

The primary subject of this week's two *Parashot* is *Tzara'at*, the affliction that our Sages identify as a punishment for speaking *Lashon Ha'ra*. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* famously observes that *Lashon Ha'ra* is equivalent to the three cardinal sins: adultery, murder, and idolatry. What makes *Lashon Ha'ra* such a serious sin?

R' Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub z"l (1932-2010; a leading Kabbalist in Bnei Brak, Israel) explains: The creation of man testifies to the common origin of all of creation, as man contains within him something from the highest realms--a spiritual soul--and something from the lowest realms--a body made from the earth. These realms intersect at man's ability to speak, the ability to express intangible, spiritual thoughts in words formed by the physical body. This is why *Onkelos* translates the verse (*Bereishit* 2:7), "He [*Hashem*] blew into his [man's] nostrils the soul of life," as: "There was in man a speaking spirit." Speech is the essence of man.

It follows, R' Weintraub continues, that a sin that involves speech strikes at man's very essence. That, in turn, calls into question the unity of the spiritual and physical worlds, which impacts our belief that *Hashem* created the world.

He continues: The Hebrew word "*Nega*" / *Tzara'at* affliction (see *Vayikra* 13:2) is an anagram of the word "*Oneg*" / pleasure. G-d created a world where man, of all creatures, has the ability to experience the *Oneg* of basking in His "light." A *Nega* comes to one whose actions--misusing the power of speech--call into doubt that greatness of man. (*B'Sod Yesharim* 5755)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. Last week, we discussed some of the reasons for the practice of "Shuckling" / swaying while praying or studying Torah. This week, we present several opinions about whether, and when, one should "Shuckle."

R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; 1530-1572; rabbi of Cracow, Poland, and author of the glosses on *Shulchan Aruch* that adapt that work for *Ashkenazim*) writes: Those who are particular [about *Mitzvot*] have a custom to sway while reading the Torah, just as the Torah was received with awe and trembling, and also while praying, because of the verse (*Tehilim* 35:10), "All my bones will say: '*Hashem*! Who is like You?!'" [i.e., one's whole body should participate in praying]. (*Orach Chaim* 48)

R' Menachem Azaryah of Fano z"l (1548-1620; Italian *Halachic* authority and a noted Kabbalist) disagrees. He writes: The verse, "All my bones will say: '*Hashem*! Who is like You?!'" is referring only to one who is praising *Hashem*. In contrast, the *Halachot* of praying--i.e., making requests from *Hashem*--are learned from Chana, mother of the prophet Shmuel, about whom we read (*Shmuel I* 1:13), "Only her lips moved."

(*She'eilot U'teshuvot Ha'RaMA Mi'Fano* No.113)

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) summarizes: Some *Halachic* authorities maintain that one should not sway during *Shemoneh Esrei*; only during *Pesukei D'zimra*, *Kri'at Shema*, and while studying Torah, the custom is to sway. . . Either way is permissible, depending on each person's nature: If one concentrates when he is swaying, he should sway; if not, he should be still. The main thing is to concentrate.

In any event, keeping one's body still and swinging one's head from right to left is a mannerism of haughty people and should not be done.

(*Mishnah Berurah* 48:5)

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“This shall be the law of the *Metzora* on the day of his purification-- He shall be brought to the *Kohen*.” (14:2)

R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l (1814-1891; rabbi in Margareten, Hungary and Kolomea, Galicia) writes: This *Pasuk* can be a source of encouragement to one who, G-d forbid, became caught in the *Yetzer Ha'ra*'s trap and, when he wants to repent, is told by the *Yetzer Ha'ra* that there is no hope for him and repentance will not help him. Our verse says: “This is the law of the *Metzora*”--i.e., the “*Motzi Shem Ra*” / one who committed the very serious sin of *Lashon Ha'ra*. Nevertheless, “On the day of his purification”--when he repents, “He shall be brought to the *Kohen*”--he shall come before *Hashem*, who our Sages refer to as a “*Kohen*.” Even the worst sinner can come close to *Hashem* when he repents sincerely. (Kavanat Ha'lev)

A related thought:

The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 15a) relates that a *Tanna* / Sage of the *Mishnah* named Elisha ben Avuyah became a heretic. Because of this, he is referred to in the *Talmud* as “*Acher*” / “The other one.” One day, he heard a *Bat Kol* / Heavenly voice proclaim, “Return wayward sons, except for *Acher*.” Hearing that, he said, “I may as well stray further.”

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira z"l (*Chassidic Rebbe* known as the “*Bnei Yissaschar*”; died 1841) writes in the name of R' Yaakov Yitzchak z"l (*Chassidic Rebbe* known as the “*Chozeh* of Lublin”; 1745-1815): Instead, *Acher*'s reaction should have been, “If so, then now I can serve G-d more completely, with no expectation of reward, solely in order to please my Creator.” Had he done that, he would indeed have been forgiven.

(Agra D'Pirka No.1)



“When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a *Tzara'at* affliction upon a house in the land of your possession.” (14:34)

Why is this law introduced with a reminder that *Hashem* is giving us the land of Canaan?

R' Avraham Azulai z"l (1570-1644; Morocco and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains in the name of R' Suleiman Ohana z"l (Morocco and *Eretz Yisrael*; died 1618): The Torah is warning us not to be stingy. Do not say, “What is mine is mine!” The land where your house stands was not always yours; it belonged to the Canaanites, and I (*Hashem*) gave it to you as a gift. You, too, should be generous with your fellows and perform acts of kindness for them. If you do not, I will bring *Tzara'at* upon your house.

(Ba'alei Brit Avraham)

“On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” (12:3)

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 132a) teaches: “On the eighth day’ -- even if it falls on *Shabbat*.”

R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; known as the “*Ohr Ha'Chaim Hakadosh*”) asks: Why was this detail not included in *Parashat Lech Lecha*, with the other laws of *Brit Milah* that were taught to Avraham Avinu?

He answers: Had this law been taught to Avraham Avinu, we might think that he was permitted to circumcise on *Shabbat* because he was never commanded to observe *Shabbat*. However (we would erroneously think), we, who have been commanded to observe *Shabbat*, would not be permitted to perform a *Brit Milah* on *Shabbat*.

Alternatively, there was no need for Avraham to be told that a *Brit Milah* may be performed on *Shabbat*, as that would have been obvious to him. Our Sages teach that Avraham practiced all of the *Mitzvot* without being commanded to do so; thus, he also observed *Shabbat*. Nevertheless, it is obvious that a *Mitzvah* that Avraham was expressly commanded to perform--*Brit Milah*--would trump a *Mitzvah* that he was not commanded to perform and was observing voluntarily--i.e., *Shabbat*. Only we, who have been commanded to observe *Shabbat*, need to be told that a *Brit Milah* may be performed even on that day. (Ohr Ha'Chaim)



“If *Adam* / a person will have on the skin of his flesh a swelling, a rash, or spots, and it will become a *Tzara'at* affliction on the skin of his flesh; he shall be brought to Aharon the *Kohen*, or to one of his sons the *Kohanim*.” (13:2)

R' Mordechai HaKohen z"l (1523-1598; Tzefat, *Eretz Yisrael*; later, rabbi of Aleppo, Syria) writes, based on the *Zohar*: The Hebrew language includes a number of different words for “person”: *Ish*, *Gever*, *Enosh*, etc. Why did the Torah choose “*Adam*” here?

He answers: “*Adam*” represents man at his greatest, as we read (*Bereishit* 1:26), “*Elokim* said, ‘Let us make *Adam* in Our image, in Our likeness.’ So *Elokim* created *Adam* in His image, in the image of *Elokim* He created him.” The Torah is teaching us: Man at his greatest--*Adam*--was imbued with the ability to defeat his *Yetzer Ha'ra*. If, instead, man sins and is punished with *Tzara'at*, the subject of our *Parashah*, he should be reminded of the lofty level--*Adam*--from which he fell. (Sifte Kohen)