

UNGRATEFUL MUTE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The spiritual malady that manifest itself as a stain or boil struck at a Jew's home and if repentance was not made onto his or her clothing. If the sin that caused it was still left uncorrected then it showed on the victim's skin. The name the Torah gives this "disease" is sa-ra-aht. The Talmud discusses several causes for this malady, conceit and haughtiness, stinginess and Lashon ha-ra - misuse of the gift of speech.

In his classic work on the subject, Shemirat HaLashon, the Hafetz Hayim explains with a parable the lowliness of the character of one who speaks negatively and harmfully about others. Imagine a person who woke up one morning and was unable to speak. His active mind full of ideas and emotions incapable of expressing the myriad of thoughts that raced through his mind. Suddenly a prisoner within himself unable to relate to those that he knows and loves. What a horrible sentence for a person to bear!

He begins a procession of doctors and tests. Baffled specialists nod their heads to and fro with serious expressions that show their frustration with his case. What is a mute to do?

Then one day a specialist arrives in his town and hears of his dilemma. After a thorough examination the doctor says, "I think I know of a remedy for your disease. In a short time you will be as normal as you were before the onset of these terrible symptoms. Take 2 of these pills a day for seven days and then come to see me again." On his note pad the mute inquired as to the charge for this encouraging diagnosis and for the miraculous pills. "Oh no - you don't have to pay me", said the doctor. I pray that it will work for you and you will be happy again, that will be my pay."

The mute went home and started the pill-taking regimen. On the sixth day he began to speak. That Friday night - Shabbat - his wife invited over family and close friends for a festive Shabbat meal. When they began to eat the mute started belittling the doctor. He made fun of him and spoke negatively about him. He imitated his speech and mannerisms in an attempt to get his guests to laugh at his benefactor. If he had a bad leg or other medical problem and acted so - how disgusting would his behavior be? But considering that it was the power of speech that was given to him by the victim of his insults how much worse is his unacceptable behavior?

The power of speech was a gift given to man to pray, praise and thank our Maker. It was intended for positive use like Torah learning, consoling and advising others. What do people do? They use this present for forbidden speech. Lies, deceit, foul language are the extremes. Worse, however, is the

use of the tongue to hurt other humans, to divide the unity of people, and to belittle the status of friends and colleagues. By right, when the soul goes up to Heaven nightly, our Creator should take back his gift of speech. Instead He waits patiently for each of us to make amends. Shouldn't we accommodate our benefactor?

Shabbat Shalom

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