

# Four Curses from the Mouth

PARSHA INSIGHTS - KI SAVO (5757)

## **BLESSED BE THOSE WHO REFRAIN FROM SPEAKING LOSHON HORA**

“I searched and delved deeply into the 613 *mitzvos* [commandments of the Torah]... and I found these to be relevant to our topic (of *loshon hora* [evil gossip]”, declares the *Chofetz Chaim*, after listing seventeen prohibitions and fourteen positive commandments associated with derogatory speech. But those thirty-one are not the whole story; the sainted *Chofetz Chaim* also enumerates four “*arurin*” [curses] - statements, which place a curse upon those who transgress certain *mitzvos*. These four also have to do with *loshon hora*. What is so noteworthy about this today? **All four curses are found in our parsha** [Torah portion], *Ki Savo!* We will spend some time reviewing the four *arurin* and explaining them well.

The *shevatim* [tribes] of Reuven, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan, and Naftali were to stand on Har [Mount] Aival. The *Levi'im* [those from the tribe of Levi] between the mountains of Grizim and Aival were to turn their faces toward Aival to recite the curses (27:12-13, with *Rashi* and *Sifsai Chachamim* from the *Mishna* in *Sotah* 32A). Let us study those pertaining to *loshon hora* in the *Chofetz Chaim's* order, though it differs from the order of the *psukim* [verses] in the Torah.

“Cursed is one who strikes his friend in secret” (27:24). This refers to *loshon hora* (striking with the tongue), as the *Sifri*, brought by our *Rashi*, interprets. The element of privacy is typical when it comes to *loshon hora*, which is generally related behind the back of the victim. Consequently, it makes sense that the Torah views evil gossip as striking someone in secret.

“Cursed is one who misleads a blind person on the way” (27:18). We are hereby warned not to cause someone to commit a transgression. This is similar to the actual *mitzvas lo sa'aseh* [negative commandments], the prohibition of putting a stumbling block before a blind man. One who relates *loshon hora* causes the listener to sin by making his words audible, and the listener allows the speaker to sin by giving ear to his spoken words. In his notes at the bottom, the *Chofetz Chaim* adds that if someone gives bad advice, and the motive of the counselor is to somehow gain from this, he also brings upon himself the “curse” we are discussing. It is a different way to transgress the same admonition. He is definitely misleading one who is blind in the matter for which he seeks advice.

The *Chofetz Chaim* mentions that some *shadchanim* [match-makers], wanting to make a *shidduch* [match] at almost any cost, pair up people who are not compatible at all. They are transgressing this admonition not to give advice that is harmful. *Shadchanim* should think carefully before making matches; there should at least be SOME realistic potential for the *shidduch* to work well. A woman and man with similar goals, levels of intelligence, *hashkofos* [philosophical outlooks on life and child rearing, etc.], and backgrounds are most likely to succeed in marriage, although there are exceptions. It is a major discussion; we have just spoken about it briefly here. I would like to add, though, that most *shadchanim* I have met act *l'shaim Shamaim* [for the sake of Heaven] and do a splendid job. Also, there might be fewer complications in our time, when prospective couples go out on more dates and get to know each other more than they used to. Perhaps this takes SOME responsibility away from the *shadchan* [match-maker].

“Cursed is one who will not fulfill the words of this Torah, to perform them” (27:26). *Rashi* explains that Hashem included the entire Torah in this statement. The *Bnai Yisroel* [Children of Israel] accepted it upon themselves with a curse (the consequence for neglecting it) and an oath. Based on Rabainu Yona, the *Chofetz Chaim* comments that this curse refers to one who disregards certain *mitzvos* of the Torah, not planning to observe them. He uses the word “*hefker*” [neglected and totally abandoned] to describe the attitude one might have toward *mitzvos* that don't seem significant. The “*arur*” [curse] certainly applies to a person who does not even give consideration to the prohibitions involved in speaking *loshon hora*.

To further clarify this, the *Chofetz Chaim* quotes Rabainu Yona in *Sha'arei Teshuva*, *sha'ar rishon*, letter *vav*, [Gate 1, #6]. Let us look at his holy words. Some righteous people, *tzadikim* [righteous people], occasionally

stumble by committing a transgression here and there. This is understood based on the famous *pasuk* [verse] in *Koheles* [Ecclesiastes] 7:20, “Because there is no righteous person on earth who will do (only) good and will not sin”. Even so, they subdue their evil inclinations a hundred times. If they will fall into sin one time, they will not repeat it... But anyone who is not careful from a given sin, and HE DOES NOT ACCEPT UPON HIMSELF TO AVOID IT, even if it is a relatively minor offense, even though he is careful from all the other transgressions in the Torah... he is counted among the sinners. Similarly, if a servant will tell his master that he is willing to do everything required of him except for one thing, he has already shattered the yoke of his master from upon himself. He has cast off the responsibility of obedience, even though the actual violation appears minor. About such a situation it is stated in our *pasuk*: “Cursed be the one who WILL NOT FULFILL the words of this Torah, to do them”. This means he is not willing to commit himself to fulfill the precepts from beginning to end.

How does one avoid this third “*arur*”? He must work as hard as possible and take it upon himself to observe the laws of the Torah properly. True, there are ups and downs. But we have no authority to disregard or neglect any of the *mitzvos* for any reason. We must learn the *halachos* [Jewish laws], get into positive habits, and strive for perfection.

“Cursed is one who denigrates his father and mother” (27:16). The *Chofetz Chaim* seems reluctant to even enumerate this “*arur*”. He lists it almost as an afterthought, in parenthesis. Perhaps the reason is that one would hope that children will never say *loshon hora* at all, but especially not about their parents! There is no need to speak at length about this now; its major discussion is in *mitzvas asai* [positive commandment] number ten, listed earlier by the *Chofetz Chaim*. There also, he is hesitant to imagine that anyone could have the audacity to say evil gossip about a parent.

Please note that the word אָרֹר “*arur*” [cursed] is very similar to and contains within it the Hebrew word for light אֹר “*or*” [sometimes transliterated “*ohr*”]. As I learned from my *rebbeim* [rabbis] in *yeshiva* [religious school], the Torah really does not want to pronounce a curse on anyone— even a serious sinner. Hashem merely wants that person to be enlightened, to be inspired to do what is right. Sometimes he is deserving of punishment, but its purpose is ONLY to illuminate his path and direct him back toward Torah.

Hopefully, our *tefillos* [prayers] will be accepted during this month of *Elul*, as well as all year long. Whenever we are tempted to say *loshon hora*, may we recall the fact that prayer is much more acceptable coming from a mouth clean of sinful speech. With these thoughts, we should be *zocheh* [meritorious] to all the *brochos* [blessings] promised for *shmiras haloshon* [guarding our speech].

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