

# THE GOSSIP OF "MEN OF DISTINCTION"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 235, Cesarean Section Births. Good Shabbos!*

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## The Gossip of "Men of Distinction"

The bulk of last week's parsha as well as the bulk of this week's parsha deals with the laws of the Metzora. The Talmud tells us [Eruchin 15b] that one of the causes of this "leprosy-like" impurity was improper speech (Lashon Horah). In Biblical times, when a person spoke Lashon Horah he received a Heavenly warning that he should "watch his mouth". This warning came in the form of the affliction of Tzoraas. A person so afflicted needed to be brought to the Kohen.

Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, comments that when the Torah uses the term 'Adam' (as opposed to 'Ish') to denote a person, it connotes a degree of importance and prestige. Therefore it seems peculiar that in the parsha of Metzora, which deals with afflictions brought upon people who speak Lashon Horah, the Torah should begin by using the term 'Adam'.

Rav Alpert concludes that the measure of a person -- in terms of whether or not he is a distinguished person -- is not dependent on whether or not he engages in Lashon Horah. A person can even be a distinguished person ("Adam Chashuv") and yet engage in improper speech. What separates the normal person who gossips from the "Adam Chashuv" who engages in Lashon Horah? The difference is the latter's desire to change. A person can be a distinguished person, and yet stumble in the sin of Lashon Horah. However, as long as he retains a desire to improve himself in this area -- he is still a distinguished person.

It is difficult to stop gossiping. The normal inclination is not to seek improvement or change in this area. "And he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen" [Vayikra 13:2] means he has to force himself to go to the Kohen to seek remedy for his condition. He does not really want to go. He goes kicking and screaming.

A distinguished person can succumb to Lashon Horah. It happens to the best of us. But that which separates the 'Adam' from the 'Ish' (the distinguished person from the ordinary person) is that the

former does something about it. He forces himself to become better. He forces himself to seek out atonement. He drags himself to the Kohen. "And he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen."

### **A Matter of "Life and Death" -- For Rav Issar Zalman**

Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer (1870-1953) was a great genius and Tzaddik [righteous person]. Rav Issar Zalman Meltzer was sitting in his study one Chol HaMoed, the "Intermediate days of the Festival," with Rav Dovid Finkel. [During these days, basic work is permitted, but activities such as writing are avoided unless absolutely necessary.] Rav Issar Zalman asked Rav Dovid Finkel for a pencil and paper to write something down. Rav Dovid Finkel questioned his mentor, "Rebbe, how can you write something down, it is Chol HaMoed?" Rav Issar Zalman responded that the issue is a matter of great urgency, "almost like a life and death issue".

Rav Dovid Finkel became all excited and asked, "Rebbe, what's wrong? What is the matter with you?" Rav Issar Zalman brushed him off. "There is nothing really the matter. It is just that for me this is something almost akin to a life-or-death matter."

Rav Dovid Finkel brought the pencil and paper and Rav Issar Zalman wrote down a pasuk [verse] from Proverbs [Mishlei 4:25] "Let your eyes look ahead, and your eyes will direct your path."

Rav Dovid Finkel was perplexed. "This was the life-or-death matter -- just to write down a pasuk that you already knew by heart?"

Rav Issar Zalman explained. "Hundreds and hundreds of Jews come to visit me and wish me 'Gut Yom Tov' during the course of Chol HaMoed. Some of the people who come in are not the most distinguished residents of Jerusalem. Included among those who visit are many who are mishugaim (crazies), braggarts, ignoramuses, etc. I have to sit here, patiently, with person after person and smile. Sometimes I am tempted to lash out and lose my patience. I need something to hold me back. Every year, before Chol HaMoed, I write down this pasuk to remind me of its homiletic interpretation: 'When your eyes look at someone else, turn your eyes inward'. (In other words 'Do not look at HIS shortcomings, look at your own shortcomings'.) This is critically important to me, to have this pasuk sitting on my desk so that I will not criticize (mentally). I absolutely need that. When people come in, I look at this pasuk and think to myself 'Do not think about them; think about yourself'. This year, I forgot to write down the pasuk before Yom Tov. For me, it was vital to write down the pasuk -- even on Chol HaMoed!"

Rav Issar Zalman felt that this lesson -- of taking extra care to avoid criticizing and looking at the faults of others -- was truly akin to a matter of life or death.

There are only two types of people in the world -- those who view the glass as half empty and those who view the glass as half full. Those who speak Lashon Horah always view the glass as half-empty. The people who view the glass as half full are not the critics and faultfinders, but they are the happy people in life who can see the positive in their spouses, their children and their surroundings. As

such they are happier people.

Lashon Horah is destructive not only to the person about whom it is spoken - - it is destructive to the person who speaks it himself, because it teaches him to be negative and that is a terrible thing.

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