

PARSHAS METZORA

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THE DANGERS OF GA'AVAH

A SUBTLE AVEIRAH

Today we want to discuss a topic that is relevant to our *Parshah*. Rashi, in the beginning of *Parshas Metzora*, writes about the process of purification of somebody who has *tzora'as*. It involves bringing certain *korbanos* and doing various procedures (Vayikra 14:1-32). The person becoming *tahor* has to bring *tziporim tehoros*. He also has to bring *eitz erez*, wood from a cedar tree, *ushni tola'as* and *eizov*.

Rashi (Vayikra 14:4) says that the *tola'as* and the *eizov* happen to be the opposite of an *erez*. An *erez* is a tall, mighty tree, and a *tola'as* and *eizov* are very small grasses that grow close to the ground. *Chazal* tell us that the reason he brings an *eitz erez* is for the *metzora* to remind himself of the *shoresh* of his *cheit*. When a person gets an *onesh* that means the person did some type of a sin. There's no *onesh* without *cheit*. The *gemara* (Brochos 33a) says that the snake or the scorpion doesn't kill. It's the *cheit* that kills.¹ Everything comes from a *cheit*. But every *cheit* comes from a *shoresh* of a *cheit*. So, let's say there's a person who spoke *lashon hara*. What's the *shoresh* of that *cheit*?

Chazal tell us שהנעים, a person is challenged with *negaim*, על גסות הרוח, for arrogance, inflated ego.² You have to know that the reason why a person talks down and talks negatively about others is because he feels himself to be self-important, and he thinks of himself as being better than others. Therefore, the Torah tells us that a *metzora* should bring a bird offering along with the *eitz erez* (cedar wood). An *eitz* that towers over other *eitzim* is to remind him of the *shoresh* of his *cheit*. Then he brings

shni tola'as (crimson-dyed wool) and *eizov* (hyssop) which are very lowly grasses as Rashi (ibid) quotes from *Chazal* מה תגידו, what's the *takanah* of a *ba'al ga'avah* in order to be healed? ישפיל עצמו מגאווה, he has to humble himself from his arrogance, כתולעת וכאזוב - he has to regard himself lowly as a worm (תולעת) and as a hyssop (אזוב).

THE GREATEST SOURCE OF GA'AVAH

Now, you have to know that arrogance is one of the worst *aveiros* that are out there. It's a subtle *aveirah* because many people don't identify exactly where the *ga'avah* begins. If a person feels that he's nothing, he can't exist. Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want a person to feel like he's nothing. He wants you to feel lucky and full of pride and thankful that you are part of Am Yisrael. He wants you to appreciate all the gifts that Hakadosh Baruch Hu granted each and every one of us. But what He doesn't want is that we should have an inflated ego. Where does the inflated ego begin?

You have to know that the ego is found where a person feels that he is entitled to something special because of the gifts that he has. Let's say there is a person who is good at math. A person who's smart. The first thing, the most powerful thing that brings a person to *ga'avah* is when a person thinks he's smart. Most people that I know think they're smart. They're not. They're what *Chazal* refer to as *dalei ge'ah*. They're paupers yet they're still arrogant. Most people are not that smart. *Chochmah* is something that is not easy to come by. The greatest force that brings a person to *ga'avah* is *chochmah*, as the Ramchal writes in *Mesillas Yesharim* (Ch 22). That is a *ma'aleh* in an *adam beatzmo*, the intrinsic design of a person. *Chochmah* is the most important *chelek* of a *mentsch*. It is part of the spiritual aspect of a person, the *ma'arachah haruchniyus* of a person. It's not a physical thing. It's a spiritual thing. It's a person's *seichel*.

¹ תנו רבנן: מעשה במקום אחד שהיה ערוך, והיה מניק את הבריות. באו והודיעו לו לרבי חנינא בן דוסא. אמר להם: הראו לי את חורו! הראוהו את חורו. נתן עקבו על פי החור, נצא ונשכו - נמת אותו ערוך. נטלו על קתפו והביאו לבית המדרש. אמר להם: ראו בני, אין ערוך ממיית, אלא החטא ממיית ועץ ארו. לפי שהנעים באין על גסות הרוח (רש"י על ויקרא י"ד: א).

THE DANGER OF CHOCHMAH

When a person feels he has *seichel* and the person feels that he is capable of special *seichel*, special *chochmah*, he becomes arrogant. The arrogance makes him feel that he is entitled to *tehilah* (praise) and *kavod* (honor). He feels he's entitled to certain *kavod* and certain praises and that's the source of his arrogance. You might see it when Reuven, who is smart, approaches Shimon, who is not as smart. You'll find this a lot of times with doctors. A doctor is someone who has *chochmas harefuah*. People come to him for advice, for treatment, etc. So this person now believes that he is deserving of *tehilah*, of praise, and that he is deserving of *kavod*, of respect. He automatically relates to others in a manner of, "I am better than you." In reality, he is not better than anybody else. It just happens to be that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave him the capability of acquiring certain *chochmah* that is very valuable in the world. Hashem put him in the right place. But that doesn't make him *raoy* (deserving) for any *tehilah* and any *kavod*. Now, it's not to say he can't feel good about the fact that he went through medical school and he is able to help a lot of people. We are not saying that.

So we are learning now that the highest motivation for *ga'avah* is *chochmah*. When there's a broken car, and somebody knows how to fix it, this guy feels like he is a *shvitsker*. A guy that knows how to fix phones or fix computers thinks he is *raoy letehilah* because he is capable and he has some kind of *chochmah*. Some people have a natural talent to take things apart and put things together.

The Ramchal says that when a person was blessed or granted certain capabilities from Hashem, it's like a bird who was granted the ability to fly. That bird who is granted the ability to fly is not any better than other animals. Each animal has its talent and this is the talent that the bird has. If a person has a *chochmah* - assuming he's actually utilizing that *chochmah* - it's a *chochmah* that's to be used to help others and to better himself. But a *chacham* who doesn't use or develop his *chochmah* is an absolute failure. He doesn't deserve any *tehilah vekavod* at all. When you see a *shor* that is powerful and able to pull big loads, it has nothing to be arrogant about. That's its nature. That's what Hashem made it for. The Ramchal says you have to know that a *chacham* is someone whose brain Hashem programmed to do certain things. Now, a person who is not a *chacham* like the first fellow, but who has a "natural" *seichel* - if you would give him the same program, he may also be as smart as the other fellow. So there's no reason to think that he's entitled to special *kavod* and special praise.

A STRAIGHT TALK TO A BA'AL GA'AVAH

I once had a *talmid* who was very smart in a lot of areas. He was very wise. He was very, very powerful also. He was able to lift over 500 pounds. That was considered, as he told me, a very big accomplishment, even though when he told me that I said, "I'm really not jealous of you. I have no interest in raising 500 pounds and possibly throwing my back out or my shoulders, or my rotator cuffs. I'm happy to lift the 10 to 15 pounds that I have to do on a regular basis." He had arms that were wider than the top of my legs. He had a difficult time buying a jacket. When he bought a jacket to put on *tefillin* for the first time, he couldn't find a jacket. I told him, "I guess all your *chochmos* made you into a cripple, because instead of having feet at the bottom of your body and arms on the top of your body, you ended up with feet on the top of your body and huge stumps at the bottom of your body. So what's the big *ma'aleh* of that?"

One day, he came to talk to me and he said to me as follows: "Rebbi, I have to tell you. I hear sometimes you talk about arrogance. I don't understand what you're saying. The *emes* is that I am smarter and faster than anybody here. I grasp things quicker than everybody else here, I am stronger than everybody else here, so why am I not entitled to feel *ram venisa*, exalted and *raoy* for praise?"

I remember thinking, "Shreck. If this is not a *ba'al ga'avah*, then I can't imagine what is!" I said, "Do you want help?" He said, "I'd like you to set me straight." I said, "Okay, let me explain to you one thing. Who says you're smart? Are you recognized in the world as being smart? Because you can do math quicker than somebody else, does that make you smart? Does that make you entitled to any *kavod*? That wasn't an accomplishment. Because you are smart, you grasp things faster. Does that make you *raoy letehilah*? I have some news for you, my friend. The only one that thinks you're smart is your mother. I don't think you're that smart, and I don't see anybody in the world who thinks you're that smart. Are you recognized by smart people as being smart? No. The jobs you did in your life were jobs that any dummy could do. You did one job after another, that the only thing you needed for that job was to be dumb. Nothing. You didn't use your brains for anything. What *tehilah* are you *raoy* for?"

I told him, "The fact that Hashem made you smart and you didn't develop your brains, is actually the most embarrassing

thing that I could imagine. Every time I look at you I say, 'What a waste of human flesh.' Hashem programmed you with brain cells and you accomplished absolutely nothing. You've gone nowhere with that in a hurry."

When he heard that, he was shocked. I said, "Because in this little group here, you could figure out math quicker than anybody else - I'll ask you what's the percentage of something and you can figure it out quicker? So you have a little talent, big deal. A guy could play a Rubik's cube. Does that make him *raoy letehilah*? Do you know how much you don't know? According to the capacity for *chochmah* that you have, you should be a *chacham atzum* in the secular world. And in the Torah world, for sure. But you're not a genius in the Torah world of *yedios*, and you're not a genius in the secular world of *yedios*. Because you have *kishron*, capability, that doesn't make you *raoy*. It makes you *raoy* for shame. Because you're a failure in life. You're a *rotzeach*. Hashem invested heavily in you and you accomplished nothing with those talents."

ARE YOU UTILIZING YOUR GIFTS?

Now, there's another thing that the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that makes people think they're who knows what, and that is, if they look good. He says an interesting thing. Many people who look attractive for some reason think the following: "If I have good cheekbones and a nice nose and my ears don't stick out of my head, I'm *raoy letehilah*." That's definitely a very low-class *ga'avah*. There are people who think if they build their muscles up, they're *raoy letehilah*.

Every person has to know what the gifts that Hashem gave him are, and the only question he has to ask himself is, if he's utilizing those gifts in the way that Hashem intended him to. Some people use their gifts for credit cards. Some use their gifts to do *shtick*. That's not called utilizing your gifts. That's *raoy* for shame, not *raoy* for any *kavod*.

The Ramchal tells us, it's impossible for any person to be on any *madreigah* where he won't also have flaws, *chesronos*. There are very few people who are not full of *chesronos rabim* (many shortcomings) whether it is *mitzad* their nature or other reasons. There are people who are big *ba'alei chisaron* - they lack proper *middos*. You see people who are not kind, people who detest others, people who are cheap. People have *tzarus ayin*, they have *ruach gevohah*, or other terrible *middos*. That's not something that's deserving of *kavod vetehilah*. The Ramchal says that sometimes a person's family or his relatives are "bad news." He says a person has to know that if he comes from a poor *mishpachah* or he has negative *kerovim*, you know what Hashem is doing? Hashem is humbling him. Hashem is trying to make him aware that he is not *raoy*. That's a very interesting thing. Even though it's not a person's fault for being brought up in such a family, nevertheless Hashem says, "I made it that way, to train you in a lesson." *Oh mitzad ma'asav*, everybody knows that he did something he shouldn't have done. It is humbling.

A CLOSET FULL OF SKELETONS

The *Bais Halevi* writes an amazing insight on this subject. He says that a person has to feel embarrassed if he becomes arrogant. Why is that? A person should think and he should know, that if his friends or acquaintances would really know what he did in secret - or they would know what goes on in your *machshavah* during *davening* (when you look like you're really into it) or when you're laying down and resting - if somebody would know what thoughts are going through a person's mind all day long, he says, *היו מרחיקים ממנו תכלית הריחוק*, they would stay away from you and tell others stay away from you, *תכלית הריחוק*, because you are evil. He has the worst *middos shayach*. They would look at him as an absolute abomination. He explains that our whole success is because others don't know what we're thinking about.³

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows what we're thinking about. So how could a person not be embarrassed from the awareness that Hashem knows the truth? So rather than thinking, "What do people think of me?" a person should always think, "What does Hashem think about me?"

I remember when I first saw this, I was very shocked and very shaken. I was thinking, if I knew what thoughts went through another person's mind, and that every time he saw somebody he had *hirhurim raim*, I wouldn't be impressed by their arrogance. And they would be a lot more humble. People have *hirhurim raim* constantly, all day long. No one is saved from that, as the *gemara* says. To what degree you ask? That depends on the person. But imagine if you would know that a

³ וכו' ואם יתגאה במעלות השכלות הלא אפס ותורה גחשיש ואפי' חכם שבחכמים נאמר עליו וחכמים כבלי מדע ונבונים כבלי השכל ואם הדברים האלו בחכמים כ"ש אנשים כמונו אשר רק הטפשות גברה לאין שיעור ואין אמת יודע עד מה וכעורים נגשש, ועליו אמרו אשר אין הדעה סובלתן דל גאה. ובמעשים ג"כ אין לנו להתפאר כי המגונים רבו על הטובים באין מספר וערך בכמות ובאיכות והלואי היה לנו מצוה אחת כתיקונה, ויתבונן האדם בעצמו וידע כי אם היו חביריו יודעים תעלמוני וכל מחשבותיו העולה על מחשבותו הן בתפלה והן בשכבו ובכל היום היו מרחיקים ממנו תכלית הריחוק לרוע מזותו והיו מתעבים אותו כתועבה, וכל הצלחתיכו אשר נעלם מאחרים פנימיות שלנו אבל הבורא יתברך הלא צופה ורואה כל סתרו והאיד לא יכענ האדם לפניו ובמה יתגאה. גם זאת יתן אל לבו כמה מהבושה ישיגהו בהיותו נידון בב"ד של מעלה וכל סתרו יהיו גלויים וישאלו לו טיפה סרוחה למה ובמה היתה גאותך, ספר לנו אחת מהגדולות שעשית הלא יכלם בלי מענה וכמאמר הפייטן כובש פניו נידון ונכלם. גם זאת יתן אל לבו כי עיקר כוונתו בגאותו והתפארות שלו הוא רק למען יכבדו אותו העולם, והנפח הוא כי מביאתו לידו בוז ולענ וכמאה"כ גאות אדם חשפילנו, ובב"ב דף צ"ח א"ר מרי האי מאן דיהיר אפי' אינשי ביתיה לא מתקבל שטאמר גבר יהיר ולא ינוה מאי ולא ינוה לא ינוה בונה שלו. וכ"ש שאנשים אחרים ישנאו אותו ויבזו אותו כי מודרך המתגאה להקל בכבוד אחרים ומקטין לשארי אנשים וכל הבזיון ההוא נופל עליו וכאמרם במ"ר קהלת אל תבהל ברוחך היאך מה דקומקמי קליש על גיסו שפוך, כל מאן דריק ללעיל על אפוי נפל ונמצא נוהל קלון מכבוד. וכל הירודף אחר הכבוד בורח ממנו. (בית הלוי, ליקוטי מאמרים וליקוטים על מילי דאגדתא)

fine *yungerman* would tell you, that every time he saw a *rebbetzin* from the age of 99 to a girl of 2, the thoughts that went through his mind were *pashut* of the most inappropriate type. Nu, would you want anybody to get near him? Would you let the guy in your house? No. You would keep a wide berth from this guy. And you know how many people have *hirhurim raim* about their fellow men?

Over the years, I've encountered tens and tens of people who have spoken to me about the *hirhurim* that they have about their *chavrusos*. And you think, "*Shreck*, these people have to be put into jail and locked up!" Or you know how many thoughts people think when they see you? They think, "Why does this guy have it so good? You know what? I would like to see an eyeball pop out of this guy's head. I would love to see this guy wearing a cast." People like that. People are sick. People are really sick.

You know what Rav Yerucham writes? If a person does not work on himself, and somebody comes over to him and tells him, "Oh, by the way I just had a baby," or "I just got engaged" you know what the other guy thinks? "*Mazal ra*, he should have *mazal ra*."⁴ But you can't say that, it's *past nisht*. So you know what he says? "Oh, *mazel tov*!" But he really means *mazel ra*. You know why? Because people are jealous. People are arrogant.

JEALOUSY BORN OUT OF ARROGANCE

I'll never forget this story. I always tell this story because it *mamash* shook me up. I was in yeshiva. At supper there were lots of tables, each full of bachurim. When somebody became a *chosson*, that table of bachurim would sing *yasis*, and the bachurim at tables around would join in, and the tables that were further away wouldn't join in. I sat at the table with *chassidim*. I happened to sit at the *chassidische* table because we ate certain food. They didn't eat the regular food in the *yeshivah* and they were the ones who *shtell tzu* so I was comfortable with them. I remember one day, some fellow at my table got engaged. I remember feeling bad and I felt terrible about that negativity. Of course, I sang the *yusis*, what they

sang over there, but I remember asking myself, "Why would I feel bad?" This guy is a *chassidische* guy. He didn't take anything away from me. If his wife was the last wife in the world, I'm not sure I would marry her. We have no similarities, no *shaychus*. I didn't even know if she was rich. It bothered me. Why does someone's *simcha* bother you? You know why? Because you're a *beheimah*. That's why it bothers you. And people are not aware of this.

I remember, when I got engaged a person came over to me and said to me, "You know, it's a real *chutzpah*. That's a real *chutzpah*." I said, "Excuse me?" They said, "You just came to the yeshiva. What are you doing, getting engaged right away? I've been sitting here for three years. You know how many people have been sitting here for years?" I said, "I'm sorry." I heard it not just from one person. I heard it from a few people. "What's your rush? What do you have to grab for? Why don't you sit and learn for another few years." I said, "That's what happened. I didn't go looking for it. I wasn't sitting with a sign on the street, looking for a *shidduch*." They didn't have "Nasi" in my days, where they encourage you to get married at an early age. I said, "If Hashem wants me to have a *shidduch*, I'll get a *shidduch*."

But that's how people are. That comes from arrogance. It comes from the attitude of: "I'm better. You can't do it before me." That's what people feel. And if you're not aware of this, you should know you could be a *talmid chacham*, you could be the biggest *talmid chacham* in the world, and you could be a person that's *naguah bega'avah*, you're plagued with *ga'avah*. You could be a good person and be plagued with *ga'avah*, because you're a good person.

I remember speaking to a fellow who was a very handsome fellow. He was *taka gebentched*. I asked him, "Who are you going to marry?" He said, "The most beautiful girl in New York," and he knew who she was. I told him, "Are you sick?" He said, "No. We're made for each other." He didn't end up marrying anybody remotely like that.

But that's how it is. People think, because I am who I am, I deserve a special *shidduch*, a special look, a special this and a special that.

WALKING A FINE LINE

If anybody would know what you think or what I think, it would be a disaster. When I saw this Rav Yerucham, I said,

⁴ כ"ו כהיום רגילים בני אדם בהגיע אליהם איזה בשורה טובה מזולתו כי כותבים תיכף אגרת מז"ט, להביע השתתפותם בשמחתו של חברו, ולולי דמיסטיפינא מכם, הייתי אומר כי מרמה גדולה היא, כולו שקר וכזב, ואם נשאלנו בינו לבין עצמו, היה מודה ואומר גם להפך: "הלואי ויפסיד חברי!" אמרי אינשי, כי ג' מיני מקרים הן באדם סוחר: א) כשהוא לבדו הצליח במסחרו וחברו הפסיד את הכל, אז זה לפניו תכלית האושר, ב) כששניהם שוים אם בריוח ואם בהפסד, אז זה לפניו צער רב, ג) כשהוא מפסיד וחברו מרויח, כי אז זה לפניו היסורים הכי מרים. שמחתו של אדם אינה כ"ב בהצלחתו שלו, כי אם הרבה יותר ויותר שמחתו גדולה בהפסד חברו, אלה תולדות השחתו של האדם, לו הייתי דורש אלה הדברים לפני אנשים בעולם, לא היו זורקים עלי שושנים...וברוך השם שאתם שומעים ושותקים, האדם בעצמו עפ"י רוב מרמה גם עצמו, ואינו יודע כוונתו הרעה ושנאתו העצומה לחברו "האהוב", להשתתף באמת בשמחת זולתו, צריכין לעבודה רבה, במעשה חושית והתבוננות רבה, ואלו לא נתנה תורה אלא לגלות לנו יסוד זה דיינו (דעת תורה, שמות עמי רלה)

“Boy, I’d better clean up my thinking, because if it ever gets revealed, you are going to be in the dog house.” People won’t even refer to you as a Ben Adam. They’re going to call you a hunting dog. They’re going to call you a *kelev*.

A person has to study this to understand what the plague of *ga’avah* is. What is the power of *ga’avah*? How come it affects every type of person, from small to great? You meet people and you think, “This guy must be an *anav*. This guy must be such a humble person. He’s got nothing going for himself.” But he thinks, “Pshhhh *ich veis vus*, I am a great guy!”

Now, you have to know that *ga’avah* is from the עבירות החמורות בכל התורה כולה. The whole *parshah* of *tzara’as* is about that. There’s a very fine line in using one’s middos for achieving. Rav Akiva Eiger with all his *anivus* knew he was Rav Akiva Eiger, that he was the *da’as Torah* of the *dor*, and that what he said carried weight. But he didn’t think that because of that he was entitled to something better than other people. Rav Chaim Halevi Soloveitchik knew, and the Beis Halevi knew, that they were capable of learning better than most people in the generation, but that didn’t entitle them to anything special. They were utilizing the *kochos* that Hashem gave them. They had developed a methodology in learning, just like a doctor develops a methodology in surgery that puts him in a category of good surgeons. He’s an accomplished person. And everybody should become accomplished in whatever his *kochos* are. He should utilize his *kochos*.

HOW TO START WORKING ON GA’AVAH

But a person has to think, where does *anivus* start? What’s the *shoresh*? How does a person begin to work on taking down his *ga’avah*? Everybody wants to know. Everybody has *ga’avah*. Don’t think not. So how do you work on the *ga’avah*?

So the Ramchal (Mesillas Yesharim 22:3) says that the first step in *anivus* is ענו במחשבתו - a person needs to become humble in his thoughts.⁵ Now, that’s a *chiddush*. You know in other things we say that חיצוניות מעוררת את הפנימיות, person’s external actions ‘awaken’ his internality, meaning, that if a person acts in a certain way, he becomes that way. They say, ‘fake it until you make it.’ Many people think if I’ll fake *anivus*, I’ll become an *anav*. *Zugt* the Ramchal, בתחילה צריך שיהיה

האדם ענו במחשבתו ואחר כך יתנהג בדרכי ענוה, in the beginning, one first needs to be humble in his thoughts, and then, afterwards, he could conduct himself in the fashion of humble people. The reason is, that if he’s not going to be an *anav* in his mind and, instead, he’s going to want to be an *anav* in his *ma’asim*, he’s only going to be an imaginary *anav*. That’s all. And he’ll be among the evil ones שהם בכלל הצבועים, they’re amongst the hypocrites, that’s what a *tzavuah* is, אשר אין בעולם רע מהם, there’s nothing worse than a hypocrite in the world, according to Mesillas Yesharim!

Now, how does a person know if he is a *ba’al ga’avah*? Let’s say somebody comes and insults you and you feel bad. Is that called *ga’avah*? No. When a person gets *bizyonos*, the Maharal says, that’s not called *ga’avah*. *Ga’avah* means when you feel insulted because you weren’t honored enough. That’s what it means. A person who feels that way, thinks he should have been honored or recognized.

AN UNDESERVING ALIYAH

I know of a *bachur* who once called me up and said that he wanted to get an *aliyah* in his *yeshivah* on Rosh Hashanah. Why did he think he deserved it? He was dreaming. He imagined in his mind, for some funny reason, that he was deserving of this. This was a *bachur* that was challenged with some heavy-duty *aveiros*, and it was known to the *roshei yeshivah* about his *aveiros*. Yet the fellow still imagined that he deserved an *aliyah* on Rosh Hashanah. So he called me about it. I called the *rosh yeshivah* to speak to him. The *rosh yeshivah* told me, “Where is this guy coming from? What is this guy thinking?” Must be that he prepared for Rosh Hashanah properly and now he’s *kulo naki, kulo tahor*, that’s what a person could think. People fool themselves about who they are, and then they think that it was an insult that they don’t have an *aliyah*. That’s what a person has to understand.

SITTING IN THE CHOFETZ CHAIM’S CHAIR?!

Here’s a father whose son sits in his chair. He was waiting to become a father and he was waiting to be able to tell somebody, “Don’t sit in my chair. Don’t do that. That’s not *derech erez*. It’s not *kibud av ve’eim*.” Now the father is being *mechanech* his kid in what exactly? For years I wasn’t sure about this. For many years I asked this question to many people: “How do you know if the father is being *mechanech* his kid to have proper *kibud av ve’eim* or the father is being *mechanech*

⁵ וכשנדקדק נמצא שתלוייה במחשבה ובמעשה, כי בתחלה צריך שיהיה האדם ענו במחשבתו, ואחר כך יתנהג בדרכי הענוים. כי אם לא יהיה ענו בדעתו וירצה להיות ענו במעשה, לא יהיה אלא מן הענוים המדומים והרעים שזכרנו למעלה, שהם מכלל הצבועים אשר אין בעולם רע מהם. ונבאר עתה החלקים האלה, וכו’.

his kid to be a *ba'al ga'avah*? How do you know?" I asked this question to many people. I couldn't get a clear answer, until I finally saw that the Chafetz Chaim's children wrote that their father, the Chafetz Chaim, was not *makpid* at all on any of these matters, like talking back or sitting in his seat. They would mention it to him and he would say, "Nah, it's *gornisht fun gornisht*." He really wasn't *makpid* on it. Because the Chafetz Chaim was an *anav* even though he was their father and he was the Chafetz Chaim.

IT GOES BOTH WAYS

Now, it doesn't say that a son should talk back to his father. It doesn't say that a son should take his father's seat or sit in his father's seat. It doesn't say that anywhere. A father who is *makpid* on that has to be aware of the real *chinuch* that he's giving his kid. Is the kid getting a message to be *medakdek bemitzvas kibud av*, or is the kid getting a message to be *medakdek* in *ga'avah*, in collecting the honor that you're entitled to? How many husbands have said to their wives, "I'm a *melech*." The Rambam says you should treat the husband like a *melech*. So if you have a wife who's not stupid, she'll tell him, "And what about the other part of the Rambam? It says you treat your wife like a *malkah*?" There are people who think they're *chashuv* and because of their status in life they expect their wives to treat them a certain way.

Now, of course, there's such a thing as a *talmid* having *kavod* for a *rebbe*, but it doesn't say that the *rebbe* has to demand the *kavod* from the *talmid*. That it doesn't say. You have to know why the *rebbe* is demanding the *kavod*. Is he trying to be *mechanech* the *talmid* to have *kavod rav*, *kavod* for the source that teaches him Torah? Or is it because of arrogance - he wants to play 'let's be a *rebbe* today' This is a very, very important, very powerful question.

SENSITIVITY DOESN'T EQUAL HUMILITY

People were just talking about somebody I know. He gets very, very insulted if anybody talks about him, for good or for bad. I once asked this person, "Why are you so concerned about this?" He said, "It's not right. Why do people have to talk about me?" I said, "You know what's bothering you? I'm going to tell you. You're afraid maybe they're not saying nice things about you. So because you're afraid that maybe they're not saying nice things, you're *choshesh* that maybe they don't see you in the same way you see yourself. So therefore you think that maybe the guy is talking negatively about you. So you know what you say? 'Don't say anything about me.' But if you knew that everybody was just talking positively about you, then you would be very happy about it."

Today there's a word called 'sensitivity.' I'm sensitive. You know what that means? I'm a *ba'al ga'avah*. That's what being sensitive means a lot of times. I'm not talking about a guy who comes and pushes you off the chair, or a guy who snaps you on the nose, or some guy who thinks he's your friend and he smashes you on the back, thinking he's your best pal over here, and your back wants to break and you have to put up a good front. There's now a muscle spasm in your back. And you don't understand what he's banging for. That's how people are.

There's an interesting *Reishes Chochmah* that says the following. The gemara says that whoever gets angry it's like he's *oved avodah zarah*. Now the source they bring is a gemara in *Sotah*. What does it say in *Sotah* (4b)? כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח - עובד עבודת כוכבים. anybody who has arrogance it's like he's *oved avodah zarah*. Do you know why? Because *ka'as* comes from *ga'avah*. You have to know that. The source of somebody getting angry is because, 'I am a *ba'al ga'avah*.'

The Rambam's son (Rabbeinu Avraham) has a *sefer* called *Hamaspik Leovdei Hashem*. He says על פי רוב מה שמעורר את כוח הריב אל הכעס, what makes an argument burst into *ka'as*, הוא הגאווה הפנימית, is the inner *ga'avah*. And what brings a person to be *soleach* and forgiving, *mevater*? הוא הענוה הפנימית - it is the inner *anavah* (humility). That's what a person has to understand.⁶

ANGER AND GA'AVAH ARE JOINED AT THE HIP

A fellow called me the other day with *tzaros* like I never heard a human being had. *Pashut*, the guy started telling me his *tzaros*, and I told the guy, "I think I can't even talk to you." From lawsuits to a number of children divorced, a number of children off the *derech*, one child with a terrible disease, two children with cancer. This guy has a lot of children, *mamash* not *stam*. *Tzaros* you cannot begin to imagine. He said, "Could you help me out?" I said, "I'll help you out. I mean we're talking here that Hashem seems to be shouting at you from every single angle possible in

⁶ וז"ל: ועליך לדעת כי דרך הסלחנות ודרך הענייה שותפות הן, כשם שהפכיהן הכעסנות והגאווה שותפים הם, כי ע"פ רוב מה שמעורר את כוח הריב אל הכעס הוא הגאווה הפנימית, לפיכך אמרו לעולם יהא אדם ענותן כהלל ואל יהי קפדן כשמאי, ואין ענותן היפוכו של קפדן אלא על פי מה שביארנו וכשפירשו ענותנותו של הלל פירשו גם את העדר כעסו.

the world. Hashem is on your case. You're not listening. Something is wrong. Do you have any idea when this all started?"

Then his wife, who was also on the phone, said, "I'll tell you when it all started." He acted in an extremely, extremely arrogant manner. He was very, very demeaning to his wife, what we would call today extreme abuse - and it began from that. He said that he's a changed man now. He said he has changed since then. It's been many years.

I said, did you ever do *teshuvah*, or did you just change? Did you ever undo all the evil? Did you beat your kids? Was that because you were *mechanech* them or because you were angry towards them? If you're angry towards your kids when you hit them, that means it's not coming from *chinuch*. It's coming from *ga'avah*. A person is saying, "How dare you do something that I didn't want you to do? I'm g-d over here. I'm the *getschke*." A person has to realize that one of the worst *totzaos* (results) of *ga'avah* is *ka'as*.

In our *parshah* there's the *sugya* of *lashon hara*. When you bad-mouth others, you talk down to others, or you're negative to others, that's *lashon hara*, which comes from *ga'avah*. Let each of us begin to identify the areas where he is sensitive, and likely to respond with arrogance. So, when his wife asks him a question, or his mother asks him a question, or his father asks him a question - for example, where his father says to him, "How come you're not living up to your potential?" and he rolls his eyes and shrugs his shoulders and says, "Don't go there," or he walks out of the room huffing and puffing, like, "How dare you talk to me this way? I told you not to bring up this subject. This is a subject I don't want to deal with." And then he gets depressed - that's all because of his arrogance. He's an arrogant person and he is not willing to face reality and look at himself. Then he goes somewhere and says, "Oh my mother, she's a witch. My father is abusive. I suffer at the hands of these tyrants, these dictators, these who-knows-what." That's what happens, it is the outcome of *ga'avah*.

A SEDER NIGHT TO "REMEMBER"

Just yesterday a fellow called me up, a tyrant, a dictator. The night of the *Seder*, he beat up his oldest kid, a *bar mitzvah* kid! The kid ran out of his house and went to the *rebbe's* house and told the *rebbe* about it. The *rebbe* reported him to the authorities. The next thing he knew, the authorities came to take his kids away from him. This kid was put into the hospital on suicide watch. His wife was with this kid, the oldest kid. His wife went into such shock, he told me she's not been able to talk since the beginning of Pesach. She became mute. She was not very talkative beforehand, but now she has become a total mute. He calls me up screaming at the top of his lungs. I said, "What does it have to do with me? I want you to change this. How could I change your behavior? I warned you, if you act arrogantly, you're going to pay the price. You thought that in your life you are the king." And I told him, "If you send your kids to that school (where he chose to send his kids to), you're someday going to pay the price." He said, "It's my kid. I could do what I want!"

It was a modern school. You know what he liked about that school? I asked him, "What do you like about that school?" This is what he told me. They know their *milel* and their *milra*. That's what they know. I used to kid him around. Let's say I said, "...Nachson..." He would get worked up and tell me, "No, no. That's not how you say it. Say NachSHON!" That is how he reacted when I said such kinds of words. The guy was getting worked up into a fury, not *stam*. I told the guy, "You're a sick man."

Now, he lost all of his family. I asked him, "Is this your first run-in with child services? Do they know you? Do you have a record with child services?" He doesn't live in this state. He lives in a different state. He said, "This is the fourth time." I said, "Hashem gave you three warnings already. You know what the problem is? You're *דוחק רגלי שכניה*" (i.e. you are distancing Hashem from yourself).

A *ba'al ga'avah* has no connection with Hashem, because he worships himself. He has his own entitlements. He decides what's important. He decides what he's entitled to, what he can do, what he can't do. And then Hakadosh Baruch Hu comes and shaves him down, and cuts him down. The *eitzah*, Rabosai, is to be *mashpil* yourself, be *mesaken* yourself, to be real with yourself. Demand from yourself that you do as best as you can, and don't give yourself accolades for being better than everybody else, because we all could be better than we are. Acknowledge the *ga'avah*. We have to face it, because it's from the worst *aveiros* that are *shayach* in the *velt*.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The parshah of tzara'as teaches us that ga'avah is a plague that affects every person, from small to great. Ga'avah manifests itself when a person feels that he wasn't honored or recognized enough for his chochmah. And that's why the highest motivation for ga'avah involves one's chochmah - whether one is a car mechanic, computer engineer, doctor, or a talented yungerman. And while there is certainly nothing wrong with being aware of our talents and feeling good about our individual or professional accomplishments - provided that we use them to help and assist others - we should be careful not to seek praise and honor for our chochmah. The powerful words of the Beis Halevi and Rav Yerucham - of how people would stay away from us like one stays away from a toevah, if they could only read our thoughts - should alone humble us and inspire us to change! This coming week, I will, bli neder, identify one area where I am very sensitive and often respond with arrogance and ga'avah when challenged. Once I know this area, I will draw on the powerful lesson from the Mesillas Yesharim and will practice humbling myself in my thoughts first, before attempting to correct my ma'asim. And in that zechus of working on becoming a more humble person, I will, IYH, improve and strengthen my relationships with my family, spouse, children and, ultimately, Hakodosh Boruch Hu!