

# IT'S NOT A PUNISHMENT!

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshios Tazria & Metzora

### It's Not a Punishment!

**By Shlomo Katz**

This week's HaMaayan has been dedicated in memory of and as a merit for Mattisyahu Carrera, by his loving parents.

BS"D

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Today's Learning:

Nach: Tehilim 5-6

Mishnah: Ohalot 10:3-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 82

Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 575:3-5

The metzora, the subject of much of this week's double-parashah, is required to remain quarantined outside of his city for at least seven days and to announce to any passers-by that he is tamei / ritually unclean. The Sefer Ha'chinuch (an anonymous 14th century work from Spain) explains:

Among the foundations of this mitzvah is that being distanced from people will make the metzora realize that sin distances a person from all that is good. This hopefully will cause him to repent. This is what our Sages meant when they said, "He distanced husband from wife and friend from friend through his lashon hara; therefore, let him be distanced from people."

The Chinuch continues: It is a major principle that a person is measured by the same measuring rod with which he measures others. However, most people misunderstand this. This does not, G-d forbid, mean that Hashem takes revenge on a person the way a mortal would. Hashem doles out

only goodness, kindness and compassion to His world. At all times, His goodness is available to whomever is fit to receive it.

Then what does it mean that Hashem judges a person measure-for-measure? It means that a person's actions, whether good or bad, determine whether he is fit to receive Hashem's goodness.

To what may this be likened? There is a smooth and straight highway with no stones in the road, but the highway is lined with thorn-bushes. If a person deviates from the proper path, he will injure himself on the thorns. We would not say that Hashem caused that person to get hurt or even desired it. So, too, Hashem does not desire or cause the sinner's punishment. Rather, the sinner causes goodness to be withheld from him, meaning that Hashem conceals Himself, so bad consequences follow.

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

The Gemara (Arachin 15b) teaches: "Metzora" is short for "motzi shem ra" / one who defames another person.

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy'd (the "Reisha Rav"; killed in the Holocaust in 1941) writes: There are many statements of our Sages that speak very harshly of a person who speaks lashon hara. Why, in fact, is lashon hara viewed as one of the most severe sins that can be committed?

He explains: The power of speech is man's crowning glory, what elevates him above all other creations on this earth. It is the most precious gift that mankind has received. That is why, in classical Hebrew, the human race is referred to as "the speaker." [The mineral, plant and animal kingdoms are called "the inanimate," "the growing," and "the living," respectively, and "the speaker" is the kingdom above "the living."] The significance of man's power of speech is highlighted by the fact that, when the Torah states (Bereishit 2:7), "Man became a living being," Onkelos translates, "A speaking spirit."

Accordingly, man is obligated to value this gift and to respect it, to use the power of speech only to speak good words and useful words, words that have some material or spiritual benefit. If one speaks lashon hara, he soils his mouth and degrades this precious gift. This may be compared to one who received a precious gift and he allowed it to become stained. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

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## Pirkei Avot

**Rabbi [Yehuda Ha'nassi] says, "What is the proper path that a person should choose for himself?" (Ch.2)**

The following is an excerpt from the farewell address of R' Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel z"l

(1880-1953; Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel) when he left the Chief Rabbinate of Salonika, Greece, in 1923:

My masters and teachers! I was called to return to Eretz Yisrael, to the community of Tel Aviv, to serve as its Chief Rabbi. With all my love for you and your honorable community to which I have become attached with bonds of love, I cannot refuse the call of the important community of Tel Aviv, from which I came to you. With great sorrow I depart from you, [but it is] due to my love of Eretz Yisrael. However, my soul will remain tied to you and your community forever, and I hope to see all of you there, in Eretz Yisrael, for which our souls long and where the hope for our redemption lies.

Before I leave you, I stand before you to fulfill a holy and pleasant obligation to leave you with words of halachah and to speak about the "proper path." . . .

What is this path? You might say that it is a well-paved path, on which every person therefore can go with confidence. Perhaps it might cross your mind to go in the footsteps of others without knowing clearly that that is the proper path. About this the Torah says (Devarim 12:30), "How did these nations worship their gods? and even I will do the same." That is a path of enslavement, as it is written (Tehilim 123:2), "Behold! Like the eyes of servants toward their masters' hand, like the eyes of maidservant toward her mistresses' hand." How lowly, how slave-like, is such a path on which a person nullifies himself, blinds his eyes and suffocates his feelings!

Blindly imitating assimilationists does not lead to success. It leads a person to destruction or, more correctly, to a living death.

The proper path will not be found in blind imitation nor in doing mitzvot by rote. It will only be found by making choices. In the words of Tehilim (50:23), "One who evaluates his way, I will show him Elokim's salvation."

This is what Rabbeinu Ha'kadosh [Rabbi Yehuda Ha'nassi] says in the mishnah: "What is the proper path that a person should choose?" Making choices leads to finding the proper path. One who never makes choices will never find the proper path, the path that ends in happiness and blessing for himself and others.

Choosing a path is the obligation of every single person. Not everyone merits to find the proper path, as Mishlei (16:25) states, "There is a path that seems right to man, but at its end are the ways of death." Some people lose their way because their leaders fail to give them proper direction. About them the prophet proclaims (Yechezkel 34:6-10), "My sheep wander on the mountains . . . but no one seeks and no one searches. . . I will seek out My flock from their hand."

A path of understanding and thoughtfulness places before every individual and every congregation the fundamental question: "What is the proper path that a person should choose?" Woe to a person and woe to a congregation that does not place this question before themselves every day and with

every step in their lives. . . And, do not think that if you have chosen a path that you can walk on it always without examining every step. You need to know that the path on which you are walking is planted with mines and stumbling blocks. You must remove the stones from your path every day . . .

Perhaps you will say that good and bad, blessings and curses, are known to all. If you say this, you are mistaken. . .

Making this choice gives [the Jew] his special nature and is the secret of his existence and eternity. How so? The Torah of Yisrael is the Torah of life. G-d offered this Torah to all the nations . . . Only Bnei Yisrael said, "Yes! We accept it willingly, with no pressure; rather, of our free will and out of recognition of the good it contains, for it is the source of good and "light." . . . This choice renews itself every day and in every situation in which we find ourselves. (Derashot Uziel)

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## Shemittah

This week we discuss the prohibition on transacting business with the produce of shemittah. The source of this prohibition is the verse (Vayikra 25:6), "The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat," from which our Sages understood: "'To eat,' but not to transact business with."

The halachot below are taken from chapter eight of Sefer Ha'shemittah by R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinski z"l.

It is prohibited to transact business with the produce of shevi'it / the seventh year, which is defined as gathering them or buying them in order to sell them for profit. [Ed. note: When produce is distributed through an otzar bet din, this prohibition is avoided because the charges that one pays are not for the produce itself; rather, they are intended to cover distribution costs. Also, an otzar bet din is a not-for-profit organization.] One is permitted to sell small amounts of produce of shevi'it, which some authorities define as the equivalent of three meals and others define as any quantity ordinarily purchased at retail.

Some say that the prohibition applies only to the individual who gathered the produce from the field. Thus, if several people gathered produce, that produce may be combined and sold as one lot.

Even in circumstances in which selling is permitted, produce of shevi'it may not be sold by volume, weight or number, only in estimated quantities.

When one sells produce of the seventh year to a retailer--in circumstances in which it is permitted to do so--one should not sell to the same retailer with whom he does business in other years. Also, one should designate the money as payment for one's labor and not for the produce itself so that the money will not have sanctity of shevi'it.

One who sells produce must remind buyers that the produce has sanctity of shevi'it.

One is permitted to give produce of shevi'it as a gift.

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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](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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