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The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

ל' ניסן תשפ"ג-4/21/2023

תזריע-מצורע

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צרת The True Reason Behind

By Tehilla Huff

In this week's פרשיות, תזריע and מצורע, the illness of צרת is introduced as a supernatural plague which can afflict individuals, along with their clothing and homes. It appears as splotches of color on specific contaminated areas. Based on various signs, the כהן will announce the person as pure or impure. In the case of being declared impure, one must dwell outside the main camp until the צרת is gone and destroyed. צרת is the result of speaking badly about someone else, among other sins. One who has צרת is called a מצורע, from the Hebrew words מוציא and רע, literally meaning someone who spreads slander.

Another possible interpretation for the cause of צרת, from the ערכין ט"ז עמוד א on גמרא, is selfishness. לשון הרע and selfishness both reflect on the individual. Typically, speaking badly of others comes from a place of insecurity, or inflated self-esteem. Both possibilities reflect selfishness. Whether talking badly about others to prove worth, or reflect greatness, both are personally motivated.

The הפטרה for מצורע פרשת מצורע supports the claim that the מצורע is punished for being selfish. In מלכים ב, the men afflicted with צרת were in the process of contemplating their futures. After being exiled from their city, which is being seized by an army, they decide to return home and give in to the enemy. However, upon their arrival they are surprised to find the army camp completely deserted. Initially, they attempt to steal the remaining gold, and silver. While these men aren't speaking badly of others, their actions reflect a sense of selfishness. Instead of thinking about what this could mean for the community, they focus on personal gain. In order to build themselves up, they are oblivious to the needs of their nation. This הפטרה is fitting for the פרשה since there's a common theme of internal incompleteness. Just as the men acted selfishly, representing their true nature, so too speaking negatively of others is an expression of the individual's bad intentions.

As a result of לשון הרע the individual is physically marked, externally displaying internal failure. Just as, publicly speaking, is an external expression of internal insecurity. Additionally, in סנהדרין דף כ"ה עמוד ב, it discusses that in order for a person to return in Teshuva after gambling, they need to get rid of their dice which would be used to gamble, the tool which the gambler uses to sin. The dice are destroyed to separate the person from whatever causes the sin. Just as a gambler's tools are removed, so too the מצורע is isolated from the camp. In order for the speaker of לשון הרע to fully repent, he must be separated from whatever inclines him to sin. For the מצורע, his incompleteness is reflected on those around him, by speaking badly. Therefore by separating himself from the community, he will be unable to push his issues on anyone but himself. There is a lesson in this about taking responsibility for your actions, and feelings. Instead of hiding behind words, you should find the source of this selfishness. Speaking badly about others reflects badly on the sharer, not the victim.

A Small Mark With a Big Effect

By Shiraz Sage

This **שבת** is double **פרשה**, **תזריע מצורע**, **פרשה** discuss laws pertaining to **טהרה** and **טומאה**, ritual purity and impurity. In **תזריע**, **ה'** tells **משה** the laws of impurity for women after giving birth, including the **מצורע**. **צרת**, followed by instruction for the procedure of identifying and treating **צרת**. Both of these **פרשיות** discuss detailed laws of the punishment for speaking **לשון הרע**. **לשון הרע** is a discoloration of the skin or clothing, cloth and leather deeming them impure. However it is not simply a disease caused by bacterial infection, rather a specific punishment from the heavens. **צרת** only came to people who were on a higher spiritual level - previously, in **שמות**, both **משה** and **מרים** were afflicted with **tzara'at** when they spoke negatively about people.

It is strange how **לשון הרע** is an extremely serious sin, as severe as **עבודה זרה**, yet the punishment seems to be relatively minor. How would the relatively small mark on one's skin be a fitting punishment for something considered so severe, especially because we know **ה'** gives punishments according to exactly what the sin deserves?

Even more astonishing is the fact that gossip only qualifies as **לשון הרע** if what is being said about the person is true, however if it is a complete lie, then it is considered **שם רע** (giving someone a bad reputation). Both of these sins warrant you getting **צרת**, and both of them involve you spreading bad information about another person. Why are these two separate **עבירות**?

לשון הרע, while technically true, is actually the most horrible kind of lie. This small truth about the person that is being spread is only a piece of their whole life, it does not give insight on the circumstances or person's entire being. None of us are proud of every moment in our lives, therefore there is greater severity of speaking truth rather than spreading a lie about someone. When someone spreads a lie about us we know in our heart, though it might be hard to prove, that what they say is not true. However when the gossip is true we cannot fully defend it, and it ends up defining us.

For this reason the punishment for **לשון הרע** is **צרת** - a small discoloration ends up defining the whole person as a sinner who needs to repent. **ה'** punishes the sinner exactly according to what they did - ruin someone's reputation with a small act.

Though it is very easy and tempting for us to speak **לשון הרע** about those around us, let us work to take small actions to be kinder and more uplifting rather than spread gossip. When we speak **לשון הרע** about others, we are allowing the **שטן** to speak **לשון הרע** about us in heaven. May this further warn us to prevent ourselves from putting down others with truth or lies.

Editors: Binyamin Orkaby and Ephraim Fischer
Faculty Advisor: Rabbi Jaffe



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