

The Haughty Won't Rise Again

PARSHA INSIGHTS - AIKEV (5757)

LOSHON HORA AND CONCEITEDNESS – The Connection

“Be careful not to forget Hashem your G-d...” (*Perek Ches, Pasuk Yud Alef* [chapter 8, verse 11]). What is the Torah teaching us?

Based on the *Gemara Sotah* 5A (Rav Nachman Bar Yitzchok) and the early authorities who list, count, and explain the *mitzvos* [commandments], the *Chofetz Chaim* clarifies this injunction - **we are hereby warned not to be arrogant**. Enumerated by him as the fifth prohibition one transgresses for speaking *loshon hora* [evil gossip], the *Chofetz Chaim* remarks that a person who belittles another with derogatory comments demonstrates haughtiness.

How is this so? Since he denigrates and scoffs at people, it must be that he considers himself an important individual. “He thinks of himself as a wise person and a man among men. If he would recognize his own faults, he would not mock his friend.”

Rabeinu Yona in *Sha'arei Teshuva* is also quoted by the *Chofetz Chaim*. He states as follows (section 174 - page 114 in the *Eshkol* edition):

“And he (the one who mocks others) is also conceited, because a humble person who recognizes his own faults and shortcomings will not make fun of people.”

This teaches us the connection between arrogance and *loshon hora*, as stated by the *Chofetz Chaim* quoted above.

In the *B'air Maim Chaim*, the *Chofetz Chaim* cites a fascinating remark of the *Smag*, an early enumerator of the *mitzvos*. The *Smag* writes in his introduction that he received an indication, a hint from Heaven, that he should not forget to list this *mitzvah* [commandment] as one of the 613, and so he entered it in his count (as prohibition number 64)! As you might know, there are differences of opinion regarding WHICH *mitzvos* technically comprise the grand total of 613. The *Gemara Sotah* definitely deduces from our *pasuk* that one is not allowed to be arrogant, but it could have been debated whether to list this as one of the 365 actual negative commandments. The communication received by the *Smag* proves the significance of our *pasuk*; its observance is crucial for proper *avodas* [service of] Hashem, and it IS to be listed as an official *mitzvah*. Conceitedness is an actual prohibition, just like desecrating *Shabbos* [the Sabbath], eating non-kosher, shaving off one's *payos* [sideburns], or wearing *sha'atnez* [forbidden mixture of wool and linen]. The punishments for violation of *mitzvos lo sa'aseh* [negative commandments] vary, but they are all forbidden by Torah law.

Let us explore more of the *Gemara Sotah* 5A. Arrogance is such a serious *avaira* [sin] that the dust of the haughty person will not stir for *techias hamaisim* [resurrection of the dead]. He will not be part of the resurrection of the dead; there is no place for him among the *tzadikim* [righteous people] who are destined to rise in the future. He is compared to an idolater, and the *Shechina* [Divine Presence] Itself wails and laments over his atrocious character traits. All this can inspire us to behave only with humility. This will inevitably lead to abstaining from all sorts of evil gossip. When we distance ourselves from conceitedness and false pride, we constantly recall the areas in which we personally can use some improvement. Consequently, *loshon hora* about others and THEIR errors is not even a possibility.

The *Chofetz Chaim* then reminds us, based on *Chazal* [our Sages], not to raise ourselves at the expense of others. It is a grave enough sin to belittle and gossip about people; it is indicative of arrogance, as we have shown thus far. But even worse is if one elevates himself, and in doing so he lowers someone else. To impress upon us this lesson, *Chazal* state that a person might forfeit his share in *Olam Habo* [the World to Come] as the result of such behavior. This *Chazal* is found in the *Midrash Rabba* on *Beraishis* [Genesis], 1:5.

In summary, conceitedness is closely connected to *loshon hora*. That is why the *Chofetz Chaim* lists our *pasuk* about arrogance with the prohibitions of derogatory speech. We are commanded to be humble, keeping our own faults in mind for the purpose of improving them as much as possible. This prevents us from focusing on the

shortcomings of others. Hashem “gives favor to those who are humble” (*Mishlei* [Proverbs] 3:34). May this blessing of grace and favor from G-d be enjoyed by all of us.

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