

# **NOT TOO FAR**

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Parashat Metzora  
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Today's Learning:

Me'ilah 6:5-6

Orach Chaim 9:4-6:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Avodah Zarah 30

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Rosh Hashanah 12

In this week's parashah (and last week's), we read that a metzora must leave the camp or city for seven (or more) days and sit alone. Chazal say that this is a punishment for the antisocial behavior of speaking lashon hara.

R' Yaakov Emden z"l (died 1776) points out the many benefits which man can attain only when he is part of society. Indeed, Chazal say, "Give me a friend or give me death," and the Torah says, "It is not good for man to be alone."

All alone, man could not obtain all of his physical needs, including proper food, drink, clothing, and shelter. A person also could not fulfill the Torah if he were alone. For example, he could not carry out the laws of property, the laws of marriage, and the laws of child-rearing.

A person who is all alone can never pray with a minyan or have his Torah questions resolved by scholars, and thus he can not properly practice a single one of the six pillars on which the world stands (as listed in Pirkei Avot): justice, truth, peace, Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. Also, how can man emulate Hashem if he is all alone? For example, just as Hashem is merciful, man must be merciful to his fellow men.

Of course, there are times for being alone, but even in those times, man should not roam too far from home. Man is even capable of achieving the concentration that comes from solitude while he is surrounded by people. (Migdal Oz: Perek Aliyat Habedidut)

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*"This is the law of the metzora . . ." (14:2)*

The Gemara (Erachin 15b) elaborates: "This is the law of the motzi shem ra /one who speaks evil of another." [The Gemara is reading the word "metzora" as an abbreviation of "motzi shem ra" in order to teach that tzara'at is a punishment for speaking lashon hara.]

The Chafetz Chaim writes that one may transgress as many as 31 of the 613 commandments with

one act of speaking lashon hara. A partial list of these includes: the prohibition on being a gossip; the commandment to avoid tzara'at; the prohibition on placing a stumbling block before another (because the one who speaks lashon hara causes others to listen to lashon hara, which also is a sin); the prohibition on forgetting G-d (because a person who speaks lashon hara thereby demonstrates haughtiness, whereas a person who remembers G-d is aware of his own faults and is never haughty); the two prohibitions on taking revenge and bearing a grudge; the prohibition on giving false testimony; the prohibition on following in Korach's footsteps (i.e., by bringing about hostility between people); and others.

(Sefer Chafetz Chaim: Introduction)

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The Mishnah (Nega'im 2:5) states: "A person sees all nega'im-- tzara'at wounds--except his own." Literally, this means that a person, even a kohen, may not be the judge of whether he himself has tzara'at. Rather, he must go to another kohen.

Figuratively, however, this statement is frequently interpreted as referring to the fact that people are rarely objective about their own faults. A person sees everyone else's faults, but not his own.

If so, asks R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva), how can a person assess where he stands? The answer is found in another Mishnah: "One does not search [for chametz] by the light of the sun and by the light of the moon, but only by the light of a candle." Kabbalists and mussar works teach that chametz represents the yetzer hara. The strong "light of the sun" represents wealth, and the weak "light of the moon" represents lack of success. Wealth is not an accurate indicator that a person has conquered his yetzer hara and therefore Hashem is happy with him, and lack of success is not an indicator of the opposite. Only the "light of a candle," an allusion to the verse, "A mitzvah is a candle" / "ki ner mitzvah," is an accurate indicator.

What does this mean? If a person wants to know where he stands in his service of Hashem, he should look at his attitude towards mitzvot. If he or she considers mitzvot to be a burden, then he or she has a long way to go. However, if a person enjoys performing mitzvot, then that person is on the right track.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David)

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## Pesach

A young man in Israel married into a family which did not have the custom of stealing the afikoman. When he had a son who was old enough to "steal" his grandfather's afikoman, the latter insisted that such behavior violated the Torah's prohibitions on theft and extortion. This dispute was then brought

before R' Chaim David Halevy z"l (Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv; died 1998), who wrote as follows:

The Gemara (Pesachim 109a) mentions a custom of "grabbing" the matzah in order to keep the children awake. As explained by Rashi and Rashbam, this does not refer to a custom that children steal the afikoman, but rather that the matzah was stolen \_from\_ the children. Why was this not prohibited as stealing? Apparently, writes R' Halevy, because it is justified as one more strange thing that we do on the seder night to highlight for the children the uniqueness of the night.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 61b) states that stealing is prohibited even if one does not desire the object of the theft, but merely intends to pain the victim. Interestingly, Rambam does not quote this law in his Code. Instead, Rambam writes that one may not steal, even in jest. Why doesn't Rambam quote the Gemara's law? Also, what is the source for Rambam's law that one may not steal in jest?

R' Halevy explains: Since we know that Rambam did not invent laws, nor did he ignore laws that were found in the Talmud, we may assume that Rambam was merely reformulating the law that one may not steal in order to pain another. Rambam's use of the phrase "in jest" must be equivalent to the Gemara's phrase "intended to cause pain." Why did Rambam change the words? Because he wanted to teach us, incidentally, that the only time that stealing in jest is prohibited is when it is intended to cause pain. However, stealing the afikoman at the seder is not intended to cause pain. Rather, it is intended only to "liven- up" the seder and interest the children.

(Aseh Lecha Rav Vol. VI, No. 35)

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R' Shimon Schwab z"l (1908-1995; rabbi of the K'hal Adath Jeshurun "Breuer's" community in New York) writes:

From my earliest youth, I remember that the children would ask each other on the first morning of Pesach, "How long did your Seder last?" This was true in my youth, and it is still the case today.

If the children were to ask me this now, I would answer them, "I made sure to eat the afikoman before chatzot [halachic midnight]." According to some poskim [halachic authorities], even the recitation of Hallel should be completed before chatzot. I must point out, R' Schwab says, that the present-day practice in which all the children read from their prepared sheets which they received in school is not exactly in accordance with the mitzvah of "v'higadeta l'vincha" / "and you shall tell to your children" (Shmot 13:8). The children have started a new "mitzvah" of "v'higadeta l'avicha u'l'imecha" / "and you shall tell to your father and mother," which makes it extremely difficult to reach the mitzvah of achilat matzah / eating the matzah - and certainly the afikoman - before chatzot.

R' Schwab continues: Rather than discourage the children from actively participating, parents should encourage their children to keep their remarks brief so that the father or other leader of the Seder

can read the text of the Haggadah and explain the miracles of Yetziat Mitzrayim / the Exodus. Children should be encouraged to say their divrei Torah during the meal if there is time or, otherwise, during the daytime meals of Yom Tov.

On the Seder night, concludes R' Schwab, it is a mitzvat asai d'Oraita / an affirmative commandment from the Torah to retell to one's children the events surrounding Yetziat Mitzrayim. If one has merited to have children or grandchildren, it is a mitzvah for the father or grandfather to hand down to them the details of the Exodus. The saying of "vertlach" / short divrei Torah is very nice, but if these are not the details of the narrative of the Exodus - or its meaning or message - they are not a part of this mitzvah. On the Seder night, the children are encouraged to ask any question relevant to Yetziat Mitzrayim, and the father has a special mitzvah d'Oraita to respond to these questions, and to tell his children about the miracles that G-d did for us.

(Rav Schwab on Prayer p. 541)

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