continue our honoring Rav Lichtenstein zt”l and illustrate ten more areas in which Rav Lichtenstein served as a role model for all.

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