

# NO FREE LUNCH

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Tazria & Metzorah / Pirkei Avos

### No Free Lunch

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Today's Learning:  
Taharot 8:7-8  
O.C. 199:6-8  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chullin 92  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 7

We are now in the midst of counting the Omer. R' David Avudraham z"l (13th-14th century Spain) writes that one reason that Hashem commanded us to count the Omer is that during this period, people are busy with the harvest and are dispersed in the fields. In order that people not forget to travel to Yerushalayim for Shavuot, Hashem instructed us to keep count of the days.

Another reason for counting the Omer is that Hashem decrees the year's grain output on Pesach and its fruit output on Shavuot. (See Rosh Hashanah 16a). We count off the days between these two days of judgment to remind us to repent.

Yet another reason, R' Avudraham writes, is found in a Midrash: To what may the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt be compared? To a prince who was imprisoned in jail and who screamed for the king to release him and to give him the king's daughter as a wife. After the prince was released, he counted the days until he would marry the princess. Similarly, after Bnei Yisrael were freed from Egypt, they counted the days until they would receive the Torah. (Sefer Avudraham: Sefirat Ha'omer)

As part of our preparations for receiving the Torah, we read a chapter of Pirkei Avot every week

during this period. R' Avudraham explains (in the name of R' Yisrael ben Yisrael z"l) that since we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of our loved one -- the Torah -- we study the chapters of Pirkei Avot which encourage us to behave in the way that the loved one would expect. (Sefer Avudraham: Seder Yemei Ha'omer)

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*"This is the Torah of the tzara'at affliction . . ." (13:59)*

*"This shall be the Torah of the metzora . . ." (14:2)*

*"This is the Torah of one in whom there is a tzara'at . . ." (14:32)*

*"This is the Torah for every tzara'at affliction . . ." (14:54)*

*"This is the Torah of tzara'at." (14:57)*

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches in the Midrash Rabbah: The word "Torah" appears five times in connection with the metzora (one who is afflicted with tzara'at). The word "Metzora" alludes to "motzi shem ra" / one who speaks ill of another, and tzara'at is in fact a punishment for speaking lashon hara. The five-time repetition of "Torah" teaches that one who speaks lashon hara transgresses all five books of the Torah. Therefore, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi concludes, Moshe Rabbeinu warned the Jewish people regarding the laws of tzara'at.

What is this Midrash teaching? asks R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (rabbi of Huszt, Hungary; died 1909). Didn't Moshe warn the Jewish people against all of the Torah's transgressions, even those that are not equal to violating all five books of the Torah?

He explains: An argument could be made that the laws of tzara'at should have been addressed to the kohanim. It is the kohanim, after all, who are delegated to "diagnose" tzara'at and to accept the offerings brought by the "recovered" metzora. Why, the Midrash wonders, did Moshe address these laws to all of the Jewish people, not just to the kohanim? Indeed, why were the laws of the metzora's offerings (chapter 14) not addressed by G-d to Aharon as were the laws that precede and follow them (chapters 13 and 15)? The answer, says the Midrash, is that Moshe was to make a special point to all of the Jewish people: speaking lashon hara is equivalent to violating all five books of the Torah.

(Arugat Habosem)

Why are the laws of lashon hara so difficult to observe? R' Moshe Rosenstein z"l (mashgiach of the Lomza Yeshiva; died 1930) suggests that it is because the laws appear to many people to be illogical. After all, why is lashon hara viewed so severely? Why can't I speak negatively of another person if I am speaking the truth? [Ed. note: People commonly defend themselves when confronted with having spoken lashon hara by saying, "But it's true." The halachah makes clear that this is not a

defense. Even true statements are prohibited. Why?]

R' Rosenstein offers several explanations: First, imagine that you were hired with a group of other individuals to weed a large field. Pulling up every single weed is back-breaking work, and there is no doubt that no worker, including you, would do a perfect job. Would you criticize your fellow workers for not finishing their jobs when you have not finished yours either? Or, would you praise their incomplete jobs, knowing that you also look good if they are praised? [R' Rosenstein says that he does not need to explain the parable because its meaning is obvious. Simply put, to the extent that we overlook the faults of others, our own less than perfect characters and actions can be overlooked also. Conversely, if we focus on others' faults, then our faults will be highlighted a well.]

In addition, writes R' Rosenstein, it is impossible not to exaggerate when describing the faults of another. Thus, even if one intends to tell only the truth, he is bound to tell a lie.

Finally, one who sees a fault in another is bound to rebuke him. Thus, one who speaks about another instead of to him is neglecting the mitzvah of giving rebuke.

(Ahavat Meisharim p. 32)

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## Pirkei Avot

*"Take care regarding a 'lighter' mitzvah as you would a 'stricter' mitzvah, for you do not know the reward that is paid for mitzvot." (Chapter 2)*

R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l (1780-1849; son and successor to R' Chaim of Volozhin) asks: Why couldn't the mishnah say, "you do not know the reward for mitzvot"? What is added by, "that is paid"?

He answers with a parable. Two merchants (call them Reuven and Shimon) traveled to the market day in a distant town. Reuven had a cousin in that town (call him Levi), so the two travelers stopped-in at Levi's house instead of going to an inn. Levi was overjoyed to see his relative, Reuven, and the two of them sat down to catch up on family happenings while dinner was prepared. Shimon, having no part in this discussion, went to take a nap.

By the time dinner was ready, Shimon was sound asleep. Reuven tried to awaken his fellow traveler, but Shimon preferred to remain in bed. In exasperation, Reuven said, "How much would you pay for a dinner such as this at the inn? Here it is being offered for free!"

Explains R' Yitzchak: We read in Devarim (30:11-14), "For this commandment that I command you today -- it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, [for you] to say, 'Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Nor is it

across the sea, [for you] to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Rather, the matter is very near to you -- in your mouth and your heart -- to perform it." Rashi comments: "It is not in heaven" - for were it in heaven, it would still be your duty to go up after it and to learn it." Accordingly, says R' Yitzchak, we must appreciate the kindness that Hashem did for us by giving us the Torah. We do not realize the reward that we would have to pay for the mitzvot if G-d had not given them to us for free. This is what the mishnah is teaching.

(Mili D'Avot)

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## Letters from Our Sages

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l in 1913 to R' Yaakov David Willowsky z"l (the Ridvaz). At the time, R' Kook was Chief Rabbi of Yafo (Jaffa). Later, he would become the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael. The recipient had been rabbi of Slutsk, Poland and Chicago, and was then living in Tzefat. In the letter, R' Kook defends himself against criticisms that he is too close to the secular and even anti- religious Zionists. The letter is reprinted in Igrot Re'iyah Vol. II, No. 555.

Regarding your response to my comment that I am not degraded by the fact that sinners praise me - just as the Torah says that Avraham Avinu was blessed by all the nations of the world (Bereishit 18:18) - you said that the nations of the world surely recognized that Avraham was not one of them. Trust me! Most of those on the outside [of Torah Judaism] who love me know well that I am not, G-d forbid, like them, and that the distance from my thoughts and ways to their thoughts and ways is like the distance from east to west. They themselves say this. They have no choice but to admit openly that, thank G-d, I have my head on straight and there is no deceit in my heart. The fact is, that I am, thank G-d, filled with Ahavat Yisrael / love of all Jews. Praised is G-d who gave me such a soul; it was neither my wisdom nor my righteousness that made me like this, but rather His kindness and mercy which know no end. Thank G-d, I cause quite a stir against their impurities when necessary; however, I speak gently and in a well thought-out way, as the wise king [Shlomo] has commanded us. [Ed. note: R' Kook's son (and publisher) cites Kohelet 9:17 and Mishlei 27:5, with the commentary of the Vilna Gaon.]

There is no doubt that if your honor, the great sage, and other great sages of the generation, may they live and be well, would support me, join with me, and act as I do as much as their personalities allow, that the Name of Heaven would be sanctified and much peace and blessing would come upon the people of Israel and the Land. Many, many people would return in full repentance, and the sprouting of Israel's redemption would become obvious. The goodness and holiness that would come about as a result is indescribable. I hope that this will indeed happen eventually, that those

who fear Hashem will recognize the purity of my heart and the truth of my views, and we will all become one union to do the Will of G-d and to increase the light of G-d and His honor upon His nations and His beloved land.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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