

Parshat Tazria-Metzora Peddlers Preaching

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

The Medrash relates that a peddler was once hawking his wares near Tzippori and began to shout, "Who wants to buy an elixir of life?" Rabbi Yannai, an Amora approached. The peddler pointed to the verse in *Tehilim*, "Who is the man who desires life... Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Rabbi Yannai seemed to be awestricken, saying, "All my life I read this verse and I did not understand how to interpret it until this peddler came along.

Why was Rabbi Yannai so taken? Rabbi Pincus z"l posits that sometimes, when something is so obvious, we completely overlook its deep meaning. This gift of simplicity was the gift of a simple peddler, writes the *Birkat Mordechai*, that he opened the eyes of Rav Yannai to the profundity of this verse.

The Meirosh Tzurim quotes the Ishbetzir Rav that perhaps in fact the peddler had once been a gossip, but when he did *teshuvah*, he felt a new lease on life and wanted to share it with others. Rabbi Yannai had never seen anyone who actually exemplified this verse so completely. It was this realization that so impressed the Amora.

The Be'er Moshe writes that according to the Gemara in Avodah Zoro, the peddler was Rabbi Alexander who was teaching another aspect of the verse. "Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it." It is not enough just to avoid evil. One must also pursue good. It is not enough for the *metzora* to go to the priest and go through some ritual.

He must actively seek the good in others, use his tongue to encourage others, and use his power of speech for prayer and *Torah* study.

When one refrains from sin, writes Letitcha Elyon, one receives merit. But that is not the same as merit for performing a *mitzvah*. *Loson horo* is different, however, for when one is refraining from *loshon horo*, one is actually sanctifying his mouth, and as such, he receives merit and reward not only for refraining from sin, but also for the positive aspect of sanctification.

Rabbi Frand elucidates the Chida's interpretation of this Medrash. The peddler did not ask, "Who seeks life?" He asked, "Who seeks an elixir of life." In other words, how can one preserve his life. Citing the *Chovos Halevovos*, he explains that when we ascend to heaven the accounting of our *mitzvot* and *aveirot* will not seem accurate. However, it will be explained that whenever we spoke *loshon horo* of someone, we are credited with his *aveirot* and when others spoke *loshon horo* about us, we are credited with their *mitzvot*. The peddler's lesson was that guarding one's tongue preserves the *mitzvot* to oneself so they will never be credited to another.

The Sichot Eliyahu connects Parshat Metzorah and *Sefirah*. Citing the Maharsha, he notes that the disciples all died of *ascarah*, the same plague that afflicted the spies in the desert. The spies died for speaking *loshon horo* and Rabbi Akiva's disciples died for the same reason. They too spoke *loshon horo* about each other and didn't treat each other with respect.

The *Sefirah* period was originally a time of great anticipation and hope. Forty nine days leading from our redemption from Egypt to receiving the *Torah* on the fiftieth day of Revelation. In *Pirkei Avot*, we are told there are forty-eight ways to acquire the *Torah*, one path corresponding to each day of the journey, with the last day reserved for review. Many of these paths, or characteristics, seem to have more to do with interpersonal relations than with traditional studying, yet they are important to acquire *Torah* properly. If these disciples were remiss in these characteristics, how could they truly acquire the *Torah* which would be given at the end of this time frame? After all, these are qualities that represent the fundamentals of a *Torah* personality.

What separates humans from animals is the power of thought and speech that is often defined as the soul God breathed into us. It gives us the power to connect to humans and to Hashem Himself. If we want to bring God's presence down to earth, we must guard our speech, for *loshon horo* distances us from God and sends His presence back to heaven, writes Rabbi Wolbe z"l. At this time of year, when we are moving toward spirituality, we must take our physical mouths and dedicate them to holy words. After all, the verse tells us *netzor leshoncha meiral* guard your tongue from evil. But the connotation of *netzor* is guarding something precious, unlike *shamor*/guard, which implies guarding against something negative. Our power of speech is a precious gift which we must continuously guard to keep pure.

Yearning to be Ourselves Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The primary function of *Mashiach* is to arouse the Jews to do teshuva which means returning to who we could be. This could happen through miracles or through opening ourselves to be willing to listen. It says in the book of Yeshaya, "Vameich kulum tzadikim-All of your nation are righteous." We will reach a point where all of us will be *tzadikim*. We will repent and reach a level of making the best

choices within our capacity.

The effect of us becoming who we could be, will in turn affect the whole world. The nations of the world will want to follow our example. They will draw their moral consciousness from us and repent. This doesn't mean that every non-Jew will return, only those who want to. After doing *teshuvah*, we will complete our

return by coming back to Israel as we can only fully be ourselves in the Holy Land. *Mashiach* will then build the Third Temple. Up until that point, we will not know if he is truly *Mashiach*, the one chosen to bring us to our destiny. When people say a specific person is *Mashiach* it means that if he is righteous enough he could be. But if he didn't get the people to repent, didn't bring them back to

Continued on page 2

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Continued from page 1

Eretz Yisrael, nor build the Temple, we could say that he had the potential to be *Mashiach* but he didn't complete his job. After the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash* the voices of evil will be silenced and we will revert to the level of closeness to *Hashem* that Adam attained in the Garden of Eden.

The first blessing of redemption refers to Yerushalayim, the place where Avraham was commanded to offer up Yitzchak. Hashem didn't say go to Yerushalayim but to the land of Moriah, the land that personified the

teachings of Hashem. Avraham recognized the place because there was a cloud hovering over the mountain that only he and Yitzchak could see. Yitzchak called it the field, the place where seeds are sown and growth is nurtured. Yaakov took it a step further and called it a house. We can make Hashem's presence in the world be almost tangible, like a person's presence in their own home.

Yerushalayim is called Hashem's city. The word *ir*, city, is related to *er-* awakening.

Hashem chose His holy place to be one filled

with people. For Him, the human soul is the pinnacle of beauty. We ask for the Divine Presence to return in mercy. We know there will be a return. But it may be a long and difficult process, so we ask for compassion. "Establish the throne of David..." For Hashem's rulership to be felt we have to have a government that's exemplified by King David. And in fact *Mashiach* will be a descendant of him and will personify his defining trait, making Hashem rule in every corner, in every place, in every Jew's heart.

Shir Shel Yom: Yom Chamishi

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Chapter 81 in *Tehilim* was the song the Leviim sang every Thursday in the *Beit Hamikdash*. It begins with "*Lamanetzach al hagitit.*" *Gitit* refers to the city *Gat* in the area that is today Gaza. Rav Hirsch explains that wine was produced there by pressing grapes through a wine press. He connects this to the previous chapter 80 which discusses the Jewish nation and compares them to grapes.

David Hamelech asks Hashem, "Why did you break the fence around the vineyard allowing passerbys to destroy the grapes?" As a parallel, David Hamelech asks why Hashem let the nations harm the Jewish people. This chapter contains the answer. The grapes are pressed in order to extract the wine. It's purposeful pain meant to bring us to our potential, to actualize our essence. The name of Hashem mentioned is *Elokai Yaakov*. *Elokim* signifies justice. This indicates that the Jewish people are going through a difficult time. Still the verse tells us, *harninu-be happy and cause others to be happy*. And the question is how. The Jewish nation are called *Yaakov* which comes from the root word *eikev*, the heel, the less sensitive more physical part of the body. This tells us that the Jewish people are in a challenging state. Yet

Hashem is still with us and will never abandon us. Step by step He is leading us towards something greater. "*Seu zimra...*" We are told to play instruments, the *kinor*, the *nevel*. Rav Hirsch explains that the *kinor* is soft and pleasant sounding while the *nevel* is more harsh sounding. In both situations whether things are pleasant or more difficult we are expected to raise our voice to Hashem in praise and happiness. It is precisely in difficult situation when we must seek to discern the hand of Hashem and His deep and eternal love for us.

The chapter continues, "*Tiku b'chodesh shofar bakesa l'yom chageinu*" This is a very famous verse constantly quoted in the prayers of Rosh Hashana. When times are hard Hashem gives us a way to climb out of it. Rosh Hashana stands for *teshuva*. Within every Jew there is an eternal spark that can never be extinguished. The *shofar* is meant to awaken it. *Kesa* refers to *Rosh Chodesh*, the time when the moon is renewed and hardly discernable. The verse takes us through the month of *Tishrei* from the renewal of *teshuva* on *Rosh Hashana* through 15 days of relative darkness to the ultimate chag of *Sukkot*, the holiday of happiness. This is a blueprint for dealing with difficult times. When we are going

through a period of darkness, when we are persecuted and the vineyard is open, then we are called to reveal the light. Darkness should be a call to come back to Hashem. When we straighten our heart and return to Him, we will reach ultimate joy.

Our happiness depends on the *chok*, on the *mitzvot* of the *Torah*. We have to examine where are we standing vis a vis what Hashem demands of us. "*Ki yesh chok l'Yisrael*, there is a way that Hashem wants us to act, think and speak. When we see that times are difficult, we have to examine our relationship to the *chukim*, how devoted are we to do the will of Hashem. *Rosh Hashana* begins with *mishpat* (justice), examining where we have to be. We have to know that the source of our happiness is in following what Hashem wants us to do. "*Ki chok l'Yisrael*," there are rules that Hashem gave us in order to access this relationship that brings happiness. And to get there we have to go through *mishpat*. *Mishpat* could be two things, ideally us judging ourselves, seeing where we are and where we are supposed to be and bridging the gaps between the two. And sometime s Hashem will act with the attribute of *mishpat* in order to bring us to the level we need to attain.