



Parashat  
Tazriah/Metzorah



English version

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## THE ART OF OVERCOMING THE BEAST WITHIN

It has been said, that when you pray, you are talking to G-d, and when you learn Torah, G-d is talking to you. I would like to add to that. When you are praying, you are contemplating how great G-d is. But when you are learning Torah, you are contemplating how great YOU can become. How G-dly, how holy, how connected to G-d and to the truth of His word you can be.

Darwinians have an agenda in tracking humans to apes, and gentiles are busy with animal “rights”, as if the more we compare ourselves to animals, the less responsible we are for our animalistic natures; it’s a disclaimer, of sorts. The Torah tells you that you can be an animal, if you choose. But G-d directs us to become G-dly, and expects that from us.

This is the whole concept of Sefirat Ha’omer: disconnecting from the animal side of the human, soaring with the soul. This is why we bring the Korban Omer at the outset of the counting, a korban of barley, of animal food. The only other barley korban is that of the Sotah, who acted upon her animalistic nature. (See Sotah 14a) We count 49 days, and then, on Shavuot, we bring the Korban of Two Breads, a wheat Korban, human food. This is because, through Tikkun Hamiddot, the character improvement we learn in Massechet Avot during Sefirat Haomer, we are disconnecting from our animalistic side, so that we can ready ourselves to accept the Torah and be G-dly. Each day of the Omer we count upwards, from 1 - 49 and not downward out of anticipation for the Torah from 49-1, because each day we are moving *away*

from the animalistic part of ourselves, בה מה, “what is in it for me”, to אדם, which is from the root of אדמה, *Adameh*, I will be like Him.

We can live our whole life focusing on ourselves, on our passions and pleasures, on our instincts, the essence of an animal, focusing only on what is in it for me, ignoring others, ignoring G-d, even ignoring the soul. Or, we can concentrate on the purpose we were actually created for, to have a relationship with G-d, to be connected to Him, through prayer and through Torah learning, and to be like Him. וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה אֹתָם : *This is my G-d and I can be like Him.* (Shabbat 133b)

All sin is the result of not controlling the animal component in our personality. G-d wants us to fight this and beware of our instincts, הוּוּ זְהִירִים בְּרִשׁוֹת Beware of indulging in things that are permitted, because when a person allows indulgence, that brings him to sin, every time, and the source for life’s problems. Indulgence brings upon us Amalek and is the power of עמלק – to get us to forget what his acronym stands for: ק'דש ע'צמך במ'ותר ל'ך. Being G-dly means to sanctify ourselves even in what is allowed. When the Jews indulged in the party of Achashverosh, בָּהֵנוּ בַסְעוּדוֹת, the indulgence is what brought upon themselves Haman, the power of Amalek.

When King David says that he will give you advice how to live, this is what he says, אֲשַׁקְלֶדְךָ וְאֹרְךָ בְּדָרְדָרֵינוּ מִלֵּךְ אֵיֶעֱצָה עָלֶיךָ עֵינִי: אֶל־תִּהְיֶהוּ כָסוּס כְּפָרֶה אֲיִן הָבִין “Don’t be like a horse, like a mule, with no knowledge!” The best advice you can get is: stay



away from the animalistic component of your nature!? King David goes on to explain what he means. Animals don't understand that some painful things in life are for the best. Animals won't let you get close to them, even if you want to help them, if the help you give them pains them. Humans can understand that things that don't seem to be for our good are, actually, the best thing possible for us.

This takes us back to the creation of Man. Psychology's claim that man's nature includes an "animal" component, is true. After all, man is created *עפר מן האדמה* dirt from the earth. But, we know that G-d created Man with a Neshama: *וַיִּפַּח אֱלֹהִים אֶת רוּחַ חַיָּה בְּאָדָם וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגַפְשׁ חַיָּה*. G-d breathed into Man, a "breath" from Himself, G-d blew from Himself into Man. Man has a combination in him of Heaven and Earth, and if he becomes G-dly, he can rise to the level of angels, and even higher. *וַיִּתְּתֵי לָהֶם מִהַלְלִים בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה* (Zecharia 3;7) But if Man does not rise to the Heavenly challenge and becomes haughty from obtaining possessions and unbridled passions, G-d tells him to humble himself, recognizing that even the creation of the mosquito was before that of Man. (Sanhedrin 38a)

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the Rashi at the outset of Parashat Tazriah, the parasha that begins discussing the laws of purity and impurity of humans, immediately after discussing in Parashat Shemini the laws of impurity of animals. We understand this comment in a new light. An animal is always stationary. It is either a pure animal, if it has split hooves and chews its cud, or it is impure. It is a kosher fish if it has fins and scales, or it is rendered unkosher if it does not. But humans are dynamic: they can be impure or pure, depending upon circumstance and upon their behavior. A lifeless human body is the most impure of all impurities, even more impure than the most

impure animal. Why? Man was created last of all creations, and is called *אדם*, that he comes from the *אדמה*, from the ground, because it has influence of all the animals in it, as all the animals are from the ground. *נַעֲשֵׂה אָדָם*, "Let us create Man", according to the Zohar, means that all the creatures infused a part of themselves into the creation of Man. This is why a dead body is the greatest impurity on earth, because a body contains a part of all the animals in it.

It is true. Animals are linked to Apes, but in the opposite direction. The reason we recite the blessing *מְשַׁנֵּה הַבְּרִיּוֹת*, *Who changed the creatures*, when we see a monkey and an elephant (Berachot 58b) is because the monkeys and elephants came from Man, when G-d punished the builders of the Babylonian Tower. This is why monkeys and elephants are the only creatures, other than humans, that recognize themselves in the mirror. There are other similarities between monkey and elephants and humans. (Monkeys address inequality: if one monkey is rewarded less, they all go on strike. Only elephants grieve their dead: when elephants pass remains of its kind, they stop to give it attention, smelling and touching, and repeatedly passing by the corpse.) Because they were once humans, who became animals. (See Sanhedrin 109a)

Psychologists are wrong when they claim that a person is incapable of change, and he is a victim to his nature. Because they relate only to the animalistic component of the human being. Sefirat Haomer is a special time of the year: the Kadmonim teach that the way one behaves in these days can impact his behavior, for the entire year. By working to improve our middot during this period, we can refine our character – elevating even the "animal" component that we all have.

Selfie steps to overcome the beast within:

1. Positivity. Like King David taught above, to be positive, optimistic, even when things look bleak. Optimism is not just a self-help trick. It is the real truth. The animalistic part of you is responsible for the fight or flight reflex, and this is the root of pessimism, to protect you from a future



His wife then asked him, What if there are two hairs in one root?

Confidently, the Kohen answered his wife. “No such thing! Each hair has its own root, and no two hairs are sustained from the same root. If one hair would take from the root of another hair, a person would lose his eyesight! (see Niddah 52b)”

The woman then said to her husband, “Listen to your own words! If G-d created a source of sustenance for every hair, He has certainly created sustenance for all of *your* hairs, and all your children’s hairs. And if G-d is responsible for sustaining your hair, is He not responsible for sustaining *you, yourself*? Why do you need to leave Eretz Yisrael to find your “financial root”? Why worry about tomorrow’s bread? G-d supports even lice eggs; won’t He support you?

This is what is meant in the words of Ben Azzai : A person does not touch what is prepared for his friend, even a hairsbreadth. (Yoma 38a,b) Why does Ben Azzai use a hairsbreadth as the measure? The Midrash’s story is the answer. Because every hair has its root. And every person has his root, his source. No one can ever take anything from you. Why worry about your competition?

This is a huge lesson and in so many life areas. Parnassah. Shidduchim. Jealousy. Serenity. No one can take anything from you. The reason why a person speaks Lashon Hara is because he views his friend as a threat, invading his territory. When he shaves his head bald, he reveals that although before his haircut, it looked as if the hairs were fighting over the same root, after the haircut, it becomes clear that G-d created a root for each hair.

How does one get this “no competition/ no threat/ no stepping on my toes” mindset engrained in his bones, have it flowing through his veins and encompassing his whole existence? The answer is hidden in the words of Ben Azzai prior to the lesson earlier. ומשלך יתנו לך *And from what is yours, they gave you.* What do these words mean?

Rashi explains. כלומר: לא משלהם הוא מתנה, אלא מזונות, קצובים לך מן השמים. All that you get, your paycheck, your allowance, your food in yeshiva or seminary, etc., is not a present from your boss, your parents, or school office. They were just G-d’s messengers. The food you eat was already set aside for you by Heaven. When you realize this, competition ceases to be reality. It is just a mirage.

In his Bitachon Boot Camp, R Efraim Stauber uses this awesome power tool he coined “Give it back!” The Talmud teaches that one who has pleasure from this world without thanking G-d for it is like a thief. (Berachot 35a) In a meditative way, give back to G-d what you stole from Him, or what you benefited from without praying for it or blessing G-d for it. Now, imagine how it would be without what you thought you were entitled to. Like your ability to breathe. The people you love. The house you live in. The money you have. (Even Bill Gates thought about this! He said what he would do if he would lose all of his money, \$76 billion!) Then pray to G-d, beg for what you thought you were entitled to. When we undo our entitlement thinking, gratitude starts to fill our being, and the Neshama begins to soar.

The Evil Inclination’s way of convincing us of entitlement is through the lie of whatever you had until now, you are entitled to. How does one remain spiritually grounded and focused, continuously grateful and appreciative to G-d without feelings of entitlement?

Recognizing that the present is not bound to the past, and that anything can change at any moment, is the key to tapping into focused prayer. In the second blessing of the Amidah, Mechayeh Metim, resurrection of the dead is mentioned no less than 5 times. Why the repetition? In his Olam HaTefillot, R’ E. Munk explains that these five correspond the 5 senses. Every day, three times a day, we give back our eyesight to G-d, our hearing to G-d, our speech to G-d, our taste and touch, and we ask G-d to revive the dead. Why do we believe that we are entitled to these gifts? That is ridiculous! Why do we trust G-d that if we have had our senses and our

life until now, we will always have them? How silly!!!

If we do this exercise enough, we can begin to truly trust G-d, even when the going gets rough. This is

why we mention, specifically, in this blessing, our trust in G-d, ונאמן אתה, and מקיים אמונתו..., because giving back what you did not pray for is where all Bitachon begins.

## THE ART OF THIRD PERSON PERSPECTIVE

In the ability to adapt to changes and bounce back from challenges, there are two lessons from this week's Parashiot. One from Parashat Tazriah- the art of self-reflection. The other from Parashat Metzorah- the art of hope and reframing luck. The two skills work together to elevate one from a state of anxiety to a state of enthusiasm. When studying life coaching, I realized the following truism. In every sport, and in the game of life itself, those that survive are not the most intelligent, the strongest, or the fastest, but the ones who are most responsive to change. The skill of every game is adapting to the new normal, new competition, or the everchanging circumstances and not getting stuck on habitual thinking. When we perceive life as a "game," there are so many insights we get.

Let's take the sport of basketball as an example. One of the interesting things about basketball is that there are two ways to play defense. One-on-one. And zone. When does the basketball coach decide which way to set up his players in defense, one-on-one, or zone? It all depends on the offense. If the offense has a strong inside game, the defense is better playing "zone." When the offense has a better outside game, the defense is best by playing man on man.

How do the players who are in the game pay attention to these changes and adapt accordingly? It is hard to notice the changes in the competition while you are in the game. That is why you need a basketball coach, sports coach, or a life coach, to be your thinking partner who stands on the sidelines while you are in the heat of the game. Because when you are in the game, you have too many blind spots, too many emotions.

In life changes as well, you need to continually be aware of yourself and the changes in the environment around you. How? Humans have the ability to self-reflect, to see themselves from outside of themselves. To achieve this external, objective perspective one needs Hitbodedut, or meditation.

We learn this concept from the Metzorah. When the Kohen classifies the Gossiper that he is a carrier of the spiritual Tzaraat, he must go about Social distancing, letting others know he is impure and to distance from him. וְתָמְאָוּ וְקָרְאָוּ The Shlah teaches that this is the Metzorah's punishment for referring to others as "impure" and speaking badly about them. This is because of the Talmudic rule in psychology, that the faults you see in others, is something that you yourself have to work on. כל הַפּוֹסֵל בְּמוֹמוֹ פּוֹסֵל (Kiddushin 70b) If someone frequently calls others a "Mamzer," illegitimate child, we check to see if he is a Mamzer himself. (Rambam I. Biah 19;17)

*The honest to goodness town's milkman was once summoned to court by the town baker. The baker would buy dairy products each morning from the milkman, and one morning noticed that the kilo of butter weighed less than a kilo. The baker started weighing the kilo of the milkman each day, seeing that the kilo of butter was always just short of a kilo. He brought this to the town's court, "I can't keep silent, knowing that he is stealing from the whole town!"*

*The judge opened the case, saying to the milkman. "I assume that you have a precise scale in your dairy factory." The milkman replied, "Yes, sir. I have a scale, the old type, where I weigh against*



*weights. I don't have money for the kilo weight, though. Each morning, I use the kilo loaf of the baker on my scale as my kilo weight. If my kilo butter is less than a kilo, it is because the baker's kilo of bread is less than a kilo. The judge clarified the matter, and nonetheless, it was the baker who was unintentionally not measuring his kilo, before selling it to others.*

R Yisrael Salanter would say that the reason why the Gossiper needs to exit the three camps and live with social distancing, is because people don't see their flaws on themselves. They only see their flaws in others. We are all bakers blind to our shortcomings and negative beliefs. By social distancing, one can see himself from outside himself, in third-person view, and notice his faults so that he can fix them instead of projecting them on others.

The way to detach from our blind spots and negative emotions is through Self Distancing. Adapters to change know that they need to practice the Self Distancing strategy frequently, assuming a third-person perspective to psychologically remove themselves from the events that happen to them. They need to see circumstances, markets, and environments that are changing so fast, from the perspective of an observer or from the vantage point of a "fly on the wall", to be able to recommend themselves what to do.

There is another lesson from this week's Parasha that can help in bouncing back and adapting to change. To always ask yourself the question, "How could this seemingly bad luck be good luck?" Not getting stuck on past emotions of fear, frustration, or failure, but by looking at the new normal, as a new world.

When one has Tzaraat on the walls of his house, he must break the stones, cement and wood, and deport everything to an impure place on the outskirts of the city. Rashi mentions that when the Jews of the times of Tzaraat would break their walls, they would find gold and treasures, hidden by the fearful inhabitants of the Land of Canaan during the forty years the Jews wandered in the

desert. But why did G-d bless the Metzorah with treasures in his wall in such a way? Why through the difficulty of Tzaraat?

G-d is teaching us all a lesson, that good luck or bad luck is dependent on perspective. When a person is going through a rough time, times of punishment and pain, he should believe that good things hide in bad times, and look for it, because treasures always hide somewhere in the mess.

The reason why one speaks Lashon Hara is something called by psychologists as "splitting", or all or nothing thinking, or black and white thinking, when one can only see the bad in the bad traits in others and not the good in the bad traits of others. But there is very little black and white in people, in things or in life events. Lucky or unlucky events can be seen as isolated, black or white events, or they can be perceived as part of a bigger circle of life. As FDR once said, *I think we consider too much the luck of the early bird and not enough the bad luck of the early worm.* People and their traits are not black and white; even seemingly negative traits have a time and a place. G-d wants us to retrain our thinking and find treasures in the negative circumstance and environments we are in. To constantly ask ourselves the question, "How can this seemingly bad thing have good hidden in it?" After all, you never know what worse luck your bad luck has saved you from.

It is hard to find the treasures in the game of life when we are in F3 mode (Fear, Frustration, Failure). An interesting story happened in my house this year, the first year I hid the Afikoman. Seventy shekalim for the finder, and I hid it inside the zipper on the bottom of the couch pillow. Ten minutes in, my oldest daughter stepped up on the couch to get a higher view of the room, and CRUNCH! She looked at me, not knowing what that was, and then she quickly unzipped the pillow and claimed her prize. All others were crying, wanting another chance. OK. Round two. Sixty shekalim for the finder, and I hid the crunched Afikoman in the fridge. Kids asked for hints, maybe if I can play with them "hot/cold." I agreed



to give hints, so I said “Cold” as if I was shivering. They thought I was telling them that they were far from the Afikoman, and every hint, saying “Cold,” as if I was shivering, they kept running around in circles in the house, until they cried out of frustration and despair. Only when my ten-year-old reached a game over mindset, he said, “Oh, the fridge!” and went running to pull it out! Only when he was able to step back from the situation and rethink the hint I kept repeating from a “Game Over” perspective, did he pick up on it.

Here are the Selfie Steps for Self Reflection and becoming a lucky person when faced with challenge and change:

1. When angry or upset at someone, self reflect. Ask yourself how and where you yourself need improvement in this area.
2. Meet with your destiny. Picture an extraordinary version of yourself in a

### THE GOSSIP EXTINGUISHER

Usually, people gossip, not because they want to cause harm to other people, but because they need a topic of conversation. Nothing is juicier than gossip. Listening to gossip has the same severity as engaging in it. People often listen because they do not know how to stop the “gossiper”. It may be considered rude to say, “That’s loshon horah”, so, out of an uncomfortable politeness, a person just sits and listens. After reading this article, you will be a pro at schmoozing, without needing to gossip. And you will know how to ward off a gossiper, before he has a chance to begin.

Leading an interesting conversation with others is a skill. Although the Hafetz Chaim was very careful about the purity of his speech, he was a great conversationalist. What did he have to talk about? Being a great conversationalist has almost nothing to do with what you say; it has much more to do with how you listen. Did you ever sit, one on one, with someone who rambled on and on about all different subjects ... Did you enjoy that conversation? I’ll bet you did not. Everyone likes being asked to express his opinion. It gives

day/week/month/year/ 5 year/10 year/20 year/Olam Haba. Date that future you, and ask him how he became so extraordinary. Now what advice is that future you advising the present you?

3. For Self Reflection exercises, Go to <https://positivepsychology.com/introspection-self-reflection/> Go to <https://blog.iqmatrix.com/self-reflection> Go to <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/reflective-practice.html>
4. Become a lucky person by doing the following: Find and create opportunities. Create self-fulfilling prophesies through positive expectations. Adopt a resilient attitude that helps to transform bad luck into good.

satisfaction to feel that you have made clever comments in your conversation. That’s one reason to be in the listening mode when approaching a conversation. By putting the other person in the spotlight, you make him feel that you consider him an interesting person to have in your life. When you show interest in what the other person has to say, he walks away from the conversation saying to himself, “That guy is so interesting to talk to.” Even though you did not say anything; you just “mirrored” interests.

So, how do you get an interesting conversation up and running? There are five topics that powerhouse a conversation with another person: 1 – his life. 2 – his opinions. 3- worldly items that interest him. 4 – peoples that interest him. 5- your life and interests. You can mix and match. Don’t speak about what interests you if it does not interest him, unless he shows you interest. The order goes in accordance with the other person’s preferences, from top to bottom. To keep the conversation flowing, you can change the order or ask the other person a “why” question out of pure curiosity on one of his



opinions. Why do you like living in Alaska. Once you ask a question, the other person starts talking, and you show them that you are listening. Concentrate on and relate to his areas of interest. Stay away from yes or no questions, or those with a one word answer. Open-ended questions draw a person's interest like a magnet. They give the person an opportunity to express himself, to open up. Those are the questions that make the person think, that stimulate and vitalize the conversation.

When a person starts to speak about someone else, mentioning things that may cause that third party emotional, physical or monetary damage, you may not be sure how to stop him. In general, people do not like to be quieted. Usually, the person will start to justify himself with all kinds of explanations. You don't want to sound "holier than thou".

## THE TRUE LIE

Our parasha discusses the leper, the Metzora. Although our Rabbis teach that the cause of leprosy is speaking לשון הרע, gossip, this is not mentioned specifically in the two parshiot that discuss the leper and his purity. Our Rabbis teach that this name "metzora" is a shortened version of the words מוֹצִיא שֵׁם רַע, one who slanders and spreads rumors about others. Generally speaking, *loshon hara* refers to saying negative truths about others. *Motzi Shem Ra*, in contrast, is spreading negative non-truths about others.

Most of the time when we say something negative about others, we are not fabricating. If so, why is the main title here *motzi shem ra* – which refers to telling a lie?

The answer lies in a Rashi in Parashat Shlach. When the spies came and spoke negatively about the Land of Canaan, Rashi comments "Any lie not preceded by a small truth will not be believed". First, the spies mentioned the truth – the power of the Land and its people, the magnificent fruit. Only after having cited praises of the Land, did they lie and say "We cannot capture the Land." Here, Rashi is quoting the Midrash almost word for word

Instead of mentioning the word gossip, just say that you always refrain from discussing a person who is not present. "I try to live by the 'golden rule', avoiding doing to someone else something that would be unpleasant for me. I don't mind continuing this conversation, but let us first get the other person on the phone".

Conversation is a great thing. It is the only way to build healthy, long lasting, two-way relationships. Probably the best tool you can develop is effective communication. Not knowing how to communicate effectively is sometimes a bigger problem than speaking gossip. This is a unique approach for refraining from speaking gossip. This article does not tell you to stop what you are doing, but to exchange it for something far more effective.

. However, the Midrash says, "Any *loshon hara* that is not preceded by a small truth will not be believed". How can we understand Rashi's change of terminology?

I believe the answer is that ultimately, *loshon hora* is *always* false, even though it conveys accurate information. If, for example, you witness someone shoplifting and relate what you have seen to a friend, probably, the friend will perceive this person as a "shoplifter". But this is often far from the truth! The would-be "shoplifter" might have given in to a sudden impulse that he now bitterly regrets. In other words, the "true" information that was passed on has created a false impression. Rashi may well be hinting at this in his substituting the word *lie* for *lashon hora*.

There are many reasons why a negative story, although it may not be fabricated, is still considered a lie or is included under the main title of *Motzi shem ra*. There are so many things that our Rabbis teach us that have a parallel in different forms of the media. G-d gives us such parables, so to speak, in our daily lives and experience so that we can better understand the messages of the



mishnayot. Our rabbis teach us that when someone speaks gossip, an angel comes and records, inscribes every single word! This may be why G-d allowed mankind to invent recording devices.

Though there are not a lot of good things we can learn from lawyers, this one is an exception. If someone would pay you 10,000 dollars to find some way to justify a theft, you might just come up with a valid-sounding argument. It may be that your point is not a hundred percent true, but you

### THE VOICELESS MAN

Just three years ago, I attended a Saturday night funeral in Jerusalem of an elderly friend *I thought* I had known. The deceased had had his vocal box removed as a medical precaution twelve years prior to his death. He could barely be understood when he talked, as he tried to whisper blessings loudly to those who knew him. People would sometimes walk away or try to end the conversation with him, not understanding what he was saying as he continued giving his blessings. He had a hole in his throat in the place where the voice box was removed, making it even more difficult to look at him while he tried to whisper his blessings as loud as he could. He asked, before his death, to be buried before midnight. This gave us time for only one quick eulogy. The one story that was told left everyone shocked and tearful for having underestimated the greatness of the deceased.

Two years after the voice box was removed, this man's family was informed by the doctors that it would be possible for him to regain his voice by undergoing an inexpensive, surgical procedure, necessitating being in the hospital for only one day

### HUMBLING THE HUMBLE

When I was coaching a boy on improving memory skills, he asked me if I could help him to remember not to get angry in situations which provoked such a reaction. I responded that when he got angry, he did not forget that doing so was against his values. When he got angry, he *did* remember, either consciously or subconsciously, that he was doing something wrong. Anger is an emotion that comes

would possibly be able to see the "thief" in a new light. This is exactly what the person who speaks negatively does, but in the reverse. He somehow manages to put the person spoken about in a bad light. He makes the one who sinned look like much more than just a person who sinned: now, he is labeled as a *sinner*, implying that with him, sin is habitual. There is no greater damage that can be done to a person than categorizing him as a habitual wrong-doer because of a negative action that he has done.

with no risk involved. The man's family believed that he would receive the offer happily. Instead, the man rejected it. He explained that now that he was obliged to speak sparingly and with great effort, and even so was understood by no one, he had not spoken loshon hora (gossip) for the last two years. Forced to remain silent while others spoke, he also realized how much people gossip, and he preferred not to be able to speak again, so as not to find himself once again in the test in which so many people fail. He lived another ten years of his life choosing not to speak, just because of his fear of speaking slander and other evil talk. He found contentment in doing the right thing. Ironically, the people at the funeral were left speechless. The few people who were at the funeral felt that if only they had known of his greatness, they would have wanted to get just one more blessing from this great man. It was already too late. Such great people do exist. We just have to open our eyes and recognize who they are and learn from them before they are gone.

as a response when one feels that his/her ego has been violated or damaged; it is an overflow of negative expression. This emotion will cause a person to exhibit uncontrollable behavior, ignoring his true principles and disapproval of getting angry. Anger, like any other emotion, is triggered by a thought, even a subconscious one. This "automatic" thought, (i.e., not necessarily



consciously validated) despite its irrationality, will often surface when the ego is challenged. The surfacing of automatic thoughts is a kind of reflex, generated by some underlying core belief. If we challenge the core belief, these thoughts will be more rational. This is what is meant in the Iggeret Haramban that the strategy for avoiding anger is always to speak calmly to whomever we meet. There is no effective strategy for stopping anger once one has already entered such an emotional state and is, by definition, out of control. The only effective way to deal with anger and correct it is by preventing its onset through altering our core beliefs about our expectations from the world around us. When training ourselves to speak in a low tone of voice, we are stabilizing our ego as well as expressing our recognition that *I am not greater than my surroundings*. Then, the ego is generally balanced enough that it is not so vulnerable to the *stepped-on* feeling. When the *All-Important-I* thoughts are not present, we can stay within our anti-anger boundaries. Memory, however, is neither the issue nor the solution.

This method is valid in dealing with gossip and slander, as well. We all *remember* that this talk is forbidden. However, in certain situations, where an automatic negative thought arises against another person, we *do* indulge in this kind of talk. This thought triggers an emotion that overcomes us, and we cannot keep the thought to ourselves. The way that we can control our emotions is by controlling our core beliefs – those which generate the automatic thoughts. We control our core beliefs by recognizing them and questioning them. And, the Torah tells us exactly what core beliefs cause a person to speak gossip or slander.

Our parsha discusses the slanderer, who has become a *metzora*, a leper. After his repentance, he had to go through a purification procedure involving a Kohen who took from the leper two kosher birds, a piece of cedar wood, a string of red wool and an ezob ( hyssop) grass. One bird was to be slaughtered over a cup of water, and the other live bird, together with the cedar and wool string, would be dipped into the cup of blood and water and sprinkled on the Metzora.

Our rabbis tell us the meaning behind the components of the ritual. The birds were to remind the slanderer that he had done a birdlike act of nonstop ‘chirping’. The piece of wood was there to remind him that the cedar, being the tallest tree, represents the core belief of arrogance in the person who is speaking gossip or slander. This is a primary cause of all gossip. The reason for involvement of the Ezob, or hyssop, is that it is the lowest of all trees. Rashi writes here that the lesson is to tell the Metzora that in order for him to be cured of his unacceptable behavior, first he had to come down from his arrogance and self pride, resembling the lowly Ezob and Tolaat (worm).

The Avnei Nezer presents a question: The Metzora, at this stage of purification, had already repented and was currently looking at himself in a more humble manner. How, then, could the Torah tell him that he had to lower his self image in order to be cured? Wasn’t he already humbled?

The Avnei Nezer answers that the humbling feeling that the Metzora feels may not be a level of absolute humbleness – it might be only temporary and external. If it results from pain or suffering that befalls him in life, this humility may disappear along with the pain and suffering when they go away. In G-d’s Mercy, this level of humbling is accepted as repentance. However, a lasting humility is not achieved until one arrives at the recognition of the Greatness of G-d and the minuteness of Man. This humbling feeling is a far greater one, as it is not dependent on circumstance. It will remain even after the pain subsides. This deeper humbleness will help the leper not to speak forbidden talk in the future, even after he passes this degrading stage of impurity and isolation. So says the Avnei Nezer.

The difference between these two types of humbling is that one is transient, while the other is lasting. Being humbled through pain and suffering is not related to how one looks at his surroundings and at other human beings. In contrast, when one looks at himself as being minute before G-d, he realizes that all human beings are minute before G-d. We are all only human, and humans make



mistakes. At his utmost core belief, the slanderer can realize that although he feels flawless in comparison to his fellow, when he compares himself to G-d, he sees that he is filled with flaws, no less than his friend. When one works on this type of humbling, he may find it easier for himself

to overcome his “habit” of speaking in a way that he himself disapproves of.

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