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Chizuk - Inspiration

There are times when telling "the whole truth" to government officials can be challenging. However, someone who truly values honesty, like Rav Noigershel—one of the leading teachers of Jewish ethics—can find the strength to avoid rationalizing dishonesty. On one occasion, Rav Noigershel was being driven to Jerusalem by a driver who had spent the previous night caring for his father at the hospital and hadn't slept at all. As they entered Jerusalem, the exhausted driver nodded off, causing their car to skid off the road and down a cliff. Miraculously, both men emerged unharmed.

Police arrived shortly after the accident. Rav Noigershel encouraged his driver to explain exactly what had happened, despite the risks. He felt that having experienced such a miracle, he owed it to Hashem to tell the truth. Although admitting he had fallen asleep at the wheel could have led to license suspension and loss of insurance benefits, the driver chose honesty, following Rav Noigershel's advice. Remarkably, he did not suffer any significant negative consequences from telling the truth.

On The Parsha

"As for the person afflicted with Tzara'as, on whom there is a lesion, his garments must be torn, the hair on his head must be allowed to overgrow; he must cover his face down to his upper lip and call out loud, 'Defiled! Defiled!'" (VaYikrah 13:45)

Rashi explains that this proclamation of ritual impurity

serves to inform others so they may avoid him. The subsequent verse states, "He will remain ritually defiled as long as the lesion remains upon him. Since he is defiled, he must dwell isolated from other people. His dwelling must be outside the camp." Rashi comments further, noting that even other individuals who are similarly ritually impure ("Tamei") but for other reasons are not permitted to reside with him. The one who has Tzara'as ("Metzora") is separated from others due to the divisive consequences of his slanderous speech ("Lashon Hara") which disrupted relationships and separated spouses and friends. Consequently, he is subjected to separation and isolation, reflecting the principle of punishment, measure for measure.

The Torah's depiction of the Metzora's fate is stark; he is expelled from the community, required to dishevel his appearance, and obligated to publicly declare his impurity by stating: "Tamei! Tamei!"— I am defiled! I am defiled!

Rashi, referring to the Gemara in Arachin (16b), provides a reason for making this public proclamation: he announces his impurity so others will be aware and keep their distance.

A deeper analysis reveals why the Metzora incurs more severe consequences than others who are Tamei. The Gemara explains that his penalty directly corresponds to the harm caused by his speech, which fractured social bonds. He is thus punished through enforced solitude.

However, a deeper understanding of Lashon Hara is in order. Lashon Hara is not just gossip or slander. At its core, Lashon Hara is a distortion of reality through speech.

The one who speaks Lashon Hara does not present an honest, complete assessment of the one that he slanders. Rather the speaker only presents the failures and the flaws of the one that he speaks against and then broadcasts it as the defining truth of who that person is. He takes something partial and presents it as total.

The one who speaks Lashon Hara is a manufacturer of a false impression. He uses the power of speech to construct a damaging, distorted image of another human being. He then plants that image in other people's minds. The husband now sees his wife differently. A friend now sees his fellow in a different light. Relationships have been fractured.

This is why the Gemara calls it one of the gravest sins. It is a fundamental act of dishonesty — dressed up in true facts, but dishonest at its core because it weaponizes selective truth to destroy.

As a result, the punishment imposed on the Metzora is particularly apt. Isolated from society, he must announce his own impurity: "Tamei. Tamei." He who distorted the truth about others must now proclaim the unadorned truth about himself. He who controlled other people's reputations through selective, damaging speech now loses all control over his own. He who caused others to be seen in the harshest possible light must now announce his own harshest reality to the world — with no spin, no context or mitigation.

This measure for measure punishment, as explained by Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz ZT"l also demonstrates Divine compassion. Hashem provides clear guidance to the Metzora regarding the nature of his transgression, enabling the individual to pursue rectification. In this instance, the Torah's approach not only identifies the wrongdoing to him but also implements a therapeutic remedy for him. Namely, the very experience of having to announce to the public the unvarnished truth of his defilement facilitates his spiritual healing and growth, and atones for the dishonesty that he engaged in when he spoke Lashon Hara.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Reuvain promised his nephew that he would give him a car, but he didn't follow through. How is this viewed in Halacha?

ANSWER: One who engages in this behavior is called a M'Chasurei Amana, meaning "those lacking trustworthiness." If money has already been paid for the car and Reuvain withdraws before delivering it, the situation is worse—he incurs a curse called "Mi SheParah," which means "He who paid back the evil of Sedom will pay you for what you have done."

There is some disagreement regarding whether an action that would brand oneself a M'Chasurei Amana is forbidden by Torah law, Rabbinic law or oral tradition. A fourth opinion holds that it's not formally forbidden, but still best avoided.

However, all authorities agree that if circumstances change and the cost of replacing the car for Reuvain rises after his promise, then his actions are not considered M'Chasurei Amana. Otherwise, he should make every effort to fulfill his promise.

*"May I back out of a school carpool that
I have already committed to?"*

"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"

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