

Cornerstone of Commitment: Parshat Terumah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Torah describes the *Keruvim* as two figures standing on the cover of the Ark while facing each other, with their wings spreading upward. From between these *Keruvim* the voice of God would emanate. According to tradition, the *Keruvim* had childlike faces, and the Zohar adds that one was male and the other female. When there was harmony between Bnei Yisrael, the *Keruvim* faced each other and God's presence rested among them. But when there was disunity, they turned away from each other and Hashem was displeased.

The Divrei Yisroel of Modzitz writes that the *Keruvim* represent the youth of the nation while the wings above them represent the elders. For the youth to grow properly, they must be under the protection and influence of the elders. Rabbi Schrage Grosbard notes that a child naturally has faith in adults. The

tools of Torah and prayer strengthen our childlike faith.

Vayomer Yehudah compares the *Keruvim* to seeds planted atop the fertile Aron. Drawing their strength from the Torah within, they grow pure and golden. Besides love, nurture, attention, and role modeling, a child needs a proper environment in which to grow, notes the Chinuch Malchuti. Pirkei Avot delineates 48 paths to acquiring Torah. Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz notes that many of these paths involve proper interaction with other people. Looking at each other, as the *Keruvim* were doing, is looking at the Torah and doing Hashem's will.

The Lekach V'Halibuv notes that Adar, the last month of the year, corresponds to the tribe of Naftali, the last tribe in the order of the encampments, and the last tribal prince to

bring his offering at the dedication of the *Mishkan*. He graciously let all the other princes bring their offerings before him. The prince's name Achira ben Einan alludes to his character, the son of the [good] Eye. The Zodiac sign of the month of Adar is *dagim*, a pair of fish, upon whom no evil eye can prevail. Although different from each other, they can still look at each other and live together in peace.

Our mission is to constantly grow, to reach upward like the wings of the *Keruvim*. We must model ourselves on the constant thirst for knowledge that children are innately born with, writes Rabbi Roberts. Just as Yaakov was called a *yoshev ohalim*, going from one tent to the other seeking wisdom, so too must we always strive for spiritual growth. Rabbi Meizlish notes that children tend to be happy with whatever they have. The *Keruvim* teach us to retain that childlike innocence and joy from which the voice of Hashem can emanate.

Prophecy- The Ultimate Connection to Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Nevuah comes from the root word *niv bah* – a phrase came to me. How did the prophet know that it was the voice of Hashem and not the voice of his own imagination? We know Hashem exists, but our physicality desensitizes us to His voice. Our bodies speak loudly, drowning out our spirituality. When we sin we create a barrier separating us from Hashem. Our awareness of the Creator becomes progressively distanced. Hashem's essence never changes. Our ability to see Him does. We have free choice. Even spiritual sensitivity can be misused. People are afraid to find Hashem because they think He is beyond what they can ever fathom. In the past, people would look for the part of themselves that was most like Hashem and worship that. This is what pagan beliefs were about.

During the building of the Second Temple, the sages asked Hashem to eliminate the inclination for idol worship. With it, the power of prophecy also ended. For 4,000 years the spiritual world had been more accessible. One who sought Hashem could tear down the

mechitzot, the bad *middot* that separated him from Hashem, and enter a state of *ruach hakodesh*. When they eliminated the inclination for idol worship, this became more difficult.

Ruach hakodesh is when a person's *ruach*, his choosing self, is consistently devoted to that which is *kodesh* (holy). *Kodesh* means *l'hakdish* – to separate. Being holy means being separate from that which is limited, mundane, and evil. When a person's spirit is sanctified, their intuitive understanding of Hashem's will is sharpened.

What were the signs of a legitimate prophet? The first criteria was credibility. Was he holy, wise, and meticulous in his deeds? The prophet also had to have made a sign, either a prediction that would come true in the foreseeable future or an action that required superhuman power.

Only the prophecies of the 48 prophets were written down and canonized, as they were relevant for future generations. They contain moral teachings and historical stories interwo-

ven with profound prophecies. They tell us how to look at events through Hashem's eyes. Why did the Rambam include prophecy in his 13 principles of faith? Knowing that there are humans who could reach this level of closeness to Hashem changes our perception. We tend to give up on ourselves easily. If we want to live true to our mission we have to have a vision of human potential. We cannot be spiritual midgets in our aspirations.

When Yosef said, "Ani Yosef," it was a terrible moment for the brothers. The Gemara says, "Oy l'yom hadin, oy l'yom hatochacha." Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that the deepest regret a person could feel is recognizing that he lived wrong and did not believe enough in himself to change. We have to believe that if we were able to create the *mechitzot*, we can tear them down. We may not attain prophecy, but we must still foster spiritual expectations of ourselves. If we invest our full effort and do what we can, Hashem will give us the capacity to accomplish way beyond what we thought we could.

The Dust of Loshon Hara

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

Rav Yisrael Salanter said, "If you say about a cantor that he is not clever and about a rabbi that he doesn't have a good voice, that is gossip. But if you say about a rabbi that he's not learned or about a cantor that he doesn't have a good voice then you're a murderer, as you have destroyed their livelihood." We all know that stealing is wrong, but we can understand why the thief does it. He wants something that he doesn't have. But with *loshon hara*, a person doesn't gain anything. All he does is flatter his feelings by lowering someone else's esteem. If you speak good about other people, you're going to have an upbeat attitude. If you speak bad, it lowers your own image in other people's eyes. No one appreciates someone who's always complaining about others. It's not only evil, it cuts away at your happiness.

Avak loshon hara borders on *loshon hara* and is an *issur d'rabanun*. An example of *avak loshon hara* is praising someone in the presence of their enemy or competitor. This instigates the person to speak *loshon hara* about his foe. Rashi says that a craftsman naturally despises those in his line of profession. It's unfair to expect a person to be objective about his competitor.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia says one must downplay a person's hospitality if effusive praise will cause other people to take advantage of the host. Likewise, it would be wrong to divulge a person's financial generosity if it will cause other people to pester him for contributions.

Conversely, if you don't actually say anything negative, but your gesticulations indicate

something negative, you've violated *avak loshon hara*. It's forbidden to show people unflattering photos about others. Likewise, displaying letters from others with grievous errors and spelling mistakes is wrong.

Rabbi Telushkin quotes several common excuses people give for speaking *loshon hara*. People often say, "But it's true." That in fact is the definition of *loshon hara*. Furthermore, do you think everyone has the right to know everything just because it's true? The second familiar excuse is, "I didn't actually say anything bad about that fellow." Well, once you hint at a flaw that's what people will focus on. Another thing people like to say is, "I did the same thing myself." Even if you don't mind people knowing this about you, other people might resent it. People think they can freely talk about other people's past sins. If someone was one incarcerated because of grand larceny and you're thinking of becoming his partner, it's probably appropriate to let you know about it. Otherwise, people don't need to know about it. Everyone is entitled to repent and be forgiven.

The Chofetz Chaim says that degrading someone's merchandise is also *loshon hara*.

There's an assumption that everything about a public figure is meant to be public knowledge. If he does something scandalous that will impede his ability to govern, it can be in the public arena. But if it's not relevant, it shouldn't be our business.

If someone presses you to speak negatively about someone the best thing would be to try to change the subject. If you can't, give an

impartial response. If you still can't, you can lie to avoid the *loshon hara*.

You might ask, "Did others do poorly?" to find out if your child wasn't the only one who failed the test. But don't ask, "Who did poorly on the test?" Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that it's inappropriate and downright ugly to compel a child to speak negatively about another child. It teaches children to speak evil. If the student volunteers information on his own, if it's vital for the school to know about it, you have to listen. But if not, teach the student to refrain. A teacher may want to be honest about a student, but if he knows the parents will overreact, he must be careful what he writes or says.

We must not listen to *loshon hara* either, as this provides a forum for the *loshon hara* speaker. It's like buying stolen goods. When you give business to a thief you encourage him to steal more.

If you're tempted to speak *loshon hara*, ask yourself three questions, says Rabbi Telushkin: 1. Is what I'm saying completely fair, even if it's true? 2. Does the person I'm speaking to need to know this? 3. Is there positive information about the person's actions or motives that I'm omitting? A good way to refrain from *loshon hara* is to think how appreciative you'd be if someone refrained from speaking about you. Another good idea is to put a photo of the Chofetz Chaim next to your computer or telephone. Much like a seat belt, it holds the person in place and protects him from sin.