

HOW TO EARN AND KEEP YOUR OLAM HABA

TWO PARSHIOS ABOUT CHET HALASHON

The Torah allots two *parshiyos*, Tazria and Metzora, to discuss *nega'im*, *tzaraas*. Chazal tell us that one of the main reasons *nega'im* and *tzaraas* come is for *lashon hara*. You have to understand, if the Torah makes such a fuss and elaborates to such a degree over the *onshim* of *lashon hara*, it behooves us to contemplate once in a while about the seriousness of *nega'im* and *lashon hara*. לפיכך משה מזהיר את ישראל, therefore, Moshe warned Am Yisrael, ואומר להם זאת תהי' תורת המצורע תורת המוציא שם רע, when he said to them, "This shall be the law for a *metzora* - the law of the one that gives out a bad name (רע)."¹

RAV YANNAI AND THE PEDDLER

The first thing we are going to begin with is a Medrash Rabbah (ibid.) in this *parshah*. The Medrash says, מי האיש ההפץ חיים. "who is the man who desires live. There was a story with a certain salesman," מעשה ברובל אחד שהיה מחזיר בעירות שהיו סמוכות, "who would go around to towns that were close to Tzipori. He would announce and say, 'Who wants to buy the potion of life?' They would all cling to him." They used to have these snake charmers going around trying to sell all kind of medicines, and *l'havdil*, this *roichel* (peddler) was saying, "Whoever wants to buy *sam hachaim*, step up, take a number." Nu. So R' Yannai heard the guy saying, מאן בעי סם חיים, "Who wants *sam hachaim*?" and his curiosity was piqued. He wanted to see what the fellow was selling. Was it a scam perhaps?

So R' Yanni called him over and he said, תא סק להקא זבין לי, "Come over here. I want to buy what you're selling." אמר ליה לאו, "He said to him, 'You and those like you don't need it. I'm not selling it to people like you.'" But אטרח עליה, R' Yanni insisted and said, "No. I want to know what you're selling. I want to buy some." Nu, so the fellow came to R' Yanni, סליק, "Whoever wants to buy *sam hachaim*?" and he put his and into his satchel and he pulled out a *sefer* Tehillim and he showed R' Yannai the *passuk*, מי האיש ההפץ חיים, "Argh, that's all," he says, "Oh, *ir zogt gut*. You're saying something good. Shlomo Hamelech also declared, שמר פיו ולשונו שמר מצרות נפשו, "He who guards his mouth and tongue guards himself from trouble" (Mishlei 23:3). And then R' Yannai said to the peddler, כל ימי, all my days, ולא הייתי יודע, I did not know, היכן הוא פשוט, the *pashute pshat*, עד שבא רובל, until this peddler came, והודיעו, and he told me, מי האיש ההפץ חיים."

You have to know that a person who talks *lashon hara* is not only not shomer *mitzuros nafshoi*, but he is a person who is shortening and diminishing his life.

Now, everybody knows this famous *medrash*, but not everybody knows the *pshat* in the *medrash*. What exactly did R' Yannai hear? What *chiddush* did he hear from this *roichel* that he didn't hear until now?! How could the great R' Yannai read this *pasuk* his entire life and not know its basic *pshat* until this peddler explained it to him?! Now, *vos shteit* in the *medrash* is that there was some aspect that this is *sam chaim*. He didn't *chap* that this was a medicine for life.

So the first *shaaleh* you have to ask is what life was he talking about? What exactly did he mean? There are a number of *pshatim*, and today I want to share with you the *pshat* from the gaon R' Nosson Adler (1741-1800) in his *sefer* called *Kosnos Or*.

RECEIVING THE MITZVOS OF SOMEONE WHO SLANDERS YOU

R' Nosson Adler says an interesting *pshat* that has a powerful lesson. In the *Sefer Chassidim*, it says as follows: פעם אחת מה מעשים, and the angels showed him, והראו לו מעשים, *shamayim*, there was a certain pious man that died. And he came to *shamayim*, מעשים, actions that he had never done throughout his lifetime. טובים ומצות מה שלא עשה מימיו, (If somebody would offer me free *maasim tovim*, I would just be quiet. If they are offering things, just smile and say "thank you." Say "*baruch Hashem*"). But this chassid said, הלא לא עשיתי דבר זה מעולם, I never did these things, והשיבו לו שאותן בני אדם, and the *malachei hashareis* responded to him and said, שאותן בני אדם, those people, שדיברו לשון הרע עליך, that spoke *lashon hara* on you, עשו המצוות האלה, did those *mitzvos*. and you took the *sechar* of those *mitzvos* from them, and they were given to you. It's a *peledike* *Sefer Chassidim*.

¹ דבר אחר, זאת תהיה תורת המצורע, הדין הוא דכתיב (תהלים לה יג): מי האיש ההפץ חיים. מעשה ברובל אחד שהיה מחזיר בעירות שהיו סמוכות לצפורי והיה מכריז ואומר מאן בעי למזבן סם חיים, אודקין עליה, רבי ינאי הנה יתיב ופשיט בתורקליניה שמעיה דמכריו מאן בעי סם חיים, אמר ליה תא סק להקא זבין לי, אמר ליה לאו אנת צריך ליה ולא דכוותך, אטרח עליה סליק לגביה הוציא לו ספר תהלים הראה לו פסוק: מי האיש ההפץ חיים, מה כתוב בתריה (תהלים לה יד טו): נצר לשונך מרע, סור מרע ועשה טוב. אמר רבי ינאי אף שלמה מכריו ואומר (משלי כא, כג): שמר פיו ולשונו שמר מצרות נפשו. אמר רבי ינאי כל ימי הייתי קורא הפסוק הזה ולא הייתי יודע היכן הוא פשוט עד שבא רובל זה והודיעו, מי האיש ההפץ חיים, לפיכך משה מזהיר את ישראל ואומר להם: זאת תהיה תורת המצורע, תורת המוציא שם רע (ויקרא רבה ט"ז:ב)

is the *eitzah*? The *eitzah* is that before you start to do *mitzvos*, **נָצַר לְשׁוֹנְךָ מִמְּדַבֵּר מְרָמָה**, “Guard your tongue from evil, your lips from deceitful speech.” (v. 14) Because if you’re not going to keep your mouth quiet, all your *mitzvos* are not going to help you and you are going to lose them with the *dibbur* of *lashon hara*. It’s the most frightening thing.

Usually, people you talk *lashon hara* about are not your best friends. It’s usually somebody you don’t love so much. Somebody you’re jealous of, somebody you feel doesn’t deserve so much *tov*. You go and you talk *lashon hara* and that’s the person who is going to end up with your *zechusim*. My friend, that’s not going to be pretty. It’s not *pashut*. *Amol* (sometimes) you come across a person that is not an easy person to get along with. There are some people who, by their behavior, call attention to themselves and they are the type of people who start up with others, or they are the type of people who bother others and therefore they become targets for the *chitzim*, for the arrows of *lashon hara*. They are people who make fools of themselves. And a person has to realize, you don’t want to give away your *zechusim* to that kind of person!

R’ Yanni was learning something new. Until now, R’ Yanni *teiched* the *passuk* to be referring to *olam hazeh*. **מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ**, in this world. You want to have *arichas yamim*? **נָצַר לְשׁוֹנְךָ מִמְּרָע**. And this *roichel* came and was *mechadesh* that keeping your mouth shut was *simah dechayah de’olam haba*.

KNOWING YOUR NAME ON YOM HADIN

The Chofetz Chaim brings down in *sefer Shemiras Halashon* an interesting nugget, in the name of the Shelah. Everybody knows about the *minhag* at the end of *shemoneh esrei* to say a *passuk* that begins and ends with the letters of your name. My *passuk* is **חֵיל עוֹשֵׂה הַיּוֹם הַרְמוֹמָה יְמִין ה’ רוממה ימין ה’ עושה חיל** - “The right hand of Hashem is exalted! The right hand of Hashem is triumphant!” (Tehillim 118:16). It starts with a *yud* and ends with a *lamed*. What’s the reason you have to know your *passuk*? Because they say, when you come to the next world, you could forget your name. When you “step up to the plate” up there, they are going to ask you to state your name. And if you don’t know how to answer the first question, that’s not good. “Ba, ba, ba, ba.” “You don’t know your name? What is this?” You’ve got to have a name.

So I always thought the *pshat* was because they called the guy maybe Shmelke, they called him Itzikel or they called him Joey or they called him Frank or Harry. So then when he comes and says, his name is Harry and they say, “What?” They look in the book, “There is no name Harry over here. There are no Franks over here.” So they want to know, “What is your name?” That is what I always thought the *pshat* was.

Zogt the Chofetz Chaim, *nein*, it is not so. He says that when you get the *schar* of the other guy’s *mitzvos*, they don’t just transfer his *mitzvos* from his account and put them into your account, and now, they are together with all your other *mitzvos* and *ma’asim tovim* and they don’t stand out. *Zogt* the Chofetz Chaim, no. You get the *sechar* of that guy’s *mitzvah* with that guy’s name on it. So they look into your account and it says - let’s say under Yisroel Brog it will say, Chaim. What is Chaim accountable for? He did a *ma’aseh mitzvah*. You donated your *mitzvos* to me. It’s going to come across with the name of the ‘donor’. So *mimeillah*, the guy is going to get confused. They are going to ask the guy, “So what exactly is your name? Is it Yanky, is it Moishy, what’s the name exactly?” So therefore, says the Chofetz Chaim, you say a *passuk* so that you remember your name.

A *mentsch* has to consider this seriously. You don’t have enough assets to ‘share’ the wealth. We’re all scraping the barrel here, and if you have a couple of good ones, you don’t want to give them away to people you don’t feel kindly toward.

THE VILNA GAON’S LETTER

I want to share with you a letter from the Vilna Gaon (Iggeres HaGr”a) that he penned to his family.³ And he says, **והכל יביא**, for every *dibur* you’re going to be taken to *mishpat*. **ולא נאבד אפילו דיבור קל**, and therefore, I’m warning you, he says, **ולכן אני מזהירך**, that you should train yourself **לישב יחידי**, to sit alone. Some of us are challenged. Some people are what you call very introverted by nature and they are quiet little *lemechlech*, so it’s not their challenge. Then there are people who are more outgoing, extroverts. And he says, **כי חטא הלשון על כולו**. You understand that? *Lashon hara* is *keneged kulam*. He says, “Why do I have to be *ma’arich* on this?!” He says, **שכל מצותי ותורתיו של אדם**, all the *mitzvos* and all the *toros* of a person won’t help him **למה אומנותו של אדם בעולם הזה**, a person has to train himself in this world to make himself like a mute. And he should stick his lips together like **כשתי ריחים**, like two millstones.

³ ח"ל: זכור הראשונים אשר היו לפנינו, שכל אהבתם וחמדתם ושמתם כבר אבדה (שם) ומקבלים על זה דינים מרובים. ומה הנאה לאדם שסופו לפרוש לעפר רמה ותולעה, וכל הנאות יתהפכו לו בקבר למרה והמות כרוך באדם. ומה העולם הזה, כי כל ימיו כעס ומכאובים, גם בלילה איננו מניח לו לישון, והמות אינו מקווה, והכל יביא במשפט, על כל דיבור, ולא נאבד אפילו דיבור קל. ולכן אני מזהירך, שתרגיל בכל היותר לישב יחידי, כי חטא הלשון על כולו. כמאמר חכמינו ז"ל (תוספתא פאה, א), "אלו דברים שאדם אוכל כו' ולשון הרע כנגד כולם". ומה לי להאריך בזה הענין החמור מכל העבירות. "כל עמל האדם לפיתו" (קהלת ג, ז), אמרו חכמינו ז"ל, שכל מצותיו ותורתיו של אדם אינו מספיק למה שמוציא מפיו. "מה אומנותו של אדם בעולם הזה, ישים עצמו כאלם" כו' (תולין פט, א). וידיק שפתותיו כשתי ריחים וכו'. וכל כך הקלע הכל בהבל פיו של דברים בטלים, ועל כל דיבור הבל, צריך להתקלע מסוף העולם ועד סופו. וכל זה בדברים יתירים. אבל בדברים האסורים, כגון: לשון הרע וליצנות ושבועות ונדריים ומחלוקת וקללות, ובפרט בבית הכנסת ובשבת ויום טוב, על אלו צריך לירד לשאלו למטה הרבה מאד, ואי אפשר לשער גודל היסורין והצרות שסובל בשביל דיבור אחד (זהר), ולא נאבד אפילו דיבור אחד שלא נכתב. בעלי גדיפין הולכין תמיד אל כל אדם ואדם ואין נפרדים ממנו וכותבין כל דיבור ודיבור, "כי עוף השמים יוליך את-הקול, ובעל כנפים יגיד דבר" (קהלת י, ב). "אל תתן את פך לחטיא את בשרך ואל תאמר לפני המלאך כי שגגה היא למה יקצף" וגו' (קהלת ה, ה). ובכל אשר צריך לך, תקח הכל על ידי שליח, ואף אם הוא פעמים ושליש ביקר, "היד ה' תקצר" וגו' (במדבר יא, כג). השם יתברך זון מקרני ראמים עד ביצי כנים (עבודה זרה ג, א), ונותן לכל אחד ואחד די מחסורו. ובשבת ויום טוב אל תדברו כלל מדברים שאינם נצרכים מאד וגם בדברים הנצרכים למאד תקצרו מאד, כי קדושת שבת גדולה מאד, ובקושי התירו לומר שלום בשבת" (ירושלמי שבת, וכן בתוספת שבת דף קיג). ראה, בדיבור אחד כמה החמירו. ותכבד את השבת מאד כאשר היה לפני, ואל תצמצם כלל, כי "כל מונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכיפורים, חוץ מהוצאות שבתות והוצאות יום טוב וכו'." (ביצה טז, א), וכו'. וזה כל האדם, לא יניח לו להפצו "במתג ורסן עדין לבלום" (תהלים לב, ט). ועד יום מותו צריך האדם להתייטר, ולא בעתניתים וסיגופים רק ברסן פיו ובתאוותו, וזהו התשובה, ולזה כל פרי העולם-הבא, כמו שכתוב (משלי ו, כג): "כי נר מצוה" וגו', אבל "ודרך חיים תוכחות מוסר", וזהו יותר מכל התעניתים וסיגופים בעולם. וכל רגע ורגע שהאדם חוסס פיו וזכה בשבילו לאור הגנוז שאין מלאך ובריה יכולים לשער (מדרש). ואומר הכתוב (תהלים לז, יג - יד): "מי האיש החפץ חיים, אהב ימים וגו' נצר לשונך מרע, ושפתך מדבר מרמה", ובוזה יכופר לו כל עון וניצול משאלת תחתית, כמו שכתוב (משלי כא, כג): "שמר פיו [מאכילה ושתייה יתרה] ולשונו [מדברים בטלים], שמר מצרות נפשו". "מות וחיים ביד לשון" (משלי יח, כא). אי למי שממית עצמו בשביל דיבור אחד. "ואין יתרון לבעל הלשון" (קהלת י, יא), ולכל יש רפואה חוץ כו'. והעיקר שלא תדבר בשום אדם בשבחו וכל שכן בגנותו, כי מה לו לאדם בדבר זרות. "שוחה עמוקה פי זרות, זעום ויפל שם" (משלי כב, יד), וכו'. אבל העיקר לזכות לעולם הבא בשמירת פיו, וזהו יותר מכל התורה והמעשים, ואלו נקראים "נשים שאנוגות" (ישעיה לב, ט), כי הפה קדש קדשים, וכו'.

Now, listen to this. He introduces us to an interesting thing. There is Gehinnom, when a person dies, if he is *zocheh* to go to Gehinnom. You know what Gehinnom is? Gehinnom is a hospital. It's where they cure you. They heal you. They purify you. It has every single division in Gehinnom. There is only one specialty that they don't have in that hospital. They have many, many *maduros* (bonfires). You know what they don't have? What don't they have in Gehinnom? They don't have the department of anesthesiology. There is no anesthesia. You know what that is? *Hardamah* (anesthesia). They don't have the thing that removes the pain. That is the only part that everybody loves about hospitals. You have to endure all kinds of suffering but at least they have pain medications to give you shots, to deaden the pain. But in the next world, my *Zeide* (Rav Avidgor Miller, zt"l) used to always say, that is the only aspect that is missing.

“BUNGEE JUMPING”

Then there is *Gan Eden*. What do you get for talking *lashon hara*? Obviously, you're not getting *Gan Eden*, so you'd think you get Gehinnom. Comes along the Vilna Gaon and says, no. You know what you're getting for that? *בָּהַ הַקֶּלֶט*. You know what *kaf hakelah* means? Slingshot. You know what a slingshot is? You take a rock, you put it in a pouch, pull back and you let go and boom, the rock goes flying. *Kaf hakelah* is something that most people don't know about and don't want to know about. *Kaf hakelah* is what you have to do to get prepared for surgery in Gehinnom.

A person who is sick can't go to a doctor and say, “I need surgery.” They run all types of tests. Before many surgeries, you have to go on a diet. You have to prepare to make sure your heart is healthy. To go to *gehinnom*, you have to go there when you're ready to be cured, but in order to be cured, you have to be prepped before the surgery. They called it the pre-op. This prep takes place in the *kaf hakelah*. Now, let me explain to you what that means.

The Vilna Gaon says, for *הבל פיו של דברים בטלים*, just for chit chat, could you imagine yourself being flung, being shot out of a cannon from one side of the world to the other? *צריך להתקלע מסוף העולם ועד סופו*, you need to be shot from one end of the world to another! Try ten feet, see how you feel. *וכל זה*, all this, he says, *בדברים יתרים*, for extra, unnecessary words! Very scary. Just *devarim beteilim*, not *devarim asurim*. You like bungee jumping. That was the lesson I learned from bungee jumping. I once went to watch bungee jumping off a bridge. They tie you on some harness and they have a very elastic band that you're sure could break easily. They take a person and they throw him off the bridge, and the person heads straight down to the water. It's a very frightening thing. I once saw it take place on a crane, a very high crane. They throw you off the crane and you go down, down, down. You feel, *dos is kaf hakelah*. *Dos is kaf hakelah*. You feel like you're dropping but there is no end to the dropping! And then, when you get to one side of the world, you start all over again. So all day long, you're getting shot back and forth in the slingshot treatment. And this is just to prepare yourself for *gehinnom*!!

But *לשון הרע וליצנות ושבעות ונדרים ומחלוקת וקללות, ובפרט בבית הכנסת*, *בדברים האסורים*, but for the forbidden speech, like *one has to descend into a deep abyss*, - *צריך לירד לשאול למטה הרבה מאד*, - *ואי אפשר לשער*, - *גודל היסורין והצרות שסובל בשביל דיבור אחד* *utterance of this type.* and it is impossible to imagine the level of suffering one will endure for just one utterance of this type.”

I told you a story of a guy who made a *séance*. One Israeli soldier called a friend of his, a *neshamah*, and he called him up. Both were totally *frei*. One of them died and he asked him, “Where are you now? In *Gan Eden* in *Gehinnom*?” He said, “No.” He said, “*Eifah atah*?” He says, “*Kaf hakelah*.” So the questioner didn't know what that was. “I'll explain it to you,” he says. “How long are you there?” He said, “For 240 years.” And then he is going to be judged. He said, “For 240 years! What did you do?” He started listing for him his *aveiros*: *Chillul Shabbos, niddah, tefillin*. All the *aveiros*. The guy didn't do any *mitzvos*. The guy was empty from *mitzvos*. 240, ever heard that? You think, he gets shot around for a couple of hours in a bungee rope, okay, big deal. But 240 years?!

WHEN RAV ITZELE CAME IN A DREAM

Now, R' Itzele Blazer (1837-1907), known as R' Itzele Peterburger, a *talmid* of R' Yisrael Salanter (1809-1883), commanded before he died, that he didn't want any *hespedim* (eulogies) and they shouldn't say any *shvachim* (praises) on him.⁴ And his friend, R' Chaim Berlin (1832-1912), who was the eldest son of the Netziv and his best friend, was *mechaleik* between a *hesped* and between *bechi*. He said “*Bechi*, crying is over the loss of a *tzaddik* - that you can do. But to say *hesped* about his *maalos*, that you can't do.” And he said, “Since R' Itzele just said, ‘don't give a *hesped* on me,’ so there is not going to be *hespedim* but we are going to get up and we're going to cry over the loss of R' Itzele.” And he was *me'orer* the *kahal* to great *bechi*.

Writes R' Chaim Berlin: “On the following *leil Shabbos* after the *levayah*, on Friday night *samuch le'or haboker*, at the end of the night *ba hamano'ach etzli*, my dear friend, R' Itzele came to me in a dream. And he said, ‘*Yasher koach al shelo higadeta alei shevach*. I thank you that you didn't say *shevach* about me. And I asked him a question, I said, ‘*Mah naaseh bedino be'olam hahu*?’ (Now, you have to understand, R' Itzele was a *kadosh*. He was the *baal mussar* of *baal mussars*. He was R' Yisrael's prototype of

⁴ מובא בס' "התורה והמצוה" ד' קלט, ה"ל: על ההתעוררות בענין שמירת הדיבור יש להביא עובדא נפלאה המובאת בספר על הגר"י בלור זצ"ל, שציון קודם מיתתו שלא להספידו ולא לספר בשבחיו כלל והגרייה ברלין זצ"ל, שהיה יריד נפשו, חילק בין בכי למספה, שהבכי הוא על חסרונו של צדיק ומספד הוא סיפור שבחיו ומעלותיו, וצאתו של הגר"י היתה לאסור רק מספד ולא את הבכי. יעורר את הקהל בבכי על העדרו של הצדיק, ולאחר מכן סיפר במכתבו "והי בליל ש"ק שלאחריו סמוך לאור הבוקר בא המנוח אצלי בחלום ואמר לי "ישר כח על שלא הגדת עלי שבחיי, ושאלתי ממנו מה נעשה בדינו בעולם הזה, ואמר לי שדין של מעלה חמור מאוד שאי אפשר לשום אדם בעוה"ז לשער כלל, וביחוד מקפידים מאוד על דיבורים האסורים שנדברו שלא כהוגן, ושאלתי עוד איך עלה בדינו, והשיבני שכל ימות החול לא הניחוהו לבוא אלי בחלום ולתת לי ישר כח, עד יום השבת שנתנו לו מנוחה, והניחוהו להיראות אלי בחלום. יותר לא דיבר מאומה ונעלם ממני חלקי הלך לו ולא ראיתי עוד, והקיצוני וכו'. וחתנו הגר"ר חזקיהו יוסף משיקובסקי זצ"ל הוסיף, כי בו ביום בש"ק, שלח אליו הגרייה ברלין שליח לבוא אליו למחרת בבוקר, ובבואו סיפר לו את כל דבר החלום, והוסיף, שכששאלו מה נעשה בדינו ואמר לו "שדין של מעלה חמור מאוד" וכו', עוד הוסיף "אמנם על תלמידי חכמים יש הרבה מליצי יושה, אולם מקפידים מאוד על חטא הלשון" - כל זאת העיד הגר"י בלור אחר שידוע זמירותו העצומה בשמירת פיו, וכן לא שח שיחת חולין כלל מר"ח אלול עד אחר יו"ב כאלם ממש, וגם בידיו האחרון התמרמר מאוד ב"דברנו דופי" בבכיות וצערות ומה נענה אנו! (מתוך החוברת "אבני זכרון" / ישיבת סלבודקא), עכ"ל.

a *baal mussar*. He was a *talmid chacham she'ein kemoso*. He was an *anav*. In Brisk, they said about him, *anivus* like you've never heard of, "out of town."

He was a person that had *zechuyos of zikui harabim* like nobody's business. He was *mechaber sifrei yirah* and *sifrei mussar* and *sifrei shaalos* and *teshuvos*. He was a giant! So, when his friend asked him, "What happened with your *din*?" we would have thought he would say, "*Baruch Hashem*, I had a rebbe, R' Yisrael Salanter, and I followed his direction, I learned *mussar* and it was a piece of cake." But what did he say?

He said, *שדין של מעלה חמור מאוד*, 'the judgment Above is very serious, ל'שער כלל' "No human being in this world could imagine how strict the *din* is in *shamayim*.' You try to know Zohar, Reishis Chochmah. You know all these *sefarim* that talk about the *chomer hadin*? Why can't you imagine it? *Im kol hasefarim im kol hamussar im kol hakabalah im kol hameseches gehinnom im kol hameseches chibut hakever*, you can't be *mesha'er vos tutzach in yeneh velt, vos meint chamur hadin*. With all the *sefarim*, with all the *mussar*, with all the *kabbalah*, with all the learning you do about Gehinnom, with all the learning you do about *chibut hakever* you cannot understand what happens in the other world, and what is meant by the seriousness of the *din*. *וביחוד*, 'and in particular,' said R' Itzele, 'I'm going to give you a heads up. You know what thing they are most *makpid* on?' (Take a guess. What do you think t they are most *makpid* on in the next world?) על דיבורים האסורים שנדברו שלא *כהוגן*, 'on the forbidden speech that was spoken in an incorrect manner.'

And I asked him, 'Nu, so what happened? What happened with your *din*, *lema'aseh*?' So he said, 'I didn't come to you until Shabbos morning, and that was because I didn't have the ability. I wasn't able to come to you to give you a *yasher koach*. Until *yom haShabbos*, they gave me some *menuchah* and then they enabled me to come to you.'

That was the famous story that everybody knows from R' Chaim Berlin. R' Chaim Berlin had a son-in-law. His son-in-law's name was R' Chizkiyahu Yosef Mishkovsky (1884-1946). And he said that R' Chaim Berlin told him over the whole *chalom* personally. And then he added and said as follows: "However, for *talmidei chachamim* there are a lot of *melitzei yosher*." Their *zechusim*, I guess, are *meilitz yosher* for them. *אולם מקפידים מאוד על חטא הלשון* - "But they are exceedingly strict about sins done with speech." Now, R' Itzele Blazer was known to the extreme to be *makpid in chet halashon*. He didn't say a word from the beginning of Elul until after Yom Kippur (outside of learning and tefillah). *Chet halashon* is *nora me'od*.

"PUT A CORK IN IT"!

Now, if a person wants to correct *chet halashon*, how is he *mesaken* it? What is the *eitzah*? What is the *tikun*?

So, the Vilna Gaon writes in that letter, that until a fellow dies, he needs to put himself through *yisurim*. He has to be *meyaser* himself in order to be *mesaken* himself. What are the *yisurim* that a person should do? You'd imagine that the Vilna Gaon would say you should learn the whole Shas in one week. Learn a whole *mesechta* in a day *beretzifus*. He says that self-control of your mouth doesn't come through *taaneisim* (fasts) or *sigufim* (afflictions), but *ברסן פיו ובתאוותו*, "by controlling your mouth and your desires," he says. Just putting a bit in your mouth! *וזהו התשובה*. That is the *teshuvah*. *ולזה כל פרי העולם הבא*, "this is your whole reward of the World to Come." Do you hear this?! You want to enjoy your *olam haba*?! Want to come up and enjoy the fruits of your labor?! I hope so. He says, you know how we do it? *וְדַרְךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכְחוֹת מוֹסֵר*, "reproving discipline is the way to life" (Mishlei 6:23). *וזהו יותר מכל התעניתים וסיגופים בעולם*. "refraining from *lashon hara* is worth more than all *taaneisim* and *sigufim* in the world." Ever heard of this? Isn't that amazing?!

When I read this, I said, "At least I'm in good shape during the night! I sleep the whole night, and I keep my mouth closed when I'm sleeping!" If that's the *cheshbon* then some *bachurim* get many hours of *shluf*, so it's a *gevaldige* thing. But no, that doesn't work. You know what it means? It says, you have to put a bit in your mouth. You know what a *resen* in your *piv* is? That means, when you want to talk. When you're sleeping, you don't get *sechar* for that. But you want to talk and you make a conscious choice, ah - that's different! I'm going to withhold my *dibur* or I'm going to withhold a *taavah* of mine.

Now, I want you to know, my *rebbe* (Rav Meir Halevi Soloveichik, zt"l) once pointed out an amazing insight to me. He said, "People think that if they hold back on their *taavos*, that it means to say they have to accomplish tremendous amounts. Who knows what they have to give up on?! That's not correct" he said. I remember, he showed me a *Chazal*. I was once in his bedroom, he was learning, and he shared with me a *medrash*. He says, Achav was *zocheh* to tremendous *zechus* - he did *teshuvah*. What did he do? He withheld his *taaveh*. Do you know what he did? Instead of eating breakfast at the regular time, he waited three hours. Some say he waited an hour. Some say he waited a few minutes. That is called withholding. That is called holding yourself back. That is called *resen piv vetaavaso*; *וכל רגע ורגע*, every second, he says, *שהאדם חוסם פיו*, that a person closes his mouth, he gets an incredible reward. This is one of the most amazing *chiddushim* from the Vilna Gaon, because many *sefarim* have been written about this, as to where the source for the following idea is found. The Vilna Gaon says that for every second a person consciously closes his mouth, and doesn't say something, he is *זוכה בשבילו לאור הגנוז*, he merits *or haganuz*, the hidden light, the real thing, *שאינו מלאך ובריה*, that no angel or any creature, *יכולים לשער*, is able to be measure! And that is the *kaparah* "for **any** sin," the Vilna Gaon is *mechadesh* to us.

Before seeing this letter from the Vilna Gaon, I thought that if a person keeps his mouth quiet **before** he speaks *lashon hara*, okay, *baruch Hashem*, he's good to go. But if you do that after you speak, then you're finished. The Vilna Gaon says, the *passuk* of *נצור לשונך מרע*, "protect your tongue from evil," is **after** you spoke *lashon hara*. You want to be *zocheh* to *olam haba* and you want to have a *kaparah* of *kol avon*, you want to be *שמר מצרות נפשו*, your *nefesh*, your *neshamah*?!
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That is the *eitzah*. That is the *eitzah*, *Rabbosai*!!

Therefore, we should start to practice, start to train ourselves. Any time a person has a *taavah* to talk and it's not necessary, say to yourself, "You know what? I'm going to make a conscious decision not to say what I would like to say. This is called *resen piv*. "Hashem, let it be a *kaparah* for myself." Who doesn't need *kaparah*? Everyone needs *kaparah*, right? *Chata'im belashon*. A conscious decision. If a person wants to hold back on his *taavos*, Hashem says, "You know what? You're going to get *kaparah*. You're going to be *shomer mitzaros nafsho*." Of course, you should ask Hashem and *daven* to Hashem to be *zocheh* to this. You're training yourself. "I'm accepting the directive of our *Chazal* that says, *yaaseh atzmo ke'ilem*." This applies to even quiet people, introverted people who are quiet, but when they decide to talk, then they become gabby. Or, when they have their one friend that they open up to, they can speak nonstop. They have no problem. A person has to realize that if he is *שומר פיו*, he's going to be *שומר מצרות נפשו*. He's going to be *zocheh* to a lot of *kaparah*. And then hopefully, when you get to the next world, you'll end up with something good.

WHEN TO BE EXTRA CAREFUL

Now, don't think that talking at all times is the same thing. Talking on Shabbos and Yom Tov, the Vilna Gaon says, is much worse than talking during the rest of the week. The Vilna Gaon held very strongly in this regard. A person who talks during learning time, it's also worse. *Keheineh vekeheineh*. And if a person is *mechazek* himself, hopefully, he will be *zocheh* to have a little *kaparah* and it will be *shemirah* for his *nefesh*.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The *chiddush* that Rav Yanai learned from the pasuk of *מי האיש ההפך היום*, was that controlling one's mouth from speaking *lashon hora* is the *sam hachaim* of a person's own *Olam Haba*, and not just something that brings him benefits in This World alone. The Gr"a vividly portrayed for us the devastating and frightening effects of speaking even *devarim beteilim*, much less *lashon hara*, *rechilus*, or talking during davening, etc. What is perhaps even more frightening, is that by speaking *lashon hora*, we not only give away our hard-earned *zechuyos* of Torah and Mitzvos to the people against whom we are speaking, but we also receive their *aveiros*, and even our name gets "transferred" to them, *r"l*. This is why, as the Chofetz Chaim points out, a person repeats *pesukim* following davening that remind him of his name - so that he remembers it during the Judgment in the Next World, and distinguishes it from other names that may end up on his account! However, despite all the seriousness and warnings, there is a powerful *tikkun* and a straightforward *eitzah* on how to overcome this most pernicious *aveirah*. This *eitzah* fortunately doesn't require difficult fasts or afflictions, but it does entail making a real and conscious decision to hold ourselves back - even for a short amount of time - from the *taivah* for the forbidden speech. This coming week, I will make a conscious effort to stop myself from continuing further in forbidden speech if I slipped up, *chas v'shalom*, in the *chet* of *lashon hora*. And in that *zechus*, I will be *zoiche* not only to the *ohr haganuz* but will achieve a *kaparah* for all my *aveiros*, *IY"H*. Perhaps, starting to read a few paragraphs from the *sefer Shmiras Halashon* of the Chofetz Chaim during each of the Shabbos meals may be another simple *eitza* to raise my awareness of this *aveirah* and how to begin overcoming it - because my own *Olam Haba* literally depends on it!