

The Sin's On His Head

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TAZRIA (5757)

IT'S NOT ALL JUST "IN HIS HEAD", THEN AGAIN- IT WAS!

In discussing a person whose *tzora'as* [leprosy-like affliction] breaks out on his head, the Torah speaks with much detail and firmness. **“He is a person inflicted with *tzora'as*, he is impure, the *kohen* [priest] will surely declare him impure - his affliction is on his head”** (*Perek Yud Gimmel, Pasuk Mem Dalid* [chapter 13, verse 44]). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin wonders: What difference does it make which part of one's body is affected by *tzora'as*? Why the harsh words concerning the one whose *tzora'as* is on his head?

He provides the following solution, based on other commentators. *Tzora'as* on the head indicates that the person has erroneous, destructive beliefs and opinions. The headquarters for these evil thoughts is the brain. It is for this reason that the *tzora'as* developed on his head. An individual who possesses corrupt thoughts is in grave spiritual danger. His beliefs lead him to sinful activities and pastimes. Consequently, the Torah discusses his *tzora'as* in harsher terms than usual.

The *Oznaim L'Torah* strengthens this approach using a *Midrash Tanchuma* in this *parsha* [Torah portion]. Besides other sins enumerated by *Chazal* [our Sages], idolatry is sometimes the cause of *tzora'as*. The *yaitzer hora* [evil inclination] for idol worship can be likened to an intellectual appetite, which emanates from corrupt thoughts. As a result, Hashem sometimes sends *tzora'as* of the head to steer the offender toward *teshuva* [repentance]. In addition, it must be noted that the word “*rosh*” is often a hint to idol worship, as in a *Gemara Sanhedrin* 107A. A familiar example of this is in *Sefer Bamidbar* [the Book of Numbers], *Parshas Shlach*. After hearing the report of the *meraglim* [spies], *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel] suggested, in *Perek Yud Dalid, Pasuk Dalid* [chapter 14, verse 4], “Let us appoint A *ROSH* [HEAD] and return to Egypt”. One explanation for this, brought there by *Rashi*, is that the Jews considered creating or appointing some idol(s) to replace Moshe and help return them to Egypt. Thus, the word “*rosh*” can denote an idol. Consequently, our *pasuk* in *Tazria* makes perfect sense. The *Midrash Tanchuma* quoted above states that *tzora'as* can be a symptom of idolatrous practices in the afflicted person's life. The end of our *pasuk* in *Tazria* says “*b'rosho nig'o*” [his plague is on his head]. Now we can interpret it in a deeper way: his plague is BECAUSE OF HIS *ROSH* - it is a result of his idol worship, since the word “*rosh*” hints to idol worship.

Next, the *Oznaim L'Torah* questions what he developed thus far. Doesn't everyone know that *tzora'as* comes mainly because of *loshon hora* [evil gossip]? The proofs to this are numerous and don't need to be stated here. If so, how could *tzora'as* also be the result of idol worship, a sin which seems totally unassociated with *loshon hora*? Is *avoda zara* [idol worship] perhaps connected with *loshon hora*?

The answer to this is: Absolutely! We need to study some *Rambam* to fully comprehend the association. The *Rambam* is found in the laws of *tum'as* [impurity of] *tzora'as*, 16, 10. Much of what the *Rambam* says is quoted by the *Chofetz Chaim* in his monumental works on *hilchos* [the laws of] *loshon hora*. The following is paraphrased with some comments added where clarification is needed.

In the Torah, it warns and says, “Be careful regarding the plague of *tzora'as*! Remember what Hashem did to Miriam.” This means that we must reflect on what happened to Miriam the prophetess as a result of her *loshon hora* on her brother, Moshe *Rabainu* [Moses our teacher]. She spoke against her brother, who was younger than she was. She raised him on her lap, and she even endangered herself to save him from drowning in the Nile. We see clearly that she loved him dearly. She didn't even really denigrate him with her words. Rather, she erred by equating him with other prophets, and she wished to help Moshe's wife, Tzipora, from whom Moshe had separated; Miriam did not understand why this was justified. To top it all off, Moshe wasn't even offended by what Miriam said! Despite all these mitigating factors, she was immediately stricken with *tzora'as*.

How much more so does this apply to wicked, foolish people who speak many derogatory words about people. Therefore, it is proper for a person to distance himself from their company and conversations. And this is the manner of evil scoffers: First, they engage in much idle conversation. As stated in *Koheles, Perek Hey, Pasuk Bais* [Ecclesiastes, 5:2], the voice of a fool comes with many words; talking too much is a sign of lack of intelligence. This leads them to slander the *tzadikim* [righteous people]. In turn, they might even end up criticizing the prophets

and disbelieving their words. And after this, they begin speaking against G-d Himself, and they deny the principles of Torah and our faith. And behold, it says (*Tehillim, Ayin Gimmel, Pasuk Tes* [Psalms 73:9]), “They placed their mouths against (the One Who dwells in) Heaven, and their tongues travel on the earth.” What caused them to lash out with their tongues against Heaven? Their tongues, which first traveled on earth, slandering and gossiping about people.

The part of the *Rambam* emphasized by Rav Zalman Sorotzkin is that everyday *loshon hora* eventually brings one to speak out against G-d and deny the foundations of Jewish faith. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* cited above and interpreted in detail by the *Rambam* supports this. In summary, a slanderous mouth develops into a major breakdown in faith in G-d. When one’s destructive speech is ultimately directed against Hashem, *chas v’shalom* [Heaven forbid], his transgression is tantamount to worshipping idols. Thus, he ends up suffering from *tzora’as* of the head. That is the connection between *loshon hora* and idol worship. Also, that is the hint from our *pasuk* - “*b’rosho nig’o*”. His plague is on his head and IN his head- it is because of his corrupted, heretical ideas, which were born in his brain.

All this reminds us about the significance of *shmiras haloshon* [guarding one’s speech]. Please, let us do our part to put these lessons into practice. When the *yaitzer hora* [evil inclination] tempts us to speak negatively, let us overcome the urge. When anger builds up inside because we imagine that someone has offended us, let’s recall the fact that *ahavas Yisroel* [love of fellow Jews] and *shmiras haloshon* will help bring *Moshiach* [Messiah] faster. When we are irritated because we perceive someone’s differences from us as negative attributes, let us heed the Torah’s warnings against *loshon hora* before saying anything. The time and place to implement this is now, at the *Shabbos* [Sabbath] table and in our everyday lives.

The *Rambam* quoted above ends on a very positive note. “The conversation of ethical Jews is only in words of Torah and *chachma* [wisdom]. Therefore, Hashem helps them and brings them merit through it.” G-d records our positive words, our Torah discussions, and they benefit us for eternity. As one of my *rebbeim* [rabbis] expressed it, each person creates an edifice for himself, a heavenly structure, comprised of the words spoken by him during his life. May all Hashem’s *brochos* [blessings] for His devoted followers come true for us, in the *zechus* [merit] of proper speech.

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