



The Lasting Impact of Lashon Hara

By Yonatan Halstuch (25)

In this week's Parashah, Parashat Metzora, the Torah continues its discussion of the process that someone who contracts Tzara'at takes to purify themselves. There are a few perplexing questions that arise when someone reads the first few Pessukim of the Sedra. First, believe it or not, this is the first time that the word Metzora appears in the Torah, as it is not mentioned at all in Parashat Tazria. Why is this? After all, Tazria discusses Tzara'at just as much as Metzora. Furthermore, the first Passuk states: "זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו" "This shall be the ritual for a leper at the time of being purified" (VaYikra 14:2). Why does the Torah state this in the future tense of "תהיה" rather than simply saying "זאת תורת המצרע", these are the laws of a leper? Finally, as part of the Metzora's purification process, he is commanded to take two birds but only Shecht one of them and set the other one free. This is a very strange command, so why does the Torah require him to do so?

Rav Bezalel Rudinsky explains that with every action a person takes there are two elements: 1. The action itself and 2. The consequences of that action. Sometimes a person may perform a small Mitzvah but it can have tremendous consequences on another individual. For example, someone may take a few extra minutes to learn after Davening, which is certainly a tremendous feat, but if people become inspired by that then it can be exponentially more rewarding. However, the same is true of the flipside: if a person violates an Aveira it can be detrimental to his Avodat Hashem, but if that transgression negatively affects others then the Issur can be innumerable. Chazal famously explain that the reason people contract Tzara'at is because they speak Lashon Hara. When someone speaks negatively about a person to

someone else, there is no telling how much that can affect the aforementioned person. This tale can spread to anyone and everyone and could potentially ruin their life. This may affect their ability to get a job, a shidduch, make friends and more, and all you did was say a few words. Even if the action was minor, the impact is incomprehensible.

Tabc is learning Masechet Brachot this year and there is a Gemara (28b) that describes R' Yochanan Ben Zakkai weeping as he was about to die. He explains that he is crying because he is scared for his Gezar Din and whether he will be sentenced to an eternity in Olam Haba or Gehinom. The Gemara says that R' Yochanan was worried about both standing before Hashem and the path that would lead to either Olam haba or Gehinom. R' Radinsky explains that R' Yochanan's first concern was his actions - what he did, what he didn't do etc... But he was also concerned about the path that his actions led to. Who knows what ramifications have come from him that have yet to be seen? This could be both positive and negative effects but no one knows until they get to Shamayim what kind of impact they had on others. This is why R' Yochanan was so nervous even though he was one of the Gedolei Hador because he truly had no idea how people have been influenced by his actions. Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz tells the following Mashal: If someone were to take a bag of feathers, go to the top of the Empire State building and throw them off, it would be impossible to then go and collect all of them. So too, when someone tells Lashon Hara, it can get spread in all directions and there really is no way to fix it. Even if someone asks the one they hurt for Mechila, the effects are unattainable.

We can now use this idea to answer our previous few questions:

1. He is now called a Metzora because he can never fully take back what he did and therefore takes on

the continual name of a Metzora, not simply someone who has Tzara'at.

2. The Passuk is in the future tense because this has future ramifications.
3. And finally, he sends the bird out to demonstrate that the Aveira is still out there even though he underwent this whole Teshuva process.

Similarly, Rabbi Elliot Schrier explained that the Seder is a time when lessons, memories and Torah get passed down in a night that will not be forgotten. Whatever you choose to relay to your family on Monday night will shape the way they continue to build families of their own, whether you have children, siblings or even parents. The Seder is a tremendous opportunity to forge relationships and memories that will live on forever, but this is a big responsibility because whatever happens cannot be undone. We should all take this Shabbos, Shabbos HaGadol, to adequately prepare for Pesach and the Seder ahead. This is precisely why the Shulchan Aruch requires us to read the Haggada on Shabbos HaGadol, so that we can all transmit Torah that will last a lifetime.

Who Wants Life

By Alex Kalb ('15)

We read in this week's Parashah about Tzara'at and its correlation to the Aveirah of Lashon Hara. In teaching this idea, the Midrash points to a well known Passuk in Tehillim (34:13) that states, "מי האיש החפץ חיים" (Who is the person that wants life), and then continues with the following story:

There was once a peddler who traveled through the cities near ציפורי and he would yell in the streets, 'Who wants to buy the potion of life?'. People would crowd around him, and one time, רב ינאי was sitting in his boat and heard the peddler. רב ינאי answered him, 'Come to me, I would love to buy some life'. The peddler saw רב ינאי and said to him, 'You don't need this, nor do people who are like you need this'. But רב ינאי was persistent and shouted back at him, 'I want life! Please sell it to me.' So, the peddler came to him, took out his book of תהלים and showed him the פסוק in פרק לד that says "מי האיש החפץ חיים", and he continued, "נצור לשונך מרע ושפתך מדבר מרמה סור מרע ועשה טוב" (Guard your tongue from bad, stay away from bad and do good).

רב ינאי then responded to this peddler that in משלי also, Shlomo HaMelech says "a person who guards his mouth and his tongue, he guards himself from difficulties that come his way", but my whole life I would read this פסוק in תהלים and I never realized how simple it was until you came to me and said "מי האיש החפץ חיים".

The question that is asked on this Midrash, however, is what in the peddler's message was רב ינאי so intrigued by? What did it really teach him and what can it teach us?

We might think that life is not something that can be acquired since it is a gift we already have and can't gain 'more of' once we are brought into this world. But what the peddler is trying to ask is "מי האיש החפץ חיים", 'Who wants to acquire life'? He was trying to teach us that we can do something in this world that can help us acquire a better life and attain the most incredible life possible. However, what is the way to achieve this? By "נצור לשונך" "מרע ושפתך מדבר מרמה", by using our mouths the way we're supposed to and not in ways that can be detrimental to ourselves and others. Our הדיבור, כה, the power of a person's speech, is our most powerful tool and is also our secret weapon. It can bring us down, but it can also uplift us, connect us to others, and even change our lives forever.

The Gemara in Ketubot (64) tells a story about רב ינאי who had a son-in-law named רבי יהודה. Every Friday, רבי יהודה would go to רב ינאי's house, and when he would walk, there would be a pillar of fire that would accompany him since he was such a tremendous חכם. One Friday, רב ינאי noticed that it was late and רבי יהודה seemed to have been running later than usual, so he turned to the people in his house and said, 'Go prepare the shrouds because he's probably not alive anymore'. Ultimately, רב ינאי's words were unfortunately true and רבי יהודה did pass away. Based on this גמרא, Rav Elchanan Wasserman explains the following: why did רבי יהודה pass away? Usually when we see a great צדיק's blessing or curse actually occur, it is because ה' fulfilled the will of that צדיק. But in this specific case, it would've never been רב ינאי's desire for his son-in-law to die! Therefore, through telling this story, the גמרא is trying to teach us that it must be that the speech of a person is naturally effective even without intent, and so it is of fundamental importance to

be careful with what we say and to always try to improve in this aspect of our lives.

The איש חזון was once asked by a student what he should work on while being in yeshiva. The answer he was given was to focus on strengthening his תורה learning and refining his speech. The פרשה expresses to us that צרעת originates from using our דיבור in the wrong ways and from failing to fulfill our potential of becoming an איש חיים. The הפך חיים. But as we enter into Pesach, which the Arizal mentions is composed of the words "פה סה" (the mouth speaks), and we say והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא, and sing Hallel to praise ה', we should remind ourselves that there are so many ways of using our speech for the good. We should be זוכה to embody חיים הפך חיים, people who want life by always working on our דיבור for the better, for תורה, and תפילה, and וואהבת לרעך כמוך, and in turn, ה' will protect us from our enemies and lead us to the שלימה במהירה. בימינו.

The Fig's Duality

By Shamai Bernstein ('25)

Shir HaShirim 2:13 -

The fig tree has produced its green figs, and the grapevine's tender grapes give out their fragrance; arise my beloved, my fair one, and go forth.

Figs are surprisingly useful, considering I can't recall ever having seen one. Figs help keep baked goods fresh, are a food source for thousands of different species, can be made into honey, and are of the Seven Fruits of Eretz Yisrael. That's not all, though; on the not-so-bright side of things, one species of fig literally strangles its host tree, killing and replacing it. Like the fruit itself, figs in Tanach have a mixed reputation. Rashi cites a Midrash that cites Rabbi Nechemya, in Masechet Sanhedrin 70b, writing of the Tree of Da'at that "This was the tree of which they had eaten; by the very thing through which their ruin (exile from Gan Eden) had been caused was some improvement (clothing) effected in their condition". The fig tree is also synonymous with prosperity throughout Tanach, being used both as the symbol of a gluttonous civilization and of the future messianic era. This duality, of being used both for wrong and right, is also apparent in Shemot Rabbah. Even though in 1:36, Chazal write that

the unripe figs in our Pasuk represent the wicked who were lacking in Teshvua when leaving Mitzrayim, in 15:1 they are said to represent the righteous! One possible way to tie the two together is as follows: 1:36 mentions that the wicked did Teshuvah in their hearts, but were not wholehearted in their Teshuvah, because of future treason of the Cheit Ha'Eigel. That Medrash focuses on the evil; 15:1 is focusing on the good. The former theme, when applied to the theme of prosperity, exists only when the fruit is eaten mindlessly, but the latter application is when the people's hearts are directed to a Higher Power. The same with the example of Adam HaRishon; the fig was first used for earthly gain, but later for the *Tzni'utdik* pursuit of clothing. Just as in the fig fruit, the flowers are only on the inside of the fruit, not the outside, so too, the hidden goodness in wrongdoers, past and present, is banished from sight; may it be revealed once again, soon in our days.

The Narrow Escape

By Eli Hochberg ('27)

During Pesach, we famously have a Mitzvah to eat Matzah for seven days. The reasoning for this is that Bnei Yisrael ate Matzah on their way out of Egypt, as they didn't have time to let their dough fully rise into bread. Why were Bnei Yisrael in such a rush to leave Mitzrayim? One answer, given by the Maharal of Prague, and later expanded on by HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, is that only natural events are bound by time. Miracles occur much quicker and are outside of time. Therefore, Yetziat Mitzrayim happened quickly, and Bnei Yisrael needed to hurry to make their Matzah.

Another answer is famously given in the Zohar. It states that Bnei Yisrael had reached the forty-ninth level of the fifty levels of impurity. The Ari says that if Bnei Yisrael were in Mitzrayim any longer, they would have reached the fiftieth level of impurity, and Hashem would have been unable to redeem us. Perhaps, if Bnei Yisrael waited for the dough to rise, they would have reached an unredeemable level! Hashem made us hurry to ensure that we could be redeemed. We should all go into Pesach embracing the message that for the future Geulah to come, we must hurry to do Teshuvah and that Hashem works in supernatural ways.

Shabbat Violators Touching Non-Mevushal Wine

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Counterintuitive, Ultra-Sensitive, and Easily avoided

It is a counterintuitive, ultra-sensitive, yet easily avoided issue. The widely accepted practice is to forbid non-Mevushal wine touched by Jews who publicly desecrate Shabbat (Mechalel Shabbat B'Farhesya). Let us explain this Minhag's source and why only Yayin Mevushal should be served when Shabbat violators are present.

Talmudic Background

The Gemara, Rambam, and Shulchan Aruch do not explicitly forbid wine touched by a Mechalel Shabbat B'Farhesya. In fact, the reasons to prohibit wine touched by non-Jews do not seem to apply to a Shabbat violator.

The Rambam (Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot 11: 1, 3, and 4) summarizes the principles that emerge from the Gemara (modified translation from Chabad.org) regarding wine and Nochrin:

When wine has been poured as a libation to Avodah Zarah, it is forbidden to benefit from it. A person who drinks even the smallest quantity of [such wine] is liable for lashes according to Torah Law.

When we do not know whether wine belonging to a Nochri was used for a libation or not, it is called "ordinary [gentile] wine (Stam Yeinam)." It is forbidden to benefit from it, as it is forbidden to benefit from wine used as a libation. [This matter] is a rabbinic decree.

It is forbidden [to benefit from] any wine that a Nochri touches; for perhaps he poured it as a libation. For the thought of a Nochri is focused on the worship of false deities. From this, we learn that it is forbidden to benefit [even from] wine belonging to a Jew which was touched by a Nochri (Maga Akum).

The Gemara (Shabbat 17b) presents another reason for the rabbinic decree concerning Stam Yeinam and Maga

Akum – creating social barriers to avoid assimilation and intermarriage.

Accordingly, the reasons to forbid non-Jewish wine seem irrelevant regarding a Jewish Shabbat transgressor. Concerns for Avodah Zarah and intermarriage do not apply to Jews. Most non-observant Jews do not serve idolatry, and we may marry their observant children.

However, the Gemara (Chullin 5a) equates Shabbat violators with those who offer wine to Avodah Zarah.

The Sages stated: One accepts offerings from Jewish transgressors so that they will consequently repent, except for the deliberate and widespread transgressor, one who pours wine as a libation to idolatry, and one who desecrates Shabbat in public [B'Farhesya].

Rashi (ad. loc. s.v. Alma Mumar) explains that a Jew disrespecting Shabbat denies Creation and Hashem's resting on its seventh day. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explains that a Jew's holiness stems from two sources. One is inherently invested in a Jew by dint of a Jewish mother. The second level accrues by adherence to the Torah.

Rav Soloveitchik points to Rashi to Shemot 15:2 s.v. Elokei Avi as his source. Rashi says that Hashem is Elokei Avi, my parents' God, meaning that our Kedushah stems from our parents. However, Hashem is also Keili, my God, because he develops the inherited Kedushah.

The Shabbat desecrating Jew is Jewish under Elokei Avi but lacks the Zeh Keili dimension. In other words, the Mechalel Shabbat B'Farhesya is invested with a Shem Yisrael but lacks Kedushat Yisrael. Thus, he is undoubtedly a Jew (e.g., a woman he marries requires a Get to marry another man), but there are halachic ramifications of his diminished Kedushat Yisrael.

Geonim, Rishonim, and Shulchan Aruch

The Rambam equates a non-observant Jew with a non-Jew in several places (e.g., Hilchot Shabbat 30:15, Hilchot Eruvin 2:16, and Hilchot Shechita 4:14) but not in the context of forbidden wine in Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot. Nonetheless, other early sources prohibit wine touched by non-Jews.

The Behag (Sefer Halachot Gedolot number 60) is the earliest and most authoritative source to articulate this restriction. He states: "One who violates Shabbat renders wine forbidden by his touching it." The Sefer HaEshkol (Auerbach edition, 3:151) agrees. The Beit Yosef (Y.D. 119) cites the Rashba and Rabbeinu Yonah, who also subscribe to this stringent view.

The Shulchan Aruch is unclear about this matter. He states (Y.D. 124:8) that a Mumar (apostate Jew) prohibits wine he touches. However, it is unclear if he refers only to a Jew who identifies with another religion. Nonetheless, elsewhere, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 385:3) defines a Mumar as one who regularly worships idols or publicly violates Shabbat.

The Shach (Nekudot HaKesef to Taz Y.D. 124:2), though, explicitly rules that a Shabbat desecrator renders wine non-kosher with his touch.

Twentieth Century Poskim

The mainstream view is articulated by Rav Zvi Pesach Frank (Teshuvot Har Zvi Y.D. 105), Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Y.D. 2:132), Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yabia Omer 1 Y.D. 11), and Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 8:17 and 12:56). They note the customary approach regarding wine touched by a non-Shomer Shabbat Jew as not kosher. Rav Hershel Schachter states that this is the mainstream view.

Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin (Peirushei Ibra 5:4) makes an exception when the Jew is a Tinok SheNishba, raised in an environment distanced from Torah. Rav Yosef Adler reports that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik agrees. Rav Ovadia Yosef writes that there is room to limit this rule, saying it does not apply to a traditional Jew who at least recites Kiddush. Since Kiddush proclaims belief in Creation, one who recites it is not compared to a non-Jew. Recall that Rashi explained the core issue with the Mechalel Shabbat B'Farhesya is his denial of Creation, a problem irrelevant to one who says Kiddush.

However, there is typically little reason to rely on these minority views in light of the ease of restricting the wine to Yayin Mevushal when hosting a Shabbat violator.

One may wonder why we are strict regarding wine touched by a non-Shomer Shabbat Jew if we are lenient

regarding food baked or cooked by such a Jew (regarding Pat and Bishul Akum, see Rav Ovadia Yosef, Halichot Olam 7: p. 91 and Teshuvot Yabia Omer 5 Y.D. 10) and utensils manufactured by them (not to require Tevilat Keilim, see Teshuvot Yabia Omer 2 Y.D. 9). The answer is that we are stricter regarding Stam Yeinam than by other Halachic matters (Chochmat Adam 75:1).

Nitzok Chibbur

Rav Ovadia Yosef is lenient about one significant aspect of wine touched by a non-Shomer Shabbat Jew. While he believes that the wine he pours may not be consumed. He rules that the wine remaining in the bottle remains kosher. Although the stream connects the wine he pours and what remains in the bottle (Nitzok Chibbur), Rav Yosef follows the lenient opinions regarding this matter (see Shulchan Aruch and Rama Y.D. 124:14 and 125:1) regarding Shabbat desecrators.

Conclusion – Respect Goes Two Ways

Undoubtedly, prohibiting non-Mevushal wine touched by non-Shomer Shabbat Jews occasionally leads to awkward situations. However, we can pro-actively avoid such situations by using only yayin mevushal when non-Shomer Shabbat Jews are present.

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