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Parshat Tazria-Metzora

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SONGS OF SOLITUDE

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

There is a fascinating paradox that relates to the laws of tzora'as, the spiritual malady, a skin discoloration that affects those who gossip. On one hand, only a kohen can either pronounce a state of impurity or purity. On the other hand, the afflicted man is in control of his own destiny. The Gemarah tells us that if, for example, the afflicted man removes the negah, whether it is hair or skin, then he is no longer tamei. So this affliction, which is purely spiritual in nature, a heavenly exhortation to repent from nattering ways, is basically toothless. If the man wills it, he can refuse to go to the kohen and not be declared tamei. And if he so desires, he can even remove the negah before anyone declares its potency.

Another amazing dimension is applicable after the afflicted man is declared tamei. The Torah tells us “that he is sent out of the camp, where he sits in solitude” (Leviticus 13:46).

His departure from the camp of Israelites is surely not due to a contagious nature of the negah. After all, if that were the case, he would be sent away way even before the kohen's declaration of tumah.

So why send the man to confinement where no one will monitor his reaction to the negah on his being, a place where he could remove the negah, or adulterate its appearance? Why not have him locked in a cell under the supervision of a guard who would insure the integrity of the purification process?

In the early 1900s, a simple religious Russian Jew decided that he could no longer stand the Czar's persecution. He would leave Russia to join his son who had settled in Houston, Texas, some twenty years earlier. The son, who had totally assimilated and was a successful oilman, was thrown into a panic. “Of course, you are welcome, Pa,” he cabled, “I will arrange a visa, your tickets and fares. But you must realize that I have a wonderful reputation here as an oil man. When you arrive, you must adapt to American culture or I will be destroyed. Upon arrival at the train station, the old man, dressed in his long coat and up-brimmed hat, was whisked to a haberdashery, where he was fitted with the latest style fedora and a modern-cut suit. But still, his father looked too Jewish. “Pa it's not enough. I'll take you to the barber.” The first thing that came off was the beard. The son looked on and said, “It's not enough Pa. The peyos, they'll have to go.” The barber cut off the right peya. While the son looked on proudly, his pa was becoming a real American. Then the second. And the old man began to weep. “Why are you crying, Papa?” the son asked incredulously. The father, resigned to his fate, simply answered. “I am crying because we lost the Alamo!”

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, in his sefer Emes L'Yaakov, explains the concept of sitting in solitude, reflecting in unadulterated honesty about one's true feelings.

There comes a time in one's life where the message from heaven can only be without the influence of others and the will to impress them. How often do we act because of the influence of friends and relatives? How often do we gossip due to peer pressure? We must make choices in life. Honest choices. We have to do what the neshama wants us to do. And we can't alter our true emotion due to social, peer, or monetary pressures. Henny Youngman, a classic comedian, used to talk about his wonderful doctor. “If you can't afford the operation,” he would say, “he'll touch up the x-ray!”

The afflicted man is sent away from anyone who may have influenced him to act in his blathering ways. He can reflect on his true feeling and his honest perceptions of life and his role. But this decision must be made when he is impervious to anyone who was normally in his sphere. And he has a choice. He can pull out the hair, he can scrape off the negah. He can fool the kohen. He can fool his family and fool his friends. But when he returns to the camp, the same man sans negah, the only one fooled is himself.

Lashon HaRah Begins Not with the Mouth, But with the Eye

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Many times, we have quoted the Medrash about the peddler who came into the city proclaiming “Who wants life? Who wants life?” People thought he was selling some kind of elixir of life. The Gemara says that one of the Tanaim inquired about this elixir he was selling. The peddler read him the *pasukim* “Who is the man who desires life, who loves days, to see good? Guard your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from speaking calumny, depart from evil and do good, make peace and pursue it.” (Tehillim 34:13-14). In other words, one who wishes to live should avoid speaking *Lashon HaRah*. The Gemara says that the Amora said he never understood this and now this peddler revealed to him this amazing secret for acquisition of *Chayim* (life) called *Netzor Leshoncha Me’Rah* (guard your tongue from speaking evil).

Everyone comments on this *chiddush* of the peddler, which is an open *pasuk* in Tehillim. We previously spoke out a thought from Rav Nissan Alpert, *z”l*, that is worth repeating. The *chiddush* of the peddler was not merely this *pasuk* itself, but how one punctuates the *pasuk*. When we read this *pasuk*, the opening phrase is a question: “Who is the person that wants to live a long time...?” Where does the question end and the answer begin?

The simple interpretation of the *pasuk* is that the question mark is placed after the words “*Liros Tov*” – Who is the person who wants to live (a long time), loving days and seeing good? The answer is “One who guards his tongue from speaking evil...” The peddler taught that this was not the correct way to read the *pasuk*. The question mark belongs after the words “*Ha’Chafetz Chaim*” — Who is the person who wants to live (a long time)? The answer begins with the words “*Ohev Yamim Liros Tov*” – Loving days, **seeing good**.

The secret to living a long life is to have a **positive** attitude. If a person looks positively at matters, and sees people and places and events in a good light, then obviously he will guard his tongue from speaking evil. He will not come to speak *Lashon HaRah*. One of the great myths of *Lashon HaRah* is that it starts with the mouth or the tongue. The true problem of *Lashon HaRah* does not begin with the **MOUTH**, it begins with the **EYE**.

If someone looks at people with an “evil eye” and sees only their dark side that will prompt the person to talk ill about them. However, if someone always sees the positive side of his neighbor, he will not come to speak *Lashon HaRah*. Perhaps he will see something that the person should not be doing, but he will think to himself, “Ah, but the person has so many good qualities...”

The truth of the matter is that Rabbeinu Yona in the Sha’arei Teshuva at the end of the third Sha’ar discusses different aspects of *Lashon HaRah*. He divides them into six different categories. He defines the last category (III:231) as a *Nirgan*. What is a *Nirgan*? He brings a *pasuk* in Mishlei (18:8), in which Shlomo HaMelech writes: “The words of the *Nirgan* are like blows, and they descend to the chambers.” A *Nirgan*, says Shlomo HaMelech, is a complainer. Rabbeinu Yona elaborates: A *Nirgan* is a person whose lifestyle and pattern of behavior is to invariably complain and see the bad. He always has complaints about the words and actions of his friends. “And even though the friend did nothing against him, he interprets everything in a negative fashion and not in a positive manner.”

The root cause of *Lashon HaRah* is having the personality trait of being a *Nirgan* – the complainer. *Nirgan* brings a person to see the faults in people and things. That is the sickness. The sickness is not the **mouth**, the sickness is the **eye** and how the person perceives things.

This was the *chiddush* of the peddler. The way to read the *pasuk* is: “Who is the man who wants life?” – **QUESTION MARK!** And the answer is “Someone who loves his days, seeing only good” (*Ohev Yamim Liros Tov*). If someone sees the good, he will have a long life because he will be prevented from speaking *Lashon HaRah*.

I was recently at a lecture series in which Rav Ephraim Shapiro from Florida and I shared the same podium. He told a story, which I think brings this idea into focus. I hesitate to say it in a shul, but I hope you will pardon me because I think it brings home the point very well. It is an apocryphal story (i.e. – it is a parable), but it is an interesting story nevertheless.

There was a religious Roman Catholic woman who decided to go to Italy to visit Rome and the Pope. Prior to taking this once-in-a-lifetime trip, she visited her hairdresser to have her hair done beautifully for her upcoming visit to Italy and the Vatican. She gets into a conversation with her hairdresser and tells her that she is going to Italy. “We are going to Rome.” The hairdresser says, “Rome? Augh! It is such a dirty city. The streets are not clean, there is litter all over the place; people do things in public they should not be doing in the street. Augh, Rome! It is a terrible city.”

The hairdresser then asks, “How are you flying?” The woman responds “Continental Airlines.” The hairdresser says “Continental Airlines? That is a horrible airline! The seats are too narrow, the cushions are no good; the service is terrible, the flight attendants are always in a bad mood. Augh! Terrible!”

“And where are you staying?” The woman gives her the name of the hotel. “Woa – That hotel, that’s a dive. I wouldn’t let my dog stay in that hotel.”

“And what are you going to Rome for anyway?” “That is the highlight of my trip. We are going to have a private session with the Pope.” The hairdresser says “You think you are going to have a ‘private session’? It is going to be you and five thousand other people. You’ll be lucky if you get within a hundred yards of the Pope.”

In short, this Roman Catholic woman goes to Rome. Six weeks later she came back to the hairdresser to have her hair done again. The hairdresser asks “How was the trip?” The woman says, “The trip was fabulous! Rome was gorgeous. It was beautiful. It was amazing!”

“And how was the flight on Continental?” “The flight? It was overbooked. They didn’t have room for us in Economy Class. Not only did they put us in **Business** Class, they even gave us a free upgrade to **First** Class. The flight was great!”

“And how was that hotel I told you about?” “Oh, the hotel? Our room wasn’t ready so they put us in the Presidential Suite.”

Then the hairdresser, this *Nirgan*, the one who always sees the negative in everything, finally asked, “And what about your ‘Private session’ with the Pope?” The lady said, “I’ll tell you. We were standing in line with hundreds of other people. A Swiss Guard approached us and said, ‘The Pope wishes to see you and one other couple.’ We came into the Pope and he said, ‘How wonderful it is to see you. We like people from America to come to the Vatican. It gives us encouragement, etc. But tell me, who does your hair? It’s the worst job I have ever seen in my life!”

Everyone Is Vulnerable

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The entire subject of tzoraat is shrouded in mystery and wonderment. The exact nature of the disease is not really known to our medical practitioners.

The traditional translation of tzoraat as leprosy is undoubtedly misleading and inaccurate. The rabbis of the Talmud treated this disease as mainly a spiritual one, albeit reflected in actual physical symptoms. Slander, narrowness of vision, jealousy of others and bad character traits were assigned by the rabbis as being some of the potential causes of the onset of the disease. Since tzoraat could occur not only on one’s body but on one’s clothing and in the walls of one’s house, it made everyone vulnerable- stripped bare of the veneer of possessions and false appearances that characterize human life. They are exposed publicly as being people of poor character, greedy, self-centered and even malicious towards others.

In the haftorah of the week we read of the four metzoraim – Gechazy and his three sons – who were cursed by Elisha for their greed and for the desecration of God’s name when Gechazy pursued Naaman, the Aramean general, and asked for the wealth that Elisha had refused to accept.

Even in the moment of triumph when they discovered the encampment of their enemy to be deserted and abandoned, they could not restrain their impulse of greed and proceeded to loot the camp before reporting their discovery to the king of Israel.

Apparently it is easier to cure tzoraat itself than it is to remove the character flaws that brought about the tzoraat in the first instance. Since tzoraat was a disease of character traits and flaws, it is natural that the Torah placed the responsibility of diagnosing and curing the disease, not upon doctors or healers, but rather on the kohein – the priest of Israel.

The kohein was to be the spiritual mentor and guide for Jews. The prophet proclaimed: “For the lips of the kohein shall guard knowledge and wisdom and people shall seek to learn Torah from him for he is likened unto an angel of God.”

The kohein was the sole healer of these hidden character weaknesses that lay deep within a person’s soul and personality. Apparently with the decline of the spiritual strength of the kohanim in Second Temple times, the disease of tzoraat also disappeared.

We have no record of its actual appearance in Second Temple times, though the rules of purification enumerated in this week’s parsha were continued to be studied and appear as a separate mesechet in the Mishna. The rabbis always spoke of tzoraat as something that required study and analysis – drosh (to search and analyze.) If one actually did that and underwent the searing self-analysis that is required to uproot the possibility of tzoraat in one’s person then in the words of the rabbis “vkabel sachar – one will be rewarded and receive payment.”

That lesson remains valid for all times and under all circumstances. We no longer have any kohein capable of discerning tzoraat nor do we actually have tzoraat itself in our midst. But, the root causes of tzoraat still exist abundantly within us and our society.

“The kohen shall look at the lesion on the skin of his flesh, and hair in the lesion has turned white and the appearance of the lesion is deeper than the skin of his flesh, it is a lesion of tzaraas. When the kohen sees this, he shall pronounce him unclean” (13:3)

The posuk twice instructs the kohen to look at the tzaraas. Why is this direction repeated at the beginning and end of the posuk? The Meshech Chochma answers that the kohen is to inspect both the lesion itself and also the person coming to him. There are certain times when a person with real tzaraas is not to be declared impure, such as a new chassan during his sheva brachos or any person during Yom Tov. The Torah is sensitive during these times that a person should not be inconvenienced, even if he has been afflicted with tzaraas as a punishment. As such, the kohen must not only look at the tzaraas itself, but also its surrounding circumstances. This is also true for halacha in general. Sometimes there is room within the halacha for leniencies or stringencies depending on the person or his particular situation. This is why it is important to have a personal relationship with a rav who knows the person bringing the question. The rav can then take the individual’s situation into consideration when giving an answer. Halachic questions are ideally not meant to be answered on a website, over e-mail, or in an impersonal way. It is best to address these questions to someone with whom one has a personal relationship.

“This is the law of a lesion of tzaraas on a woolen or linen garment, warp or woof threads, or any leather article, to render it clean or unclean” (13:59)

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that tzaraas was sent as a sign from heaven that a person should repent and change his ways. The various forms of tzaraas that we read about were a process that slowly advanced from the impersonal to the personal if a person failed to heed the message. First the tzaraas would appear on his home, then his clothing, and only then on his body. Even a person’s body would be affected in stages: first his hair, then his wounds, and only then his healthy skin. Of course, if the person understood the signs at an early stage and repented, the process would be halted before he suffered too greatly. Because tzaraas was a miraculous sign – not just a medical condition – and a method of close communication between Hashem and His people, it would only appear in Eretz Yisrael. When we are distanced from Hashem, we are not able to receive messages such as these from Him.

“The priest shall go out of the camp. The priest shall examine him, and behold, the plague of tzara'as is healed in the metzora” (14:3)

It is the declaration of the kohen that causes the metzora’s change in status from pure to impure and vice versa. The disappearance of physical symptoms alone do not make him pure. What is the purpose of this? The kohen’s ability to alter the metzora’s status with a verbal pronouncement teaches him about the power of a word. The metzora, who was careless about his words and unconcerned about the potential damage that they could cause, needs to see how a simple statement can put him in quarantine and distance him from all others. Perhaps after seeing how a word can have such a drastic effect on his life, he will be moved to change his ways. The Torah uses a great deal of ink to describe the various aspects of how a person becomes a metzora and how he can get out of that state. The focus on this topic shows us how careful one must be about the sins that are punishable by tzara'as, chiefly lashon hara. Negative speech causes discord and separation among people. A person who engages in these types of conversations is in violation of the mitzvah to love a fellow Jew as oneself. Hashem is so disgusted by disunity that He created a supernatural ailment which afflicts a person whose speech causes it. At the same time, it is worth recognizing that if the punishment for negative speech is so severe, then the reward for speaking positively must be even greater.

“The priest shall put some of the rest of the oil that is in his hand on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, upon the blood of the trespass offering” (14:17)

After the metzora brought his korban, its blood was placed on his ear, thumb, and toe. Then the Kohen placed oil on top of the blood in all three places. Why was this done? Perhaps the idea was to cover up the sin, represented by the blood of his atonement, with oil which represents something beautiful. After experiencing tzara'as and learning his lesson, the person was able to put the sin behind him and do better.

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Loshon Hora: What is it Good For? Absolutely Nothing, Say it Again

By Sheldon Stern

When discussing events at the start of WWII, Winston Chamberlain said, "It's a riddle wrapped in a puzzle, inside an enigma." This expression could also describe the two Parshiyot that deal with Tzaraas. As we will demonstrate, difficulties abound. So, who you gonna call? Sorry, Ghostbusters won't help. Instead, we rely on Rashi with major assistance from the Chofetz Chaim.

I'd like to go ahead and begin with a brief overview. In Tazria we're introduced to an assortment of lesions on a person's skin and/or hair whose Tumah status must be evaluated by a Kohen. This is followed by a description of discolorations in one's clothing. We then move to Metzora where the purification procedure is outlined. Finally, that Parsha discusses Tzaraas which strike a person's home and can lead to the home being razed. Rashi explains that Tzaraas is a punishment for speaking Loshon Hora. To support this thesis we see that two birds are involved, one which is slaughtered and the other sent away, in the decontamination and Rashi tells us that their twittering calls to mind the offender's prattling. He adds that Hyssop is also used as a testament to the person's haughtiness. Let's explain this point. Hyssop is a low-lying plant and so it's a sign of humility. By prescribing that this plant be included the Torah is sending a pointed message to the Metzora to curb his arrogance. The root cause of slander is Gaavah. We put people down in a shameless attempt to boost our ego.

Now let's put things together. Hashem sees a person speaking Loshon Hora and afflicts his body. If the "sinner" doesn't get the message, his clothing will be affected. Finally, if that doesn't work the tattler's house is stricken. Ok. So what's the problem? To quote the Bard, "Let me count the ways." The Gemara in Berachos 55b states that Tzaddikim are punished in this world for the few sins they commit so that they enter Olam Habo with a clean slate. Conversely, Rashaim are rewarded here for the few good things they've done and so they have no share of Olam Habo. Consider someone who is a Baal Loshon Hora. He'll likely know a Tzaddik who was judged as a Metzora and was forced to undergo the indignity of shaving his entire body. Will he recognize that this is a manifestation of the Gemara? i.e. that his speaking Loshon hora was likely a one-time slipup. Probably not. Instead, he'll assume that Tzaraas is multifactorial and it may not be punitive at all. And to support that view, he'll rely on another Rashi. When mentioning Tzaraas of houses, our foremost commentator presents a positive spin. He noted that there were homes that Jews seized from the conquered nations and when they were destroyed due to Tzaraas, fortunes were discovered in the walls. It's the Tzaddik, who always turns introspective when misfortune befalls him, who'll recall having slandered someone, while the habitual defamer will decide that his Tzaraas is a blessing in disguise. Then we have another complicating factor. According to Rambam, the sequence of Tzaraas is that it first comes on a person's clothing, then his house, and finally his body. This is quite a departure from the order in the Parshiyot. Moreover, we can't lose sight of the supernatural element of Tzaraas. To suggest that one's body and property can be subject to plague due to malignant speech calls to mind Pinocchio. So we see that there are any number of reasons why a person wouldn't catch Hashem's drift and we haven't even exhausted the subject. Baruch Hashem most Mitzvoths are straightforward. We consider Kashrus. No one would walk into a Treif restaurant and convince himself that the fish is Kosher. He also wouldn't buy something without a Hechsher. But when it comes to Loshon hora a different paradigm emerges. We start rationalizing why what we're about to say doesn't fall under the rubric of sin. Yes, there are Heterim, but there are also Heterim to violate Shabbos, but people only utilize them when there's no alternative. I recall a fellow who worked in Kashrus presenting the following, "Oh give me a break. Without Loshon Hora no one could live." He's a frum Jew, but he decided that this Sugya is off the table.

We see that Loshon Hora is a tough nut to crack, but the Chafetz Chaim lends a much-needed hand. The Mishna Berurah was his magnum opus, but the iconic Gadol is most associated with the bane of malicious speech. So we must ask why he put such a premium on this matter. The Gemara states that a person doesn't sin unless he benefits from it. Think about it, because it makes perfect sense. Some buy unkosher food because it's cheaper. But Loshon hora doesn't give us any benefit. The only thing you can accomplish is to demean others in people's eyes. And this is why the Yetzer hora encourages it. When one falls prey to such a sin he has no way to justify his act. He simply chose to libel another Jew. Let's take this a step further. It's said that knowing one's problem is half of the solution. The problem is managing the other half. An obese person knows that he's overweight because he has trouble managing his caloric intake. My first lecture in dental school was in Biochemistry. The professor was an affable fellow who was seriously corpulent. He was likely self-conscious about this because five minutes into the class he pontificated, "Americans spend millions (today it would be billions) trying to lose weight. It's all a waste of time and money. Diets don't work. In fact, one's body type is genetic and it can be determined a few months into life whether he'll end up fat or skinny." What he was really saying was that he had a Taavah for food and he had no inclination in trying to fight it. And we can understand his attitude because the desire for food is real. BTW, he died from a heart attack at the end of the term. He was either late 40's or early 50's. Nice guy. In contrast, speaking Loshon Hora doesn't do anything for the speaker. In the early 90's I had a friend who was going through a caustic divorce. One day he confided in his Rov, Rabbi Avgdor Miller that he was too depressed to put on Tefillin. The irrepressible Baal Mussar asked him, "Do you feel better now?" And the same is true for slander. The best you can hope for is that the listener will accept what you say. All too often, however, the recipient will walk away and decide that you're someone to avoid because if you speak harshly about a particular person you'll do the same to him.

So now that we know the problem, it's "simply" a matter of training oneself not to give in to the urge. Many years ago I heard Rabbi Ezriel Tauber ZTL speak. I was impressed with the contents of the speech but even more so by his addendum, "You should know that I'm not talking to you(the audience) I'm speaking to myself but it's loud enough for you to hear." Truth be told I have a proclivity for Loshon Hora and I so I'm writing this largely to strengthen my resolve in this area. The late Jim Croce was a tremendous singer-songwriter. As is often the case performers are best remembered for their most popular songs. In Croce's case that was "Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown." My favorite was "Time in a Bottle." But today I'll share some words from "Operator." "I only wish my words could just convince myself that it just wasn't real but that's not the way it feels." This really captures the struggle we have with the Yetzer Hora regarding this bane. I say it's a struggle because I try to put up a good fight since I recognize how serious it is. Let's listen to what the Gaon said. If someone spoke Loshon Hora but he stopped in the middle, for every word he restrained his reward is beyond what angels can imagine." Again we understand the gravity because we see the efforts that the Yetzer Hora extends to have us succumb. The Gaon's point should be emphasized. The Yetzer Hora is like my professor, "Who are you kidding? You'll never stop speaking Loshon Hora. Okay, today you'll hold back but tomorrow the floodgates will open." So the GRA is saying that even if you can defeat your nemesis just one time it will change your life.

Hedging for Humility

by Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

Embedded in the complex and esoteric laws of *tzara'at* is a simple, yet powerful message related to the power of speech. Although the verses themselves do not explicitly state what spawns *tzara'at*, Chazal associate it with seven sins, perhaps most famously with *lashon hara*, derogatory speech.

The detrimental effects evil speech has on others is obvious. While we may have difficulty being mindful or controlling what we say, few people would deny the unethicallity of hurtful speech. Yet *lashon hara* is not just problematic for its interpersonal effects. It is also sourced in a deficiency of character. One of the other seven sins responsible for *tzara'at* is that of arrogance. These two sins may be linked. Speaking ill of others may reflect an arrogant personality.

Dr. James W. Pennebaker is a leading psychologist in the field of language and personality. Using complex computer programs, he analyzes people's word usage to mine an individual's thoughts, feelings, motivations, and relationships with other people. Pennebaker demonstrates in several studies that the words we use not only affect others but reflect our selves.

The use of hedges in our sentences is one example of this idea. When asked "what's the weather like outside?", we could respond "it's cold" or we could respond "I think it's cold." In his book *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us*, Pennebaker argues that when we say "I think it's cold" instead of "it's cold," we are implicitly acknowledging that "Although there are different views on this – and you may indeed come to a different conclusion – my own personal belief is that it might be cold outside. I could be wrong, of course, and if you have a different sense of the weather, I won't be offended" (p. 44). "I think" implies nuance. It leaves room for multiple perspectives and different opinions. In short, it reflects humility.

When describing the laws of *tzara'at* as it relates to houses, the verse tells us that when a person sees something that looks like *tzara'at*, he approaches the Kohen and says "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house" ([Vayikra 14:35](#)). The Midrash (quoted by Rashi) is sensitive to the fact that the verse should have just stated "a plague has appeared upon my house." The fact that the qualifier "something like" a plague is used must be teaching something of significance. Even if the person approaching the Kohen is a scholar who knows conclusively that it is a plague, says the Midrash, he should still hedge his statement. He shouldn't say I saw a plague. Rather, he should say, I saw something like a plague.

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi (15th century, Constantinople), in his super-commentary on Rashi finds a moral message within the Midrash. The Torah is teaching us proper behavior (*derekh eretz*): we should speak using hesitant language. He connects it to another comment of the Sages, namely, that we should train ourselves to say, "I don't know" ([Berachos 4a](#)). Hedging our statements and admitting when we aren't sure of something, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains further, reflects a humble character.

In what is becoming an increasingly toxic social and political climate, the suggestion of the Sages rooted in the Biblical text provides us a framework for proper character and effective communication. While there may be a place for indisputable facts and speaking with conviction, if we find that everything we think and say is a definitive truth in our own eyes, it may be time to take a step back and reflect. Is it a plague or something like a plague? Am I so sure of everything or maybe I can admit that I really don't know? If we can hedge our communication with a hint of humility, we will be well on our way to cultivating our own character and improving our relationships with others.