

By Rabbi
Warren Kasztl

“AND LOSHON HARA OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL”

Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT'A

In memory of

Eliyahu ben Yehuda, Dr. Elliot Hahn

No'omi Malka bat Mordechai HaKohen, Naomi Weiss

In Parashat Shemot, a critical event occurs that paves the way for us to understand the title of this article. One day, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian abusing a Jewish woman and by expressing the name of Hashem he kills him. On day two, Moshe witnesses two Jews fighting with each other. When he intercedes to make peace, one of them looks at Moshe and says, “Who made you an officer and a judge over us? Are you going to kill me by saying (the name of Hashem) as you killed the Egyptian?” At that moment, Moshe realized that everything that occurred the day before was public knowledge. Rashi on “ochen noda ha’dovor” is famous and expresses that because of this, Moshe was able to understand why the Egyptians were the masters and we were the slaves. It came down to nothing more – and nothing less – than the reality that our nation had a problem with loshon hara.

Before several questions are asked on this, permit me please to share that in the 1980s Rov Kessin and his twin brother HaRav Mendel Kessin, authored four cassettes on this topic. I dare to say that with the advances in modern technology, they did as much to bring awareness and stem the tide of this grievous sin as did the Chofetz Chaim. It’s estimated that over a million of our people have heard the insights of the Chofetz Chaim along with their Torah on this topic. The questions on the Rashi expressed above are straight forward. If in the positive Torah learning outweighs the performance of every other Mitzvah, how do we understand that in the negative that loshon hara outweighs every other sin including murder, idol worship and adultery? Secondly, how does Moshe Rabbeinu conclude from the behavior of two Jews that an entire nation is worthy of back-breaking servitude? Lastly, every Shabbat and Yom Tov in P’sukay D’zimra we say, “Who is the person that desires life, loving days to see good? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile”. How do we understand this grand reward for simply speaking properly? The answers to these questions come with the ability to impact a person’s life much greater than you can imagine.

All of us know that there is a judgment process that occurs throughout the year, with a special focus on Rosh Hashana. Bait Din Shel Ma’ala is comprised of its angelic judges, the prosecutor and a defense attorney representing the sinner. The Satan has three jobs. The first is to test the nature of our free will by tempting us to sin. With all the temptation he imposes, every person can freely choose to say yes or no to what they are facing. Satan’s second task is to prosecute against us in the heavenly court, while his third role is that of the executioner. The Satan is not evil, but just doing his job in representing the Middat HaDin and trying to move mankind toward “shlaymut”, the standard of excellence Din calls for and mankind is capable of. Every person knows that it serves in their best interest to stay out of court. Do everything you can to settle rather than expose your self to the cost, aggravation, the time involved in going to trial, and most importantly, the risk of losing your case. As readily as this applies to our world, it applies even more so to the heavenly court. In heaven, there is no plea bargaining, no opportunity to strike a deal that the judge can sign off on. Everything is run strictly by the book – no exceptions!!

How do we stay out of court? The easiest way is to be aware of what we are doing, recognize when we have

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tripped and DO TESHUVA!! If we sincerely repent, our case will be removed from the heavenly docket and won't be heard. What an opportunity, what a kindness Hashem has provided us with!! There are other ways we can avoid court, all of which revolve around the philosophy upon which the world operates – "midda k'neged midda", measure for measure. This does not mean that if a person does A, he will get B in return. What it means is that if a person does A, he is worthy of the mirror image of A coming back to him. One example will explain how this operates in the everyday world. Reuven has fallen upon hard times and approaches Shimon for a loan. He asks him for a sum of money and anticipates being able to repay him in three months. Shimon agrees, and leaves Reuven overjoyed. Three months pass and Shimon does not have the money to repay Reuven. Reuven says, "Don't worry Shimon. Take another six months." Six more months pass and Shimon's luck has not changed at all. Depressed and embarrassed, he returns to Reuven and explains his situation to him. Reuven senses the anguish within Shimon and says, "The loan has just been converted into a gift. You owe me nothing!!" He gives Shimon a bracha that his luck should change soon, and they depart. Let's apply these two scenarios – the loan and the gift - to the concept of midda k'neged midda and how this impacts the heavenly judicial system. Reuven has a sin on his ledger that he has not properly repented for. He's on the court docket and the Satan is ready to bring Din against him next Wednesday. But wait, says the angel in charge of the court schedule. Reuven made a loan to Shimon for three months and extended his payback date to nine months. If Reuven gave Shimon six extra months to repay his loan, then Reuven is entitled to extra time to repent for his sin. The court date is postponed. As the new court date approaches, the Satan once again arrives to confirm that Reuven is on the docket only to find out that the case has been dismissed. When the Satan questions what happened, he is informed that since he forgave the loan by transforming it into a gift, so too was his sin forgiven and the court date cancelled.

Let's apply the midda k'neged midda principle to Shemirat HaLoshon. By applying this to the worst-case scenario – having to come to court – we can clearly demonstrate how powerful this ethic really is. Let's say Levi is being charged *by the Satan* with laxity in his Shemirat Shabbat. His laziness resulted in violating one of the thirty-nine primary work categories prohibited on Shabbat. The Satan

thinks he has an open and shut case and is prepared to enjoy the victory he anticipates. What he's not aware of is that Levi is dedicated to making sure he guards his tongue properly and doesn't malign another person verbally or otherwise. The moment the Satan approaches the bench to begin his prosecution, something strange happens. He thinks he's talking, but no words are coming out of his mouth. Levi does not speak negatively, so the Satan is rendered incapable of speaking negatively against Levi. His ability to do his job is paralyzed. Similarly, Levi refuses to listen to gossip about others. In the same manner that the Satan cannot speak, the angelic judges cannot hear anything negative about Levi because, midda k'neged midda, he refuses to hear anything negative about other people. Everyone is in court but rendered powerless because Levi is dedicated to the laws of Shemirat HaLoshon. Can Levi continue to be lax with his Shabbat observance and get away with it? No, he cannot. He may be able to dodge the court system, but eventually he will have to face Hashem and deal with His consequences. The advantage is that our Heavenly Father punishes His child with elements of mercy and understanding built into the process, factors that are not part of the court system. The above scenario explains why the generation that lived during the reign of King Saul, during which time people spoke about and measured what was owed to them with great precision, died in war, while during the days of Achav and Izevel, people guarded their tongue, so despite the evils of that time, they went out to battle and came home victorious. This is why the promise of long and good life is fulfilled in someone who guards their tongue. They short-circuit the judgment process and hopefully in doing so, buy enough time to realize the mistakes they've made and do Teshuva. This also explains how loshon hara can be worse than the three sins that one is required to sacrifice his life for rather than violate. If one guards their tongue, they may be guilty of those heinous crimes, but their case will never be processed through Bait Din Shel Ma'alah because the perpetrator will render the Satan and the judges incapable of hearing the charges.

Here is a fact that many are not aware of. People go to great lengths to make sure they won't be impacted by an "ayin hara", an evil eye. I'm not suggesting that anyone tear off their red bendels or the like, but there is a far more secure way to protect ourselves from this danger. What is

an ayin hara, an evil eye? Reuven and Levi are talking about Shimon and the new car he just purchased. They question where he got the money for such an extravagant purchase, as the new car is one he cannot afford. This is not a conversation Jews should be having, as it victimizes all three people: The speaker, the listener and Shimon, the innocent victim who is not even there. All three are going to be forced to come before the Heavenly Court: Reuven and Levi for obvious reasons, and Shimon because, as the subject of the illicit conversation, his worthiness regarding this new car comes into question and therefore is dragged into Beit Din with the other two. What can Shimon do to protect himself – other than wear a red bendel?! The same midda k'neged midda principle applies. If Shimon does not speak or listen to loshon hara, then the court process that applies to him will not be able to be expressed by the Satan and/or heard by the judges. Shimon walks away from the entire process unscathed. As it applies to ayin hara, everyone can trust the concept of shmirat ha'loshon with much greater confidence than any number of red bendels.

With this understanding of the system in place, we are prepared to understand Moshe's response to Doson and Aviram and "ochayn noda ha'dovor". One of the concepts that marks the uniqueness of our people is "arvut", the fact that, *as one organism*, we are responsible for each other. Moshe's right to conclude that Bnai Yisroel is enslaved because of an incident that involved two people can be compared to a group of a thousand passengers travelling together on a yacht. Each has their own seat, their own personal space. If anyone were to witness a person drilling a whole beneath the seat they purchased, they would immediately stop them. Even though the passenger could say, "I purchased that seat. It belongs to me and I can do whatever I want within my allotted space", the reality is that if the person is successful in hitting the water he is drilling for, the entire ship will eventually sink. Doson and Aviram were like a disease in a small corner of a tree trunk. Left unchecked, the disease can spread and eventually kill the entire tree. This philosophy is what gave Moshe the right to apply the situation he confronted that day to the entire nation.

It is that very situation that applies to Parashat She-mot and Parashat Bo. How did Moshe know the disease precipitated by loshon hara had been cured? During the week Moshe spent with Hashem on Har Sinai, Hashem told him that we would leave Egypt enriched by the entire popu-

lation, (Shemos 3:21,22). Hashem

promised this to Avrohom during the Brit Bain HaBesorim. Moshe was to share this with Bnai Yisroel, in particular the elders who would transmit the message. The requirement this came with was that we were to keep this confidential. Can you imagine what would have happened had this become common knowledge? The Egyptians would have killed us, accusing us of grand theft in the future tense. The fact that word of this never became public Egyptian knowledge before we asked the Egyptians for their possessions provided Moshe with the necessary proof that we can control our tongue and that the loshon hara of the past with Doson and Aviram had been remedied. With this challenge behind them, Bnai Yisroel was now worthy of redemption.

There has been much said regarding the imminent Geulah and Chazal go to great lengths to express the responsibility we have as individuals, communities, indeed as a nation to hasten the arrival of Mashiach ben Yosef. There is a famous Chazal that expresses that if every Jew keeps two Shabbatot in a row, the Geulah will occur immediately. Is that realistic? Does that Chazal have a chance of becoming the reality that will usher in the Geulah? Most people will answer this question with a resounding no. There is another, far more simplistic way to bring the Geulah. Permit me to quote the Chofetz Chaim's Shmirat HaLoshon, section two, chapter seven. As an introduction, we know that the second Bait HaMikdash was destroyed due to loshon hara and sinat cheenom. Chazal logically dictate that the Geulah and the building of the eternal Bait HaMikdash will occur when the sins that destroyed number two are fully remedied. Is it reasonable to expect Jews throughout the world to participate in this healing process? Will loshon hara finally cease and will we, as a nation come to love each other? Once again, most of our own would consider achieving this highly improbable. Comes the Chofetz Chaim and shares something EXTRAORDINARY with us based on Zohar that he quotes!! ***"And behold, according to that which was clarified before*** (that the third Bait HaMikdash will only be built when we remedy the problem that resulted in the destruction of the second Bait HaMikdash) ***is the future Bayit dependent. And behold, there are those who quote in the name of the Holy Zohar that any (single) Bait Kneset that guards the peace therein as required*** (proper speech and peace between them) ***they alone can provide the merit to***

bring the Mashiach! If that is the case, the arrival of the Mashiach is within OUR hands. And know that the measure of peace required can only be achieved if we are zealous from the beginning regarding the sins of free hate and evil speech. All those who strengthen themselves to fix this sin will have a portion in the House that will be built in the future. Without them, the House will remain in ruins forever, G-d forbid". What a grand reality, and if it was said by the Chofetz Chaim, you can take it to the bank!! One Bait Knesset alone can save all of Klal Yisroel.

We've learned on many occasions that the ultimate Achdut, unity, founded in the concept of "organism" that Rabbi Akiva attempted to achieve among his twenty-four thousand students had the power to bring the Geulah despite the widespread Sinat Cheenom that resulted in the churban Bayit Sheni. This concept was authored by Rabbi Akiva who provided the holy understanding that became the Zohar to Shimon bar Yochai. Rabbi Akiva gave him his mystical knowledge in understandable "nimshal" form and instructed him to record it poetically in "moshul" form. Nonetheless, the Zohar the Chofetz Chaim quotes above proves that the actions of a dedicated few can have a profound impact on numbers many times greater than theirs.

The bigger question is which Bait Knesset is going to step forward and achieve this lofty ideal, this sanctified goal? Which Bait Knesset has the courage to take this on to its fullest degree – and bring the Geulah for all of Klal Yisroel to enjoy? Can you imagine how the Mashiach ben Yosef will greet the members of that Bait Knesset, what he will say to them? Can you imagine their place of renown as our people are gathered together in Eretz HaKadosha? They will be able to participate in securing the doors in the eternal Bayit we all await. All this, simply as a result of guarding their tongue and loving their fellow Jew in the manner prescribed by Hashem Yisborach. Avinu She'ba'Shamayim has never set us up to fail. If the laws of Shmirat HaLoshon and Ahavat Yisroel were beyond human capability, Hashem would never have required we observe them. Succeeding in this is founded on a simple state of mind that enables our eyes to see our extended family in a loving manner, judging them meritoriously, and speaking with them and about them properly.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

THE 'NATURE' OF RUCHNIYUT AND GASHMIUS

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In memory of

Eliyahu ben Yehuda – Dr. Elliot Hahn A'H

Chaya No'omi Malka bat Mordechai HaKohen – Naomi Weiss A'H

The main purpose of the ten plagues was to demonstrate to Pharaoh and by extension the entire nation of Egypt that G-d created the world, is the author of what we call "nature" and remains the active "conductor of the symphony" regarding the everyday happenings of the world in which we live. Hashem's ongoing, active role – His Hashgacha - is evident in everything from what direction human history (centered around the Jewish People), takes, to when every blade of grass sprout.

This concept manifests itself in one plague in a manner that raises a huge question regarding the Rashi that is associated with it. The plague of hail is introduced to us in a unique way. G-d declares (Shemos 9:14) that He's going to unleash "all of His wonders" against Egypt through this plague, an introduction that we do not see in any plague before this. Rashi comment on the words "es kol magayfosy" – "All of My wonders" – precipitates two questions. He says, "From here we learn that the plague of the killing of the firstborn outweighs the (previous) nine combined". On this we can ask why is Rashi's statement regarding the killing of the firstborn made here, and from where does he conclude that, indeed, this tenth plague outweighs the other nine combined?

We present the following for your consideration. The first six plagues were exaggerations of the natural process – teva. Frogs, lice, pestilence, boils and the wild animals were brought upon the Egyptians in overwhelming quantity and intensity, but all within the framework of the natural process. Water can be transformed by Hashem into blood with a few minor additions. Up until this point, nothing conflicts with our everyday understanding of nature.

The first exception to this rule is the plague of hail, which brings with it a contradiction in the natural process. The Torah (Shemos 9:24) expresses, “So there was hail, and fire flashing within the hail”. Rashi comments on these words, “A miracle within a miracle. The fire and hail were mixed together, even though the hail is water. To do the will of the Creator, they made peace between them”. How are we to understand this? What we have here is a super-natural manifestation of Hashem’s total control of the physical universe He created within the framework of the natural process. He provided within the framework of two natural elements – the temporary coexistence of fire and water – a contradiction that could only be attributed to Hashem’s Infinite power and control.

We need to understand how the “above the natural process” (“L’ma’ale min ha’teva) concept is shared between the plague of hail and the killing of the first born. If today’s finest pathologists were to autopsy every first born that died in Egypt, they would come up with absolutely no cause of death. They would have to conclude that perfectly healthy people died for no other reason than it was Hashem’s will. This was absolutely necessary, for if there was a disease or malady the Egyptians could attribute this plague to, they would have been the first to say it was the disease that killed them and *not* Hashem. Therefore, what marks the uniqueness of this plague is that, unlike plagues one through nine, there was **no** physical component associated with it. It was a spiritual manifestation – totally above the natural, physical process – of Hashem’s strength and control over the universe He created. The fact that this plague was entirely spiritual, lacking any physicality like the nine before this is the reason Rashi declares that the killing of the firstborn outweighs the other nine combined. If hail was above the natural process while remaining rooted in the realm of gashmiut, then the greatness of makat bechorot is in being fixed exclusively in the world of Ruchniyut,

with nothing physical associated with it.

Why does Rashi make this tenth plague declaration during Hashem’s introduction of the plague of hail? It is because both plagues share the “above the natural process” characteristic. This connection only occurs between hail and the killing of the firstborn and not with any other plague. Rashi teaches us this by identifying the power of the tenth plague here rather than during the tenth plague. Rashi’s literary style is to be highly commended because the greatness of anything is appreciated more when contrasted with something else than when it stands alone.

There are phrases of redemption at the beginning of this week’s parasha that express the transformation Klal Yisroel will go through in the process of being freed from Egyptian slavery. According to Rov Kessin, they obviously have application to the complete metamorphosis that will culminate with our departure from Egypt. Beyond this, they have “Ma’ase Avot Siman L’bonim” application regarding the Messianic Era and ultimately the Olom HaBah we all long for. The background required to fully appreciate Rov Kessin’s thoughts requires background information that this format cannot accommodate, so this will be abridged.

V’hotzaysee: As Hashem took us out of the “klipa”, the shell of slavery, so too will he take us out of the enslaved mindset that accompanies the galut we are presently in. One of the pivotal concepts associated with the era of Mashiach ben Yosef that we pray for everyday is the “Ohr Chodosh” the Mashiach will bring with him. The light is the fifty gates of wisdom (“Nun Shaaray Bina”) that will open our eyes regarding the Yichud of Hashem Yisroel and how that Unity manifests itself in our world. When this moment occurs, we will run to redefine the normalcy of life as it presently exists because with that wisdom in place, our eyes will be opened to what we have been missing for all these centuries. The challenge we will face will be in exiting today’s concept of normalcy (the concept of v’hotzaysee) and the amount of time it will take to fully appreciate the “new light wisdom” available to us.

V’hetzaltee: The fact that we left Egypt didn’t mean that we were physically free. Indeed, Egypt attempted to recapture us at the Yam Suf and return us to Egypt as their slaves. Leaving Egypt and the victory Hashem provided to

us at the Yam Suf are both considered so significant that we celebrate them as two separate events: One at the beginning of Pesach and the other at the end of the holiday. As Hashem prevented us from being recaptured then, so too will Hashem via the Mashiach ben Yosef prevent us from backsliding once the Messianic process takes hold and we begin to move forward. Once the klipa of galut is emptied in the first step, it will want us back. The second step will prevent that from happening now as it did at the Yam Suf.

V'goalti: The process of being taken out of Egypt had to be followed by taking Egypt out of us. The environment of darkness that damaged our people, sinking to the forty-ninth level of impurity, had to go through a healing process. This growth process is observed yearly and remains the goal of Sefirat HaOmer. There are, therefore, 3 steps to this process: Taking them out, preventing them from backsliding and then healing them from the spiritual darkness and servitude they experienced. That tahara process culminated with Ma'amad Har Sinai. Soon, the Messianic goal of Mashiach ben Yosef will be a tahara process that returns us to the status of Adam and Chava *before* they sinned. The fact that the first Luchot and the Torah that accompanied it would have been comprehended through the lens of the nun shaaray bina had the egel not been built means that the "goalti" process was successful then. We reached the level worthy of receiving the "fifty gates of wisdom" with which to comprehend Torah. We lost it because of the egel. What we need to realize is that the egel occurred forty days following Ma'amad Har Sinai. During that time, until the egel was constructed, we were on a level our people never again experienced.

V'lokachti: Having achieved the goals expressed above, having received the Torah, we were ready to enjoy a manifest Achdut with Hashem Yisborach. The holiday of Shavuot, which brings this word, this concept to life, comes with a shefa enabling us to achieve a real dveykut with Avinu She'ba'Shamayim. What brought the full realization of this to a halt was the egel ha'zahav – an event that caused more damage to our people than most even begin to realize. From a Messianic perspective, the persona of Mashiach ben Dovid comes to life within this framework. With the tahara process completed by Mashiach ben Yosef, the goal of Mashiach ben Dovid is Kedusha that, at the beginning of his reign, manifests itself in a unity between Hashem Yis-

borach & Klal Yisroel.

V'hayvaysee: This fifth phrase of redemption is represented by the cup of Eliyahu HaNavi found on every Seder Table. It represents the future Moshe Rabbeinu longed for. The main reason Moshe begged Hashem to permit him entry into Eretz HaKedoshah was to enable him to fulfill the Mitzvot that can only be performed in Israel proper. Once our nation and Hashem's Torah join in our homeland, the full scope of Taryag Mitzvot and our national identity achieve the reality that is the destiny of our people. From the Messianic perspective, this word represents the mission, the purpose of Mashiach ben Dovid, that being Kedusha. This is the beginning of zichuch transformation of Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah, a process that can only begin in Eretz Yisroel proper. The land of Israel is a major component in the Zulos's ability and goal to achieve shlaymus. Every land is sensitive to the nation it inhabits. Land and nation – Bnai Yisroel and Eretz Yisroel - as well as every nation and their assigned land comes together in helping said nation complete the avoda they are responsible for. That's why after the destruction of our Batay Mikdash no one could settle our homeland. It vomited everyone out except the Arabs who are there to hold it for us until we are ready to take it back. Holding Eretz Yisroel until this galut is completed is today's role for Bnai Yishmael. Indeed, one of the signs that this galut is almost over is when Bnai Yishmael sense they are going to lose the land and rise up to hold onto it any way they can. This is what we are seeing today.

What is interesting about this approach is that it takes us from Adam and Chava until the "end of days" with the focus on Bnai Yisroel. As the "Am HaNivchar" we cannot escape our role, our historic identity, our destiny. Throughout the thousands of years of our history, there have been high points and low points, success and failure, positive national relationships and Antisemitism, and those who have remained true to Hashem and His Torah and those who have left that path. One factor that has remained consistent throughout is the character of our people. When it comes to morality, ethical behavior, treating people properly, the world continues to look at Israel and our people to set the bar for the world to follow. Even after the decimation of the Holocaust which cost us six-million Kedoshim and the culture that defined our people through-

out Europe, Russia and beyond, those who survived relocated without expecting their new host nation to assist them. We were thankful to have a new place to come to. We worked, we learned the language, we paid our taxes and contributed to the wellbeing of whatever host nation we found ourselves in. Despite the challenges, some remained religious while others chose a new life. What marks the uniqueness of the post-Holocaust generations was and is our response to those who left the path – KIRUV!! This is the first time since Avrohom Avinu, that Kiruv has had a defined place in the fabric of the Torah observant community. It started on shaky ground. Some who were aware of HaRav Noach Weinberg's ZT'L efforts to start Aish HaTorah thought he was out of his mind. With the encouragement of his brother, the Godol B'Torah HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, ZT'L, Rav Noach persevered and built a paradigm Kiruv organization that testifies to the love Jews should have for each other. We cannot count the number of Neshamot that found their way back to Hashem Yisborach and His Torah, compliments of Aish. As they expanded, how many people joined with them to provide authentic Torah based

Judaism in the form of a positive Jewish experience to young adults around the world.

A few years before Rav Noach founded Aish, the OU invested in Kiruv via N.C.S.Y. in the United States. That organization made myself and my wife religious!! It too has reached a point where it's impossible for us to count the number of teenagers that have returned to our heritage, our roots. How many of today's Talmudic scholars began their learning in this Makom Kadosh with a trip to a Kollel program in a summer camp or in Israel?

Let me close by quoting HaRav Yaakov Weinberg, ZT'L. "You cannot preserve Torah for some and let the others lose it. It doesn't work – there is no such Torah. Torah for Yidden is for all – we're "Areivim" (guarantors for each other). ***We're one organism.*** It's one Klal Yisroel." Currently, with the Geulah near at hand, this is the lesson ALL Klal Yisroel needs to remember. We are one people with one Heavenly Father, one Torah, one destiny – indeed, we are one organism.