

Kovetz
**Chidushei
Torah**

A collection of Chidushei Torah
through the many dimensions of The Torah:
Peshat, Remez, Halacha and Chassidus.

Composed by:

Rabbi's, Yeshiva students and members
of The Buffalo Jewish Community



Buffalo, NY

Yud Shevat, 5781

In loving memory of a beloved
member of our community

Reb **Motty** A"H **Kopman**



By the **Kopman** Family

In honor of my wife

Leah Chavah

for being such a wonderful

"עזר כנגדו" and "אשת חיל"



By **Rabbi Shmuel Rashkin**

In the Z'chus of

Chabad of Buffalo

and the **Gurary** family



By **Mrs. Rus Devorah Wallen**

B"H

Foreword

Can We Add to the Torah?

There is an ancient saying, oft repeated, “Scriptures, Mishnah, Talmud, Aggadah . . . any innovation of any sharp student of Torah—all was given to Moses at Sinai.”

If it was given at Sinai, why do we call it an innovation of this student? As the Midrash above tells, all he did was to recite that which his soul had heard at Sinai.

But this student, through toil and tears, exhausting every tool and tradition his teachers had given him, drilling into the innermost powers of his soul, unraveled yet another fold in the voice heard at Sinai. And with that unfolding, a spark of wisdom that was utterly concealed, now entered openly into the world utterly unknowable and beyond the grasp of any mind, now entered openly into the world.

It is not simple. The Zohar warns that one who says something is Torah when it is not true Torah has created an idol—for Torah is one with the One who gave it.

Who, then, are those that dare to unfold this great voice? Who can reveal the hidden wisdom of the divine?

Each one of us can—if we only would put in the effort. Each soul holds a fractal of the whole, something of that voice that it alone heard at Sinai. And each soul comes to this world at the time it is needed to reveal its piece of the puzzle

As The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya, Igeres Hakodesh, Epistle 26:

"Every Jew is able to reveal secrets of wisdom, (to reveal) and to discover a new insight, whether it be in the laws or in homiletics,

in the revealed or in the mystical [planes of the Torah], according to the nature of his soul's root and its consequent affinity with each of the above categories of the Torah.

Indeed, one is obliged to do so—to uncover hitherto-concealed insights into the Torah, and to reveal the secrets of wisdom, in order to perfect his soul by elevating all the sparks that have been allotted to it, as is known".

Based on the above, The Rebbe encouraged that everyone can and should write and publish Chidushei Torah. Publishing Chidushei Torah benefits the readers as well as the writers, for when a person knows that he has to explain his idea in writing, this will cause him to study the concept with more depth and clarity.

Baruch Hashem The Jewish community of Buffalo is blessed with many great Rabbi's, Yeshiva students and Torah scholars.

This booklet is a collection of Chidushei Torah. It contains essays and insights on the different dimensions of the Torah, Peshat, Remez, Halacha and Chassidus.

We would like to thank all those who took the time and effort to write down and send in their Chidushim. A special thanks goes to Sholom Ber Gurary for his help with formatting this booklet. We hope that this booklet will be the beginning of many such booklets.

May it be Hashem's will, that in the merit of these Chidushei Torah we shall merit the coming of Moshiach and the revelation of the secrets of the Torah that Moshiach will reveal to us. May it be speedily in our days.

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Modeling Mesirut Nefesh & The Virtue of Living Unreasonably

by Rabbi Ori Bergman

The Torah describes three cases in which Moshe encountered injustice.

When he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, he intervened despite the danger it posed to himself.

When he saw two Jews fighting, he attempted to mediate between them.

Even after fleeing the country to Midian he acted to save the girls there from the wicked shepherds, and even drawing water for them.

Moses' actions were not intuitive for someone in his position. Moses grew up on the knees of Pharaoh. He lived in a royal palace surrounded by comfort and luxury. He was saved from the anguish and experience of the Jews.

Yet, Moses leaves the comforts of the palace to see his brethren and their suffering (Shmot 2:11). As Rashi states: "he [Moses] gave his eyes and heart to be distressed over them [i.e. their pain and suffering]"

Yet, his decision to step in and save a Jewish slave cost him everything- he became homeless overnight and a traitor to his grandfather, Pharaoh. Moses became a "wandering Jew."

According to logic, Moses should have done nothing, or at least, nothing as drastic as killing an Egyptian to save a Jewish slave. It would have been more reasonable for Moses to advocate for the Jews as an insider in Pharaoh's court.

A reading of the early years of Moses point to the influence of Yocheved, his biological mother, Miriam his sister and the daughter of Pharaoh, who raised him as a mother. All three, are able to keep the will of God in focus even in the most trying of circumstances.

Miriam

According to the midrash, Amram [Moses' father] divorced his wife, but took her back, on the counsel of his daughter, Miriam (Sotah 12b).

When Amram saw that Pharaoh had decreed that all the boys be cast into the Nile, he divorced his wife to ensure that no other children would be born.

All of Israel saw this, and in consequence they also divorced their wives.

But Miriam saw that the future of the Jewish people hinged on this decision. So Miriam, who was about five, said to her father: "Father, Father, your decree is harsher than that of Pharaoh. Pharaoh only decreed against the males, but you have decreed against both the males and the females [because all the Israelites withdrew from their wives, neither sons nor daughters would come into the world].

Pharaoh decreed only for this world, but you decreed both for this world and the next [a baby that was born and died as a result of Pharaoh's decree would reach the World to Come, but an unborn child would not attain this].

It is doubtful whether the decree of the wicked Pharaoh will be fulfilled, but you are righteous, and your decree will undoubtedly be fulfilled." Amram heeded his daughter and remarried Jocheved in a public celebration with great pomp and ceremony.

All Israel saw this, and they, too, remarried their wives.

It was unreasonable to bring in a child to the world with a 50-50 chance of being killed. Yet, Miriam realized that such Mesirut Nefesh was necessary.

Yocheved

Moses was also with great love by his mother Yocheved, who got to care for him until he was weaned.

This is a woman who already had two children and who lives in a world in which male children are killed by the government upon birth, and yet she has the courage to have a third child.

There is a famous midrash where the Rabbis identify Jochebed with Shiphrah, one of the two Hebrew midwives (Shiphrah and Puah) who delivered the children of the Israelites during the Egyptian servitude.

The Torah relates that the midwives did not fulfill Pharaoh's command because they feared God, who rewarded them for their actions

Jochebed was given the name "Shiphrah" because she would cleanse (meshaperet) the newborn, by washing it and cleaning it after birth;

Upon giving birth to Moses, Yocheved hides him but when it was no longer possible to hide him at home, she puts him in a wicker basket in a desperate attempt at rescue. The midrash describes in detail how she prepared the ark for Moses.

She chose bulrushes, a soft and flexible material that is capable of withstanding contact with both soft and hard objects.

She caulked it with "bitumen and pitch" (Ex. 2:3), lining the inside with bitumen, and coating it on the outside with pitch, so that Moses would not smell the bad odor given off by the latter.

Another midrash has Jochebed building a little canopy for Mo-

ses inside the ark, for she said to herself: Perhaps I will not see him under his wedding canopy (Sotah 12a–b).

This portrayal emphasizes the painstaking motherly attention that Jochebed paid to every detail in the ark.

She took leave of her baby with a heavy heart, and tried with all her might to protect him and ensure that he remain alive.

Upon being found, the midrash relates that Moses rejected the nursing from the Egyptian women because he said: “God will speak with me. The next day the Egyptian women would say that I nursed the one who speaks with the Shekhinah [the Divine Presence]” (Ex. Rabbah 1:25).

Jochebed nursed Moses for twenty-four months (Ex. Rabbah 1:26).

God returned her child to her, thus granting her a part of her reward for keeping alive the Hebrew boys (Ex. Rabbah 1:25).

Moses’ compassion and Mesirut Nefesh as a leader was nurtured from his earliest years by his mother who, herself with Mesirut Nefesh, acted defiantly against the most powerful man in the world.

The Daughter of Pharaoh

It was the daughter of Pharaoh that saved Moses from death and raised Moses in his formative years.

The Talmud asserts that although Jochebed gave birth to Moses, he is called the son of Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh, because she raised him (Sotah 19b).

The daughter of Pharaoh received her new name of Bithiah (bat-yah; literally, the daughter of God) from God as reward for her actions.

God told her: “Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son; you are not My daughter, but I call you My daughter” (Lev. Rabbah 1:3).

We are told that Moses was given 10 names but God told him: “...of all the names by which you are called, I will call you only by the name given you by Bithiah the daughter of Pharaoh” (Lev. Rabbah 1:3).

The Rabbis emphasize that she was put to a test when she saw the ark bearing Moses.

She heard the distinctive cry of an infant and, found a small ark floating in the water.

In the midrashic account, when her handmaidens saw that she intended to rescue Moses, they attempted to dissuade her, and persuade her to heed her father.

They said to her: “Our mistress, it is the way of the world that when a king issues a decree, it is not heeded by the entire world, but his children and the members of his household do observe it, and you wish to transgress your father’s decree?”

Immediately, Gavriel appeared and beat them to the ground, and they died (Sotah 12b).

These handmaidens represent the internal voice of the daughter of Pharaoh, who might have been undecided as to whether she should disobey her father’s edict.

The angel Gavriel removes this obstacle and reinforces her resolve to draw Moses forth from the Nile.

The attendants had a very simple argument; that Batya should show loyalty to her father and follow his decrees. This was logical yet Batya acted in a manner that transcended reason by greatly exerting herself to save the Jewish baby.

Growing up as the daughter of Pharaoh, she had a life of privilege and saw firsthand her father's immense cruelty. Yet, she went against his will to rescue an Israelite child and bring it up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people.

We see that as Moses grows up, he seems to have absorbed his adoptive mother's humanity and *Mesirut Nefesh* by going out of his way to feel and respond to the pain and suffering of others. Like Batyah, he [unreasonably] chooses to turn his back on royal privilege in order to save a Jew from harm.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz says that Moshe Rabbeinu was the recipient of this great kindness, compassion and self-sacrifice, therefore, these very virtues became part and parcel of his personality.

Rav Chaim gives a great parenting lesson in stating that 'One who is on the receiving end of such great compassion and self-sacrifice naturally acquires these traits.'

Moses, not masuy

According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Pharaoh's daughter consulted Yocheved about naming Moshe. He writes:

Call him "Not "Mashuy", who was drawn from the water, but rather "Moshe" – a rescuer from the water.

Naming him this way, she wanted to say: "Do not forget at any time that you were put into the water, and rescued by me, in order to rescue others!"

Therefore, all of his life he should have a tender heart..., attentive to the suffering of others, and should always be a true savior in times of trouble, to be a "Moshe".

It does not come as a surprise that when he grew up and saw his brethren's hardship and suffering, Moshe, sought to save them.

Haftara Questions

*Halachic questions regarding reading the haftara during the
Coronavirus*

by Rabbi Moshe Taub

I. Reading the haftara when the Torah was not read?

During the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus most shuls in our particular area of Queens – have only begun outdoor minyanim, and without krias haTorah. So that this past Shabbos there were several different minyanim in people's large backyard properties.

Several hours before last Shabbos one of our members asked “I understand that this week like for the past few months we will need to read the parsha at home, and alone. However, what about the haftara?”

“After all, the haftara was created to take the place of krias ha-Torah, and since this week we are not having kriaah, shouldn't we then read the haftara – with its berachos –at the many backyard minyanim?”

Reading the haftara during Mincha of Shabbos?

This coming Shabbos we will jump one more step: we will have kriaah, yet for reasons not for here, we will be doing so by mincha. This setup for both last week and for this coming Shabbos has led to some fascinating shailos, and is a wonderful opportunity for us to investigate and understand subjects often not studied.

This presents yet another unique, and very rare, haftara issue: Since we are reading the parsha by mincha, when should we read the haftara?

Should we do it by shachris, as we did last Shabbos? Or, by min-

cha? And, whenever we read it, would this Shabbos demand we do so with its berachos?

The answer to these questions allows us to discuss an issue and history so often overlooked: The institution of the haftara.

II. Why Do We Read the Haftara?

The Chofetz Chaim, in his Mishneh Berrura (siman T 284:2), explains that there was a time of a gezeiros shmad (decrees forbidding the practice of our faith, l'a) along with a specific diktat not to lein from the Torah in any public setting.

We therefore began to read from portions of Neviim that best reflected the themes of what would-have- been the parsha from the Torah that week. (Seemingly, reading from neviim was not a concern for these enemies of Torah –see Iyunim B'Haftara p.12) This is also the view of the Rav Dovid Avuderahm (circa 1350, Siddur Avuderahm, shachris shel Shabbos), the Levush, Bach, and Taz.

The Tosfos Yom Tov (Rav Gershon Shaul Yom-Tov Lipmann Heller, d. 1654, to Megilla 4:4) gives us a little more background, explaining that this decree took place during the time of Yochanan kohein gadol and Antioches.

[Interestingly, this particular history seems to have been first recorded in an important glossary of 712 halachic and armaaic terms, called HaTishbi', written by the great gaon Rav Eliyahu Bachur, under the section 'petur'. Yet, even he states there that he found this recorded elsewhere.]

The poskim explain that even after this decree ended we never stopped this special reading from neviim on Shabbos morning. This history explains many of the peculiar features of the haftara. For example, there is a halacha that a haftara on Shabbos can be no less than twenty-one pesukim. Why that specific number?

The reason for this now is clear. This leining from neviim was

initially to mimic the parsha-reading, and the parsha is to have seven olim, and each aliyah must have a minimum of three pesukim. Seven times three equals...twenty-one!

In addition, the person who gets maftir makes seven berachos total –this is to make up for the seven aliyos not said due to lack of leining (birchas haftara plus his own birchas haTorah by maftir equals seven).

Based on the above, it would seem the questioner was correct: Even, nay, especially, because there was to be no krias haTorah last week we should have still read the haftara, and with berachos! But, of course, halacha is never that simple.

III. A Great Mystery

While the above is the most popular version of the events behind the Shabbos haftara, the truth of the matter is that the motivation and history for the haftara on Shabbos is still somewhat cryptic.

Here are four other opinions on the haftara's history:

- The Rid for example argues that our reading of the haftara goes back to the time of Ezra! (Rav Yeshayah DeTrani, d. 1250, in his sefer Hamachria, #32, page 20, top of first - column in Kohen/Klein/Muncaz ed.)

- Rav Hai Gaon (d. 1038) writes, “halacha zu yerusha miyimos haneviim – reading a haftara each Shabbos was bequeathed to us from the prophets”! (Otzar HaGeonim, Megilla, siman 106, p. 90)

- Rashi also gives an alternative explanation behind our reading of the haftara. He posits that due to busy work lives people did not have time to learn neviim and other parts of Torah. On Shabbos and Yom Tov however, people have time, and so we returned to our public teaching of these topics through this reading we call ‘haftara’.

[Based on this reasoning there is no ashrei and uva l'tzion on Shabbos morning as we already read from neviim (and we only say it by mincha so that we can remind ourselves not to skip this section during the week). (Sefer Hapardes, Rabbi H. L. Ehrenreich ed., page 306, with footnotes #123, 124)]

- The great gaon and iluy Rav Reuvein Margolis (d.1971) records yet another history to the haftara. The midrash (Tanchuma, beginning of parshas Reah) records: "The sinners of bnei yisroel say that the neviim and kesuvim are not Torah, and they do not believe in them, as stated "And we have not obeyed the voice of Hashem our Gd by walking in His Torah, which He set before us at the hand of His servants the prophets." (Daniel 9:10)..."

This, he explains, was in reference to the tzedukim.

In order to combat such a dangerous belief, we began to read from neviim in conjunction with our Torah leining. (Nefesh Chaya to orach chaim, siman 284).

IV. Reading JUST the Haftara

Now can return to the original question: should we not read the haftara with berachos when there is otherwise no krias hatorah?

The answer is, emphatically, 'No'.

The Rema records (siman 284:1) that we only read the haftara with berachos if it follows a Torah reading.

As to the history of the haftara being precisely when there was no kria, the Biur Halacha (s.v. aval) explains that now things have changed –and our present decree for its reading would always need kria first.

In fact, the whole reason we add a final (8th) maftir aliyah to our Torah leining before the haftara is simply to demonstrate the primacy of Torah over neviim and kesuvim (Shaar Hatzion 22).

Therefore, to read just neviim with berachos would defeat that purpose! Of course, the haftara should still be read, just without any berachos.

[The above discussion has many ramifications even when there is leining. For instance, what happens if one loses their minyan during shevii, or discovers that the sefer Torah they had used for leining was pasul? Would they still say a haftara with berachos? (See siman 143 with commentaries at length)]

V. Reading the Haftara by Shabbos/Mincha?

Before we talk about the haftara in such a case, it is critical to point out that our make-up reading of the parsha by mincha must take place before ashrei of mincha begins (siman 135 with Mishneh Berurua siff 5 and Shaar Hatzion #5).

Now what about reading that Shabbos' haftara by a make-up Torah reading Shabbos afternoon before mincha?

The Mishneh teaches us (Megilla 3:1, daf 21a) that there is no haftara by reading The Torah during mincha on Shabbos. While some argue that this ruling was specific to the mincha reading, and not the earlier make-up leining, most disagree.

Therefore we would read the haftara Shabbos morning before mussaf without berachos, and read the parsha before minchah without a haftara. Naturally, no maftir (8th aliyah) would be added to this pre-mincha reading. Is there anyone who would disagree –and demand/ allow (of) us to delay our haftara reading until pre- mincha, and, more, with berachos?

It is interesting to note that another gemara - Shabbos 24a – seems to state an opinion that there was a haftara read by Shabbos mincha! Rashi there records from the geonim that such was the case in some communities of old! Tosfos (s.v. shilmalei) questions

this based on the mishneh we quoted above that clearly states no haftara is read at this time.

They therefore explain that this gemara was referring to a special reading from kesuvim. In any event, we are left with the earlier mishneh that disallows haftaros at this hour.

[Interestingly this last gemara in meseches Shabbos was talking about a Shabbos that coincided with a Yom Tov. As it happens, many today indeed have the minhag to read from kesuvim -i.e. the various megillos - on every Shabbos hat coincides with a Yom Tov (although, granted, not by mincha). It would seem that according to Tosfos this gemara may be the earliest reference to such a practice!] Amazingly, Rav Azriel Hildensheimer (d. 1899) would have a late Shabbos afternoon leining followed by mussaf and then mincha. The haftara was read at this hour, and with berachos.

However, Rav Dovid Hoffman most respectfully argued on this unusual allowance (shu't Melamed L'Hoil 1:51), as do many others. The Aruch Hashulchan (135:6) states that in the case of a late Shabbos mincha-time leining, only seven aliyos are read.

Therefore, in cases of a Shabbos mincha Torah reading make-up, the minyan should say the haftara without berachos in the morning, and read the entire parsha before mincha, with no haftara.

The Melamed L'Hoil (Rav Dovid Hoffman, d. 1921) warns, however, that such a system should be rare and should never become standard practice.

Numbers Speak

by Rabbi Shmuel Rashkin

Edited by Mrs. Leah Chavah Rashkin

Introduction: Gematria is a method of Torah study which allows commentators to interpret scripture by assigning numerical values to letters, words, or phrases and then drawing insights by comparing them to those words or phrases with similar values.

Adam and Chava ate from the forbidden fruit and Hashem's question, (Bereishis 3, 9) "Where are you?" follows. (Which in Hebrew equals 36).

Rashi explains that of course Hashem knew where they were, however the phrase, "Where are you?" was a way of starting the conversation without startling them.

The numerical value of Ayekah - אֵיכָהּ is 36 which is the same as Eichah - אֵיכָה (Lamentations). 36 is two times Chai and Chai means life. Adam and Chava represent two units of 18 and as a marriage equals 36. Eighteen signifies and is related to prayer. For example, Shemoneh Esrei has 18 blessings.

The number 36 also represents light. For example, a total of 36 candles are lit on Chanukah. In Tractate Berachos it indicates that Adam experienced the original light for 12 hours erev Shabbat as well as the 24 hours of Shabbat which again adds up to 36.

A lesson I drew from this is that perhaps Ayekah (Where are you?) was a hint to Adam and Chava that they were being provided an opportunity to plead their case by taking ownership of their actions.

The number 36 can be interpreted that together you both bring

light into the world and that you should protect each other and treasure and guard the opportunity.

Adam's defense was that Chava gave him the fruit and he ate. Although Hashem made Chava as a helpmate for Adam, the Tractate in Avoda Zara indicates that Adam said to Hashem, "Because you made me this woman, she caused me to sin." Chava then placed the blame on the serpent.

We all can identify both as children and adults how hard it is not to make excuses, not blame others for our mistakes and to acknowledge our own faults and errors. One of the primary reasons we are still in exile is because of baseless hatred and a lack of Shalom.

In Hebrew the word for serpent is Nachash which equals 358. When we add light (18) to 358, we get 376. This is the equivalent to Shalom. May Hashem give us the strength to be a light unto the nations by living a life of Torah and being examples to those who we meet, whether family, close friends, or with anybody we happen to communicate.

May Hashem grant us the ultimate Sholom by bringing Moshiach speedily in our days, as the Prophet Jeremiah says at the end of Eichah - הַיָּמִים which is read on Tisha B'Av, "Renew Our Days as Of Old" (Lamentations 5, 21).

A Chassidic Perspective on Gossip - Loshon Hora

by Rabbi Shmuel Shanowitz

Common Interpersonal Struggles

Have you ever been hurt or betrayed by a friend or a relative? We all have! How does one deal with those negative feelings that begin to develop? At times, we become enraged. Other times, our responses are more subtle and though we pretend to forgive, we bear a grudge. Sometimes, we may feel the need to share the experience with others, either to vent, or to get even with our adversary through gossip.

Have you falsely been accused or mistreated? What strategies or actions may one consider to combat this injustice and to right the wrong?

From a Halachik and moral perspective, we should confront and discuss our concerns directly with our adversary (Rambam Hilchos De'os 6:6, Shulchan Aruch Harav O"C 157:6). This requires integrity and can be difficult. A much easier path of dealing with our hurt, is to share our story with a safer listener or in a more friendly environment, where we are less likely to be questioned or challenged. Hence, in modern times, people may post negative experiences on Facebook or other media platforms.

Following a public negative media post or the sharing of hurtful information, even privately, we may experience thoughts of regret. What have we accomplished? Or what happens if the one I spoke about finds out about the information I shared or posted? Have I further deepened our conflict? Have I risked prolonging this disturbing quarrel?

Beginning with the Sources

The evils of gossip are well addressed in Talmudic and Halachik sources and are considered a severe breach in the devotion of a faithful Jew.

The most notable works on this topic are those of Rabbi Yisroel Meir Hakohen Kagen (1839 - 1933) in his books, *Chafetz Chaim* and *Shemiras Haloshon*.

Have you wondered what Chassidus has to say about Loshon Hora, gossip, or as it is referred to by many, *Shemiras Halashon*, guarding our speech?

As an introduction, Chassidus sheds light on the esoteric and deeper meaning of the laws of Torah. When one studies Chassidus, one acquires a deeper appreciation for the study of Torah and the practice of its commandments.

Chassidus is also about going beyond the letter of the law. In the Talmud, a Chassid is described as one who acts *Lifnim mishuras hadin* - beyond that which is required by the law.

So too, regarding *Lashon Hora*, the expectation from the perspective of Chassidus is far deeper and more demanding than just what is required according to Halacha.

In this essay, we will study and learn to appreciate a Chassidic approach to the power of speech and to the struggle many may face in dealing with gossip or conflict.

Is There Anything Negative to Talk about?

We will begin with the highest aspiration found in Chassidic thought and then move to a more basic level as we explore this topic.

As we know, in medicine, we try to root out the cause of an illness, rather than just treat the symptoms. Those who are aller-

gic to peanuts are advised not to eat peanuts, rather than to apply creams or take antihistamines after the fact.

Similarly, our primary aim is not to provide a set of rules about what we may or may not say, but rather to reach a level where such rules are not necessary.

Not Seeing Flaws in Our Fellow

When one studies Tanya chapters 30 - 32, one quickly notices its attitude towards negative talk. These chapters are dedicated to recognizing where one stands in comparison to others. Once we realize that we are all part of the same soul and literally different parts of the same entity, our attitudes change, and just as we do not see our own faults, we will not notice the faults of our friends.

This is much easier said than done, so let us expand on this topic.

In Tanya chapter 32, two questions are addressed. First, how is it possible to “Love your neighbor as yourself,” known as Ahavas Yisroel (Leviticus 19:18), when we are naturally much more closely attached to our own physical bodies and needs than to those of our friends? In addition, how can the commandment to “Love your fellow as yourself” be the essential point of the entire Torah, as stated by our famed sage, Hillel (Talmud Shabbat 31a)? What connection is there between loving your fellow neighbor and eating Matzah, shaking a Lulav or keeping Shabbos?

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745 - 1812), author of Tanya, explains that the key to loving our fellow as ourselves is placing our focus on our soul rather than our body. When we compare souls, we are like siblings. We are equally children of our one Father in heaven. Being part of one family makes our love towards one another perfectly natural and instinctive, as if part of one entity.

On the other hand, when our focus is on our physical body, di-

visiveness is inevitable, as we instinctively look out only for our own physical needs. Even when giving to others, there may be a selfish and self-serving motive. Similarly, the key and purpose of all commandments is to bring significance and growth to our soul where it is elevated to become one with the Almighty. In essence, true Ahavas Yisroel demonstrates our focus on soul over body, which is essentially the purpose of all Mitzvos.

In this light, rather than focus on what to say or what not to say about a friend or foe, we should not even be capable of noticing a fault in another, just as we would not notice a fault of our own. When our physical body is at the center, we will overlook our own faults. When our soul is the focus, we will overlook our friend's flaws and there will be nothing negative to talk about.

How Is This Possible?

How is such a seemingly elevated level possible? Can an average person relate to it? Chapter 30 of Tanya explains in detail how one can honestly find excuses for negative behaviors of a friend, due to their unique circumstances, temptations or upbringing etc., whereas for oneself, it is clear that a better choice could have been made with greater determination.

When it comes to our own flaws, we tend to easily brush them away and find all sorts of creative justifications. All we need to do is apply this same practice to our friend. When we recognize that we all share the same soul and are truly one with our people, justification can be just as easy in relation to others as to ourselves. In truth, as stated earlier, the only one for whom a justification may be questionable is ourselves, as we know deep in our hearts that we could have made a better choice despite our challenges.

Are we ready to shift our focus from guarding our speech to guarding our perspective on others? Once we know what to strive

for and what is the true ideal, we can set for ourselves new goals and hopefully achieve them in full!

In summary, Chabad Chassidus focuses on the root causes of Lashon Hora, stopping it at its earliest stages.

Seeing a Flaw or is it a Call to Action?

What If, despite the above expectation, we do notice flaws in our friend, such as cheating, stealing or lacking in the performance of a Mitzvah? Do we pretend we did not notice? Aren't we supposed to correct them? How can one correct a friend when one is at a level where he does not notice his friend's flaws?

Let us preface by introducing an interesting Talmudic discussion about being careful with our choice of words. The Talmud (Pesachim 3a) states that one should never use unrefined language, as the Torah added eight extra letters when describing the non-kosher animals Noah brought into the ark. Rather than stating "Bring two of each Tameh - unclean animal - into the ark," the Torah says, "bring two of every animal that is not pure - asher einena tehora" (Genesis 7:8). This Talmudic passage seems very puzzling, as the Torah uses the word "Tameh" repeatedly in the book of Leviticus when describing various people or animals in an unclean state. How can this be understood?

The Rebbe explains (Lekutei Sichos Vol. 10 p.26) that there is a distinct difference between the two. When the Torah discusses law, or when a Jew teaches law, there is no mincing words or speaking indirectly. We must be clear and straightforward. That is the case in the Book of Leviticus. On the other hand, when merely relating a story, we have the option, and therefore should be using more refined words. The Rebbe takes this one step further and says that the use of direct and unrefined talk when teaching Jewish law is not seen as the better of two evils, but rather, in the context of law, such talk is considered proper talk. We see here how the

exact same word is considered appropriate in one context, yet inappropriate in another.

Similarly, when the children of Noah found him to be drunk and naked after the Mabul – the Great flood - the Torah (Genesis 9:23) describes how the two sons, Shem and Yafes “walked backwards with their faces turned around and they did not see the nakedness of their father.” This sounds redundant. If their faces were turned, they obviously did not see their father’s nakedness, so why point this out?

We shall answer this question, but first let us consider; when seeing a negative trait in another person, there are two possible reactions. One would be to notice the flaw and see it in its negativity. A more ideal reaction would be to see it not as negatively, but positively, as a call to action or a need to correct or perfect a situation.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of the Chasidic movement, says (Me’or Einayim, beginning of Parshas Chukas, written by a student of the Besh”t, Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl 1730-1797) that when one sees a flaw in another, it is like looking in the mirror and seeing merely a reflection of one’s own flaw. But why? Is it not possible that our friend really has a flaw or has indeed sinned?

Here again, we can notice a person with a flaw and be resentful, or our compassion may be aroused, and we will notice an area which needs correction without passing judgment on our friend.

This might be compared to how one views a vacant run-down home for sale in a poor neighborhood. The home can be seen as an unsafe place one would never choose to live in or, to the eye of an investor, an opportunity to repair and get a good return through rent or flipping. The Besh”t is teaching that if we notice a flaw in another as a fault rather than a call for action, it must be a heav-

only sign for us to correct our own behavior in this area. There is nothing in this world that is coincidental.

When the Torah states that the two sons of Noah, Shem and Yafes, did not see the nakedness of their father after already saying that they turned their faces, it can be understood as saying that they did not see a flaw, but a call to action. Thus, it is not a redundant statement. Here again, the exact same incident can be seen by one as something negative, yet by another as a positive call for action.

Thinking Lashon Hora

What if I am noticing faults in others and sometimes feel resentment? Is it ok to just think Lashon Hora? Speaking Lashon Hora is obviously forbidden, but what about thinking badly about someone else?

Chassidic thought places great emphasis on not even thinking about the negative of a fellow. Furthermore, from a Chassidic perspective, it is even worse to think Lashon Hora than to speak it. How so?

The importance of thought

To understand what is so wrong with thinking negatively about another, let us preface what Chassidus has to say about the importance of a person's thoughts.

Because a person's thoughts are spiritual, they are deeply connected to the soul. Even more than speech, which is more physical, thus further from the soul.

For this reason, good thoughts leave a deeper impression on oneself than good speech, and conversely, evil thoughts leave a deeper impression than evil speech. Another expression of the connection between the soul and thought is that both are con-

tinuous, whereas with regards to speech, “There is a time to keep silent and a time to speak” (Kohelet 3,7).

According to this reasoning, it is understood why it is worse spiritually to think Lashon Hora than to speak Lashon Hora, since it negatively affects a deeper part of the soul.

In the words of The Alter Rebbe in Tanya Igeres Hakodesh chapter 22:

“Therefore, my beloved and dear ones, I beg again and again that each of you exert himself with all his heart and soul to firmly implant in his heart a love for his fellow Jew, and, in the words of Scripture, “Let none of you consider in your heart what is evil for his fellow” (Zechariah 8,17).

Moreover, [such a consideration] should never arise in one’s heart [in the first place]; and if it does arise, one should push it away from his heart “as smoke is driven away,” (Psalm 68,3) as if it were an actual idolatrous thought.

For to speak evil [of another] is as grave as idolatry and incest and bloodshed.

And if this be so with speech, then surely thinking evil about another is even worse,

for all the wise of heart are aware of the greater impact [on the soul] of thought over speech, whether for the good or for the better.”

The idea of not thinking badly about others is also discussed at the end of chapter 12 in Tanya. It addresses how the Beinoni (a person with a degree of religious devotion attainable by everyone, and a level each of us should strive for - Tanya, beginning of chapter 14) stops a negative desire as soon as it enters the mind: “He immediately thrusts the thoughts aside with both hands and averts his mind from it the instant he realizes that it is an evil thought.”

Tanya continues, “So, too, in matters between man and his fellow man, as soon as there rises from his heart to his mind any animosity or hatred, G-d forbid, or jealousy, anger, or a grudge and the like, he will bar them from his mind and will.”

To summarize, according to Chassidic teachings, great emphasis is placed on not even thinking negatively of others. In a way, it is worse than speaking Loshon hora.

What is so bad about speaking Lashon Hora?

We will now move on to the more basic understanding of Lashon Hora - Negative speech. Chassidus will shed light and show depth to this Mitzvah on the simple level as well.

The simple reason is that speaking badly about someone else is harmful. As the Gemara (Eruchin 15b) states that when someone speaks negatively, they harm three: the one who is talking, the one who is listening and the one who is being spoken about.

This appears to be puzzling. It is understood that the one who spoke and the one who listened clearly acted inappropriately, but why would the one who was spoken about be punished for the gossip of others?

The power of speech

To answer this question, we must preface the Chassidic view on the power of speech:

Chassidic thought explains the extraordinary power of speech. When used properly, it can bring out the best in others, but when used in a negative way, it can bring hidden negative forces into the open. This is how the Rebbe (Lekutei Sichos Vol 27 p. 160-165) explains a passage in Maimonides (Rambam Hilchos De'os Chapter 6) describing the Mitzvah of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” The Rambam writes “It is a Mitzvah to love every single Jew like

oneself... therefore he must tell his praise and care for his possessions..." Implied here is that praising someone has the same material benefit as does protecting his possessions.

There is a well-known story about a member of the community of the Baal Shem Tov who, in a rage, was heard saying that had he had the power, he would have ripped his foe like a fish. The Besht had his students rest their arms on each other and then placed his own hands on the students closest to him, creating a full circle. At that point, a shocking vision of what was happening in the upper worlds was observed. The outraged man was seen actually ripping the other into pieces like a fish (Hayom Yom, 29 Tishrei).

This answers our question raised earlier. The mere speaking bad about someone is harmful since it brings to the surface that which would have otherwise been concealed. So long as we have not spoken of the flaws of the third person, his negative actions will not be a matter of focus in heaven. But when they have been exposed and brought into this material world with words, they can much more easily be noted.

To summarize: the problem with Lashon Hora is not just that it may bring harm in the future. Rather the speaking itself is harmful, since it brings forth negative qualities of another which would have otherwise been concealed.

It is worthy to mention that on the most basic level of Shmiras Halashon, The Alter Rebbe encourages a person to be extremely careful with his words and to avoid saying anything that can possibly offend someone else, even in the slightest way.

In Tanya chapter 30, when describing the soul-reckoning one ought to do in order not to be judgmental towards others, it states "For example, he may find that he does not summon up the strength to stop in the middle of a pleasant gossip or in the middle of relating a tale discrediting his fellow, as he ought to do even if

it is a very slight slur, and even if it be true, and even though his purpose in relating it is to exonerate himself.

As is known from what Rabbi Shimon said to his father Rabbeinu Hakadosh (concerning a problematic bill of divorce that was improperly written) “I did not write it, Yehudah the tailor wrote it,” where the slur was a minor one, and the purpose was self-vindication and yet, his father replied: “Keep away from slander.” (Bava Batra, 164b)

In summary: The perspective of Chassidus regarding Lashon Hora - negative speech - is:

A) Ultimately, we should be focusing on the Jewish soul where we are all one, thus not seeing flaws in a fellow in the first place.

B) When one sees an apparent fault in another, it is taken as a call to action. Help your friend. Make the world a better place.

C) One who notices a flaw in a friend in a negative way should be aware of its negative impact and immediately remove it from his mind.

D) Words are powerful and should only be used to praise others. Even words not meant to slander but which indirectly imply a negative trait must be avoided.

By increasing Ahavas Yisroel and avoiding Lashon Hora in our thoughts and speech, peace will rest amongst our people. This will create the perfect vessel for the Almighty, so He can find a comfortable dwelling in our world and hasten the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

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