

שמרה בשבוע

**Insight, halacha and haskafa
relating to Shmiras HaLashon
gleaned from the weekly Parsha**

ויקרא 3

Preface

Why this *mitzva*?

Why this book?

Mah nishtana?

I. Why is there so much focus on *Shmiras HaLashon*?

We are not generally aware of the weight that a particular *mitzva* carries. Indeed, we are warned: **וְהָיִי זְהִיר בְּמִצְוֹת קִלְיָה כְּבִתְמוּנָהּ, שְׂאִין אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ מִמֶּן שֶׁכָּרוֹן שֶׁל מִצְוֹת** - **Be as careful with a lenient *mitzva* as you would be with a stringent one, because we don't know the reward for *mitzvos*.** Yet, *Chazal* tell us that there are certain *mitzvos* that are so intrinsic to the essence of a Jew, *mitzvos* that so permeate our daily and annual life that they bear greater importance and require greater focus. *Shmiras HaLashon* is clearly one of those *mitzvos*.

We can get a profound understanding of the centrality of *Shmiras HaLashon* by examining the *Sheish Zechiros*- the Six Remembrances that most authorities obligate us to remember every single day. If we categorize these remembrances, we will find among them:

Seminal events in the birth of the Jewish nation

1. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and 2. *Kabalas HaTorah*;

Critical moments of national, spiritual or physical risk

3. the *Cheit haEgel* and 4. the War with Amalek

A central aspect of Jewish observance

5. *Shabbos*.

If I were to tell you that these are five of the six things that a Jew must remember every day, what would you choose to be the sixth remembrance? Perhaps you would choose another critical moment in Jewish history such as *krias yam suf*, entering *Eretz Yisrael*, or building the *Beis HaMikdash*? Maybe you would add an additional moment of spiritual or physical risk such as the shattering of the *luchos* or the *cheit* of the *meraglim*. You might choose another central tenet of Judaism to accompany *Shabbos* on the list, *kashrus* or *taharas hamishpacha* would be good choices. Remembering “what Hashem did to Miriam” (punishing her with *tzaras* for speaking *lashon hora*) would likely be far down the list of choices, if it even made the list at all. Yet, “Remember what Hashem did to Miriam...” is the sixth *zechira*.¹ That is how fundamental *Shmiras HaLashon* is to a Jew and the Jewish people. Why is this the case, what is so essential about *Shmiras HaLashon* that it merits so much attention? Here are some of the reasons.

A *mitzva* that touches everything

Shmiras HaLashon touches so many other *mitzvos*. The introduction to the *Sefer Chofetz Chaim* lists seventeen negative *mitzvos* and fourteen positive *mitzvos* that relate to *Shmiras HaLashon* along with three curses that one potentially triggers when speaking *Lashon Hora*. Those lists certainly highlight the importance of *Shmiras HaLashon*. But there’s so much more.

¹ I have listed the *Sheis Zechiros* out of order to illustrate the point, the traditional order of listing is:

1. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* 2. *Har Sinai* 3. The War with Amalek 4. *Cheit HaEgel* 5. What Hashem did to Miriam 6. *Shabbos*

Speech is an integral part of our very essence. Intelligent speech is the differentiating attribute between humans and animals-- only man is called a *medaber* (literally: one who speaks), the loftiest level of creation-- , and proper speech is one of the primary things that differentiates Jews from non-Jews. Indeed, speech is what makes us, to the extent possible, G-dlike. Speech also plays a central role in the quality and efficacy of our relationships *bein adam lemakom*-- through torah learning and *tefilah*-- and *bein adam lechavero* -- through communication and interaction. Finally, *Shmiras HaLashon* is an integral part of Jewish history including *golus mitzrayim*, the destruction of both *Batei HaMikdash* and our current, prolonged *golus*. The Chofetz Chaim in his *hakdama* to the Sefer Chofetz Chaim says: **וּכְאֲשֶׁר נִחְפְּשָׁה דְרָבֵינוּ וְנִחְקְרָה, אֵיזָה עֲוֹנוֹת הֵם, -If we thoroughly examined our ways to determine which sins are the primary ones that cause our exile to be lengthened, we will find many. However, the sin of *Lashon Hora* is greater than them all.**

The danger of overlooking *Shmiras HaLashon* and the Reward for honoring it

The severity of *Lashon Hora* cannot be overstated. The *gemara* in Arachin (15b) makes three powerful statements about a person who speaks *Lashon Hora*: **מגדיל עוונות, כאלו כפר בעיקר - he is considered as if he has denied belief in G-d, אמר הקב"ה אין אני והוא יכולין לדור - his sins increase until the heavens, and עד לשמים - Hashem says (about him) "He and I cannot dwell together in this world".** These are only three of the literally scores of such frightening statements about the severity of speaking *Lashon Hora* found throughout *shas* and *chazal*, the Chofetz Chaim sums them up as follows: **ומי שיעיני ויתבונן היטב בהם, And anyone who scrutinizes them well, the hair on his head will stand up from the greatness of this sin.**

The Chofetz Chaim often points out that due to our many sins, *Lashon Hora* has increased but consoles us by explaining the tremendous reward for those who "revive" this neglected *mitzva*. **דלפי זמננו, בעוונותינו הרבים, שהפקר אצל איזה, אנשים לגמרי העון לשון הרע ורכילות, אם אחד יתחזק תמיד בענין שמירת הלשון, שלא לעבר על עון לשון הרע ורכילות, כמה מהשכר נגיע לו על ידי זה, דהלא ידוע הוא מה שכתוב ב"ספר חרדים", דמצוה שאין לה דורשיו, היא כמת מצוה, ומצוה שאין לה רודפיו, רדף אחריה לעשותה, מפני שהמצוה מקטרגת ואומרת: כמה גרועה אנכי, שנתעלמתי מכל וכל? וכבר ידוע גדל ענינו של מת מצוה ממה דאמרו (ברכות כ'), דאפלו כהן גדול ונזיר והולך לשחט פסחו ולמול את בנו, שאינו מטמא לקרובים, אכל מטמא הוא**

למַת מִצְוָה, כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה מִנַּת בְּבִיּוֹן. – In our times, due to our copious sins, many people have completely abandoned the *mitzvos* of *Lashon Hora* and *Rechilus*. If someone would strengthen himself in *Shmiras HaLashon*-- to not speak *Lashon Hora* and *Rechilus*-- how great his reward would be! We know that the *Sefer Chareidim* writes that a *mitzva* that no one is searching after is like a *meis mitzva* (a corpse which does not have someone to bury it, and therefore it becomes everyone's obligation). Any *mitzva* which no one is chasing, chase after it, because that *mitzvah* is crying out: "How ugly am I that everyone has abandoned me?!" And we all know the greatness of a *meis mitzvah* as explained in the gemara in *Brochos*: even the *Kohein Gadol*, a *Nazir*, one who was going to slaughter his *Korban Pesach* or one going to perform *bris milah* on his son render themselves *tameh* for a *meis mitzva* so that it should not lie in shame.

The *Chofetz Chaim* continues by saying that a *meis* is mere matter, without life or spirit. But because it previously embodied a Jewish soul, we are concerned about its shame and we obligate even those who are otherwise prohibited from becoming *tameh* to bury it. Regarding the Torah which is more precious than pearls and with which Hashem occupies Himself every day, if one of its *mitzvos* lies in shame, how much more so must we strengthen ourselves in it so that it does not cry out against us. When we chase after and attend to such a disregarded *mitzva* such as *Shmiras HaLashon*, the *Sefer Chareidim* tells us that the *mitzva* will not cry out against us. In fact, the opposite will happen: the *mitzva* itself will advocate to Hashem on our behalf. That reward is incalculable.

II. *Shmiras HaLashon* is a particular challenge in our times

The importance of *Shmiras HaLashon* as discussed above requires every Jew, in every generation to give it due attention and protection. But our *dor*, perhaps, has a greater need to be even more focused on *Shmiras HaLashon*. Our generation is a generation of communication. We are persistently being tempted to be "in touch". We call, we text, we video chat. The world is constantly developing new means, methods and platforms of communication. In 1984, it was estimated that the average person speaks approximately 860,000,000 words in their lifetime. With the understanding that this estimate was published years before the internet and many of our more modern digital

communications systems were launched, I would not be surprised if many of us now utter/type closer to a **billion words** in our respective lifetimes.

To give some perspective to that, imagine that each word was the length of a dollar bill (each word is significantly more valuable than that!). If you laid each word end to end, you could go from New York to Jerusalem 17 times.

As our means of communication increase, the number of words we use increases and the chances of breaching *Shmiras HaLashon* in all of its facets-- *lashon hora*, *rechilus* (tale bearing), *sheker* (falsehood), *chanifa* (flattery), *leitzanus* (scoffing), *machlokes* (controversy), *ka'as* (anger), *divrei gaivah* (haughtiness), *onaas devarim* (hurtful speech) and *halbanas panim* (causing embarrassment)-- increases. Imagine: a billion chances to stumble into sin. That's a daunting thought. However, with great risk comes great opportunity-- every time we speak or we think before speaking is an opportunity to do the *ratzon Hashem* and employ proper speech.

III. The Nexus between Shmiras HaLashon, Shabbos and the Parsha

The importance and Challenge of Speech on Shabbos

Speech plays a central role on Shabbos. There are many esoteric and profound reasons and examples of these, but if we just review some of the familiar aspects of speech on Shabbos, it will become clear that speech on Shabbos has an elevated role. According to the Rambam: **מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה מִן הַתּוֹרָה לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בְּדַבְרִים... בְּכַנְיֻסְתּוֹ בְּקִדּוּשׁ הַיּוֹם וּבִיציאתו בְּהַבְדִּילָה** - **It is a *mitzva* from the Torah to sanctify Shabbos with words... when it enters with *kiddush* and when it exits with *havdalah*.** Simply thinking about the *kedusha* of Shabbos is not enough, we must actually use speech to sanctify it. There is a *halacha* that the verbal greeting we give people on Shabbos should be different from the one we use during the week. On Shabbos, we increase our *tefillah* and the public reading of the *Torah*, both *mitzvos* that are performed with the power of speech. We are familiar with the restrictions of **וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר** "and speaking words" which prohibits certain speech on Shabbos such as business discussions and particular types of transactions or preparations.

Rabbeinu Tam actually interprets the phrase **וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר** to mean that on Shabbos you need to minimize even permissible speech, and the Mechaber, Rema and Mishna Brurah bring this down in *hilchos Shabbos*. The Midrash brings a story that supports this position: **אִמְיָה דְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי, בְּדִקְוֹת מִשְׁתַּעֲבָא מוֹתֵר: מַלִּין בְּשַׁבְּתָא הָוָה אָמַר לָהּ שַׁבְּתָא הִיא וְהוֹת שְׁתַּקָּא**. **The mother of Rabi Shimon bar Yochai**

was once speaking permissible things on Shabbos, he said to her “It’s Shabbos” and she quieted herself. There’s a gemara in Shabbos (119b) that really drives home the power of speech on Shabbos, it essentially says that there is a way that through speech on Shabbos a person can become, a co-creator of the world with Hashem. **כל המתפלל בערב שבת ואומר “ויכולי”, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו נעשה שותף להקדוש ברוך הוא במעשה בראשית** - Anyone who prays on Shabbat evening and says the passage of *vayechulu*, it is considered as if he is a partner with Hashem in the act of Creation.

In addition to the intrinsic importance of speech on *Shabbos*, there are practical aspects about the way we spend our *Shabbosim* that highlight the importance of speech and the dangers of uncareful speech. On one hand, *Shabbos* is the time that we spend removed from several of the day-to-day challenges of *Shmiras HaLashon*--our phones, computers and devices. On the other hand, *Shabbos* also presents significant challenges since for many of us it is the day that we spend the most time with others-- in *shul*, at *kiddushim*, *onegs*, and at long meals and get-togethers with friends and family. Whenever we spend prolonged time with others, the chances of improper speech increase and, accordingly, the opportunities for proper speech. The Chofetz Chaim himself spoke about the challenges that *Shabbos* creates in the area of *Shmiras HaLashon*. For example: **בשבת קדש אחר סעודה שלישית, שיש כמה כתות אנשים הלומדי תורה מסתמא משיחין בדברי אלהים חיים, ושאר אנשים מסתמא משיחין בענין הבלי העולם ובודאי מתגנדר על לשונם דברי לשון הרע והוללות ולצנות** - On *Shabbos kodesh*, after *shalosh sheudas*, there are many groups of men that will learn Torah and there are other groups that will talk about the matters of the world and for sure this will lead to *Lashon Hora*, empty speech and cynicism. The juxtaposition of these two groups highlights both the opportunity and the challenge of *Shmiras HaLashon* on *Shabbos*.

It has been said that our speech during the week needs to be *kodesh*, but our speech during *Shabbos* needs to be *kodesh kodoshim*.

The Parsha as our Guide

As Jews, we live week to week by the *parsha*. We *lein* from the *parsha* four times a week (Mon/Thurs/Shabbos morning/Shabbos Mincha). We review the weekly *parsha* through *shnaim mikre*. *Parsha* invariably becomes the focal point of much of our *Shabbos* table *Torah*, and we know that the lessons of the *parsha* have significant meaning for the week in which it falls.

The gemara in Sanhedrin (106b) says: אמר לו הקב"ה לדואג הרשע מה לך לספר חוקי: Hashem said to Doeg the evil one, What are you going to say when you reach those *parshios* of the Torah relating to murderers and those relating to those who speak Lashon Hora, how will you explain them? The Chofetz Chaim explains that when someone goes to the next world, they open a *Sefer Torah* in front of him and tell him to read it out loud and they ask him questions about it as they related to his life. Here, the Chofetz Chaim is saying that one who neglects *Shmiras HaLashon* will not know how to answer when he reads those *parshios* relating to *Lashon Hora*.

The goal of this *sefer*, *Shmira Bashavua*, is to marry the *parsha* to *Shmiras HaLashon* in order to elevate our *Shabbos* and our *Shabbos* tables, and to help provide a fixed time to discuss the *halachos* and *hashkafos* of *Shmiras HaLashon*. The Chofetz Chaim lists and elucidates (in the *Shmiras HaLashon* and the *Kuntres Chovas HaShmirah*) the *parshios* that directly relate to the *halachos* of *Shmiras HaLashon*. In *Shmira BaShavua*, we are taking the Chofetz Chaim's lead and expanding upon that approach to glean *Shmiras HaLashon* related learnings from every *parsha* in the Torah. At the end of each selection, you will find:

THE TAKEAWAY- a summary of the learning, and

THIS WEEK- practical advice for bringing the learning into the week.

It is not recommended that you try all of the advice for an entire *parsha* each week. Instead, focus on one or two pieces of advice that speak to you most or those focused on areas where you feel that you need strengthening.

The Gaon in *Alim LeTerufah* quotes the midrash: שָׁעַל כָּל רֵגַע וְרֵגַע שְׂאֵדָם חוֹסֵם: - That for every moment that a

persons closes his mouth, he merits the “hidden light” (a reward) that even the angels and celestial beings cannot fathom. The Gaon points out: **רָאָה שְׁלֵא נִזְכָּר בַּמִּדְרָשׁ תְּדַשׁ אִו שְׁבוּעַ אִו יוֹם אִו שָׁעָה, רַק רָגַע** - Notice that the midrash did not say (that he held his tongue for) a month or a week or a day or an hour, only a moment. If someone receives such a tremendous reward for being careful with *Shmiras HaLashon* for a moment, imagine what would be if we make *Shimras HaLashon* a greater part of our Shabbos and then bring that approach into the week. Our reward will be immeasurable. May we be *zocheh* to it.

Sefer Vayikra

Introduction

- *Why do some people feel disconnected from Sefer Vayikra?*

On *Tisha B'Av*, 5765, I decided to *daven mincha* at the late afternoon *minyán* in a *shteibl* across the street from our home. As always, my then eight-and-a-half year old son jumped at the opportunity to come to *shul*. He stood wide-eyed at the *bima* during the *leining* and he found it particularly interesting to watch men don their *talleisim* and *tefillin* so late in the day.

In the middle of *davening*, the skies began to crackle with lightning and bellow with thunder. By the time *mincha* had finished, it was pouring so hard that we decided to wait in *shul* for the 25 minutes or so before *maariv* instead of braving the downpour and running home.

Usually, when waiting between *mincha* and *maariv*, my son and I would review the *parsha* or learn *pirkei avos*. Since it was *Tisha B'Av* (when most *Torah* learning is prohibited), we couldn't do that. Instead, we sat down to shmooze

about the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*. My goal was to try to teach him something that would make *Tisha B'Av* just a little more relevant. And so I began.

The *kina* of *Eili Zion* has always struck a chord with me, I know I'm not alone in that. The haunting *niggun* recounting the vivid allegory of a mother in labor has the ability to wrench at least one tear out of an otherwise exhausted body and perhaps calloused heart. I began to tell Aryeh about how the pain and crying of the Jewish nation throughout our long *golus* is compared to a woman in labor. I explained that just as the excruciating pain of childbirth ends with the ultimate joy of the birth of a child, our pain and tears on *Tisha B'Av* culminate in the birth of *mashiach*. I explained further how we are taught that *mashiach* is actually born on the afternoon of *Tisha B'Av*. As I added this point, my son glanced up at me with watery eyes. He appeared hurt or confused. My first thought was that perhaps I had frightened him by discussing how women cry and experience pain in childbirth. The little boy who just a few short minutes ago was floating on the excitement of coming to shul with his father now looked like a wounded bird. He was just on the edge of cracking into a cry when he asked: "Abba, does that mean I can't be *mashiach*?"

How in the world do you react to a question like that? No parenting book I had ever read, no chinuch shiur I had ever attended, and no Rav I had ever spoken to had prepared me for that. You see, having been born in the dead of winter, Aryeh had just heard for the very first time something that hinted at the possibility that he couldn't grow up to be *mashiach*. I tried to recover. I told him that maybe *mashiach* isn't physically born on *Tisha B'Av* but that he reveals himself to us on *Tisha B'Av*. I'm not quite sure if he bought that explanation but I am sure that I was ecstatic that the time for *maariv* had arrived, the perfect excuse to end a conversation for which I had no answers.

By the time we puddle-hopped home and Aryeh had changed out of his drenched clothes and into pajamas, he seemed to have forgotten about his question. I, of course, could not. I shared the story with my wife, my oldest daughter, and my in-laws over our break-fast meal. I realized that the reason I was so blown away by Aryeh's question was because *mashiach* seems so far away from me, so foreign, so unattainable. I had never had that thought that I could be *mashiach* and, truthfully, I was probably much more focused on my

post-fast coffee than yearning for *mashiach*. Sometimes we need a child to remind us of the things that we so easily forget. Sometimes we need a child to remind us: **עַם כָּל זֶה אֶחָדָה לוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם שְׂיָבוֹא** **even though he** (*mashiach*) **may be slow in coming, every day I will anxiously await his arrival.**

I had thought that I could make *Tisha B'Av* a little more relevant to Aryeh. Boy, did he turn the tables on me. In the very last passage of *Navi*, *Malachi* tells us that just before *mashiach* comes, Eliyahu HaNavi will arrive **וְהָשִׁיב לֵב-אֲבוֹת** **עַל-בְּנֵיהֶם** - **And return the hearts of the fathers through the hearts of the sons.** Mission accomplished. We must be close.

It is an unfortunate reality that *Sefer Vayikra* is often considered the most inaccessible of the *chamische chumshei torah*. Indeed, it is an unfortunate reality that the multitude of laws contained in the *sefer*-- the overwhelming majority of which relate to the services in the *Bais Hamikdash*-- often don't seem relevant at all. I know for me that's sometimes because I lose sight of the fact that *mashiach* is close. Perhaps you feel that same way. But if we put in a little extra effort into learning the *parshios* of *Sefer Vayikra* we will become much more attached, it will become much more relevant, and we will realize that the time is near when these *parshios* and the *halachos* contained within them will have practical application.

It is my greatest hope that *Shmira BaShavua* will make *Sefer Vayikra* more relevant to those who learn from it, particularly as it relates to *Shmiras HaLashon*. However, it is important to understand that this *sefer* is in no way a substitute for the proper in depth learning of *Sefer Vayikra* with the *meforshim* that guide our path through it. If we are truly trying to get closer to *Sefer Vayikra*, there is no better way to do that than through in depth study. The Gemara in *Menachos* (110a) brings the question of Rebbe Yitzchak: **מָאִי דְכָתִיב זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַחֲטָאת וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הָאֵשׁ** **Why does the Torah write (before giving the halachos of the *korban chatas* and the *korban asham*) "this is the Torah of the *chatas* and this is the Torah of the *asham*"?** The Torah could have simply stated, this is the *halacha* of the *chatas* or the *asham*. Why use the uncommon phrasing: "the Torah of...". The gemara answers: **כָּל הָעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרַת הַחֲטָאת כְּאִילוֹ הִקְרִיב חֲטָאת וְכָל הָעוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרַת הָאֵשׁ** **- Anyone who involves himself in learning the Torah of the *chatas*, it's as if he himself has brought a *chatas* and anyone who involves**

himself in learning the Torah of the *asham*, it's as if he himself has brought an *asham*.

The Nesivos Shalom points out that this *gemara* doesn't use the words כל הלומד -- anyone who learns (these *pesukim* and laws). It uses the words כל העוסק -- anyone who delves into (these *pesukim* and laws). To be *oisek* is to dig deep and be wholeheartedly involved. Rav Gifter, ZTZL said that you can tell if someone is *oisek batorah* if they are constantly thinking about it even when they aren't sitting in front of the *sefer*. When you are *oisek*, you have the Torah in your bones. And when we get the Torah of Vayikra in our bones, we will realize its relevance and we will take one small step closer to rebuilding the *Bais Mikdash*, it should be speedily and in our days.

Parshas Vayikra

§ Purity of Torah - Toras Kohanim

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

And He called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying...

When children begin to learn *Torah*, the obvious place to start would be with *parshas Bereishis*. After all, that's the chronological beginning, it's the beginning that Hashem chose, and it's the beginning of all things in creation. It is quite literally the origin story. Yet, that's not where young children begin learning chumash-- they begin with the first *posuk* of *parshas Vayikra*. As you're reading this, you can probably hear that sing-song *posuk* in your mind as the class, topped in paper crowns, belts it out to beaming parents and grandparents filled with joy and anticipation of a lifetime of torah study ahead for their budding *talmidei chochimim*. But the question begs to be asked: If *Sefer Vayikra* is widely considered to be the most inaccessible of the *seforim* in *chumash*, why would we start children who have absolutely no background with the first *pasuk* of *Vayikra*? The *Midrash* asks this very question: אמר רבי אסי: מפני מה מתחילין לתינוקות בתורת כהנים יתחילו להן מבראשית - Rabi Asi says:

What is the reason that we start teaching children with *Toras Kohanim* (Sefer Vayikra), we should start them from *Bereishis*? And the Midrash answers: אמר *HaKadosh Borechu* הקב"ה הואיל והתינוקות טהורים והקרבנות טהורים יבואו טהורים ויתעסקו בטהרות says since the children are pure and the *karbanos* are pure, let the pure ones involve themselves in purity.

This response-- connecting the purity of children to the purity of the Torah-- has a direct relationship to *Shmiras HaLashon*. The gemara in Shabbos (119b) says: אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל הקל תינוקות של בית רבן - The world only continues to exist because of the breath (the Torah study) of young children. Rav Papa asked Abaye: Why not mine and yours (our Torah study)? אמר ליה: אינו דומה הקל שיש בו חטא להקל שאין בו חטא. He said to him, there is no comparison between speech that has sinned and speech that has not sinned.

The Chofetz Chaim in the Sefer *Shmiras HaLashon* points out that the torah of Rav Papa and Abaye was obviously steeped in *kedusha* and that they were not speaking actual *Lashon Hora*. Rather, from time to time perhaps a more common word would pass through their lips. Nonetheless, the Torah of children with absolutely no understanding of what *kedusha* is, and no deep attachment to Hashem --and not the Torah of these giants-- is what sustains the world because it is perfectly pure.

If the *kedusha* of Rav Papa and Abaye's torah was lessened because of the words they spoke, imagine the effect that improper speech has on our Torah learning. The Chofetz Chaim asks this question in a powerful way: אם פן מה נעשה: אמ פן מה נעשה, און, אזובי הקיר, אשר קביעותנו בתורה הוא בלאו הכי גם פן במדרגה קטנה ושפלה, בעונותינו הרבים, אם עוד נטמא פינו, חס ושלום, בדברי לשון הרע ורכילות וליצנות ומחלוקת וכדומה, מה קדשה יכולה לחול על הלמוד ההוא שלומד אחר פן בזה הפה What should we, (who are like) "moss on the wall" (compared to Rav Pappa and Abaye) do? We, whose attachment to Torah is, even without this (sin of improper speech), on a very low and insignificant level from our many sins. What shall we do if we also desecrate our mouths, G-d forbid, with words of *Lashon Hora*, *rechilus*, *leitznas*, *machlokes*, etc.? What holiness can possibly attach itself to learning that is afterwards uttered with that mouth?

In his *Kuntres Chovas HaShmira*, the Chofetz Chaim gives a haunting

illustration of the level of eternal damage that *Lashon Hora* can wreak on our *limud torah*: Two men together approach the *Beis Din shel Maaleh* to be judged based upon their actions. It is determined that the men learned the same *mesechta*, they spent the same amount of time learning it, and the depth of their learning was the same. One of the men was accepted into *shamayim beseiver panim yafos* (with smiling and welcoming countenances) while the other was only accepted begrudgingly. The second man complained: This is the *olam haemes* and we know it is true that my learning and his learning were equal in all aspects, so why aren't our rewards in that regard similar? They responded to him "This is your own fault. Have a look, you can see the other man's Torah glowing even from afar, while your Torah is covered by the *tumah* that came out of your mouth."

Our respective Torah learning abilities, capacities, and opportunities may vary widely. We are not Rav Papa and Abaye. Yet, we all have the ability to be more scrupulous about *Shmiras HaLashon* so that we don't detract from the beauty, purity and power of our learning.

THE TAKEAWAY: The way we speak when not learning has an affect on the purity of our learning. We are not held to the standards of Rav Pappa and Abaye. But each and everyone of us can increase the purity of our learning by increasing the purity of our speech.

THIS WEEK: Before opening a sefer, going into shiur or sitting down with your *chavrusa* take 30 seconds to think about purifying your learning by being more careful with your speech.

§ Hashem Protects the Humble

ויקרא אל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

And He called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying...

We are aware that the *alef* in the word *vayikra* is smaller than the other letters of the word. The Baal Haturim explains one reason: א' דויקרא זעירא שמשה לא רצה לכתוב אלא ויקר כדרך שנא' בבלעם כאלו לא נראה לו השם אלא במקרה ואמר לו הקב"ה לכתוב גם *vayikra*, in the way that it is written about Bilaam, this implies that Hashem only appeared to him “by chance” (this is the *lashon* of *mikre* – happenstance or *kar* – coldness). Hashem told Moshe to write it with the *alef* (which connotes that he called to him personally, purposefully and with endearment – the opposite of happenstance), and Moshe wrote it (the *alef* small (because of his humility)).

Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest man that ever lived. This isn't an opinion, this is a fact stated by Hashem himself. It is interesting that the very *posuk* (in *parshas Bechokosai*) that tells us about Moshe's humility is found in the story of Miriam and Aaron speaking *Lashon Hara* about Moshe. The Ramban explains the relevance of Hashem making the point about Moshe's humility at that precise moment. וטעם והאיש משה ענו מאד להגיד כי השם קנא לו בעבור - The reason that Hashem called Moshe the most humble person is to teach us that Hashem was zealous for Moshe because of his humility, because he never answered any injustice done to him, even when he knew about it. The Ramban then quotes the *Sifre* that tells us that Moshe actually heard Miriam and Aaron speaking about him but because of his humility he didn't say anything, so Hashem stepped in and brought them to task.

When we hear what others say about us, we are often primed to respond, to pounce. We think that we immediately need to stand up for ourselves. Yet, we see that when we refrain from responding, not only will we have the merit of avoiding the *machlokes* and other breaches of *Shmiras HaLashon* that will inevitably ensue, Hashem himself will stand up for us. When we are faced with a moment where we feel like responding, we are essentially faced with a

choice: give in to our emotions and immediately try to defend ourselves while running the risk of engendering deeper *machlokes* and increased *Lashon Hora* or allow *HaKodesh Baruch Hu* himself to ensure that we are defended and protected. It sounds like a simple choice, but in the heat of the moment, once our ego takes that hit, it is extremely difficult. In the field of neuropsychology, they call this an amygdala hijack. It's where your emotional alarm system overrides your logical understanding. The trick is to avoid this hijacking by buying yourself a little time for your true humility, *emuna* and logic to catch up with and mediate your emotions.

THE TAKEAWAY: Someone with true humility will be better able to restrain himself when he hears others speaking about him. If he needs protecting, Hashem will step in to protect the truly humble.

THIS WEEK: Determine what you will do the next time someone gets under your skin in order to buy yourself the time necessary for your logic to catch up with your emotions. Maybe you will count to ten, crack all your knuckles, or repeat a relevant *pusek* to yourself. Then take a deep breath and remind yourself that Hashem has your back.

§ Lack of Humility is a lack of Emunah

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

And He called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying...

We mentioned above the Baal HaTurim's explanation of the small *alef* in the word *vayikra* as a lesson in humility. The Sefer Shmiras Halashon lists seven character traits that lead one to speak *Lashon Hora*. Among them is *gaivah* - arrogance. *Gaivah* is the opposite of humility.

The Chofetz Chaim explains how *gaivah* leads to a myriad of breaches of proper speech. וַיִּשׁ מִחֲמַת גְּאוּוֹה, דְּהִינּוּ שֶׁהוּא מִחֲשִׁיב אֶת עַצְמוֹ לְחָכְם וְלְאִישׁ בְּאֲנָשִׁים, וְהַכֵּל שְׂפָלִים, בְּעֵינָיו, לְכֹן מְלֹאוֹ לְבוֹ לְהִתְלוּצֵץ מִחֲבָרָו. גַּם הַגְּאוּוֹה תְּבִיאֵהוּ לְקַנְיָא וְלִשְׂטֵם אֶת חֲבָרָו הַמְּכַבֵּד בְּעֵינָיו אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר, וַיִּקְנֵא וַיִּשְׂטֵם אוֹתוֹ, בְּעֵבֹר שְׂיִדְמָה לוֹ שְׁנִפְתָּח כְּבוֹדוֹ עַל יְדֵי זֶה, וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבּוֹ: לֹאֵל הוּא, הֵייתִי מִתְאַר בֵּין בְּנֵי אָדָם לְאָדָם חֲשׂוֹב. וַיִּבְחַן וַיִּבְדֹּק גְּנֵזִי נִסְתָּרוֹתָיו, כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה לוֹ מֵה לְדַבֵּר מִמֶּנּוּ, יִהְיֶה אֲמַת אוֹ שֶׁקֶר, כְּדֵי לְהַקְטִין שְׂמוֹ אֲצֵל בְּנֵי אָדָם וְלְהַרְאוֹת יִתְרוֹנּוֹ עָלָיו וְלְהַפְחִית מַעְלָתוֹ וְלְהַכְלִימוֹ וְלְבִישׁוֹ. וְלִפְעָמִים יִסְבֵּב עַל יְדֵי הַגְּאוּוֹה כָּל ד' פְּתוֹת חֲשָׂמִ"ל (חֲנִפִּים, שְׂקָרָנִים, מְסַפְרֵי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, לִיֻּצְנִים). יִסְפֵּר בְּגִנוּת חֲבָרָו, שְׂיִהְיֶה הוּא נִכְבֵּד וְחֲבָרָו בְּזוּי. וַיִּתְלוּצֵץ עָלָיו מֵאֹחֵר שְׂאִינּוֹ חֲשׂוֹב בְּעֵינָיו. וַיִּתְפָּאֵר בְּשֶׁקֶר וּבְמַעְלוֹת שְׂאִין בּוֹ. וּבְעֵבֹר גְּאוּוֹתוֹ יִחְנִיף לְרָשָׁעִים תְּמִיד - There are some [who are habituated to lashon hora] because of arrogance. That is, he considers himself wise and a "man above men", all others are considered lowly in his eyes. Therefore, his heart prompts him to scoff at his friend. His arrogance also brings him to envy and to hate his friend who is honored in the eyes of the people of the city because he believes that his own honor is diminished because of this. He will say to himself: "If not for him, I would be considered an important person." And he will intently probe hidden matters to find something to say against him--regardless of whether it is true or false-- in order to smear his name, diminish his importance and humiliate and shame him. And at times, his arrogance will bring him to be included in all four of the groups that do not merit the Divine Presence - flatterers, liars, speakers of *Lashon Hora* and scoffers. He will speak disparagingly about his friend, so that he will be honored and his friend despised; and he will mock him for not being important in his eyes; and he will glory in falsehood and in good qualities that he does not possess. And because of his arrogance, he will come to constantly flatter those that do evil, and he will not reprove them because if he does so, they might come to hate him and diminish his honor.

If we analyze the different ways that *gaivah* leads to improper speech as laid out in the above paragraph, we will find one common denominator: comparison. Someone who has extreme *gaivah*:

“considers himself wise and a “man above men””

“all others are considered lowly in his eyes”

“His arrogance also brings him to envy and to hate his friend who is honored in the eyes of the people of the city because he believes that his own honor is diminished because of this.”

“He will say to himself: "If not for him, I would be considered an important person."

“He will speak disparagingly about his friend, so that he will be honored and his friend despised”

The *gaivadik* person is constantly making comparisons, telling himself that he is better than others or asking himself why others should be considered better than him. Even if we look at the *Lashon Hora* that Aaron and Miriam spoke, albeit with good intentions, we see that it was rooted in comparison. Aaron and Miriam said: **הֲרַק אֶת־בְּמִשְׁפַּחַת דְּבָר יְהוָה הֲלֹא גַם־בָּנוּ דִּבֶּר - Did Hashem only speak to Moshe?! He also speaks to us.** Aaron and Miriam were speaking about how Moshe had separated from his wife ostensibly because he wanted to be in a state of purity when Hashem would speak to him. This was something that Miriam and Aaron did not do and since they were prophets as well, there could be no reason for Moshe to act differently than them. When we start comparing ourselves to others, two things happen: We don't value our own uniqueness, and we bring others down so that we feel better about ourselves. (Of course, when it comes to Miriam and Aaron, we are talking about a sin so slight that it was barely perceivable. However, because of their greatness, they were held to an extremely high standard.)

Rav Wolbe in *Alei Shur* highlights the importance of understanding that Hashem gives each person exactly what he needs to reach his personal completeness-- both in *ruchnius* and in *gashmius*. Comparison is ridiculous because no man is created like any other. Rav Wolbe says: **זהו העומק בשמחה זו שהאדם: -- מוצא שלום עם עצמו וגורלו וחי בהרמוניה עם עצמו** -- **This is the depth of simcha: that a person finds peace with himself and his destiny and lives in harmony with himself.** Living in harmony with ourselves is the foundation for living in harmony with others. When we realize that we are unique, that we have all that

we need, and that our mission is to live up to our personal G-d given talents and abilities, we will not be concerned with how much others have or what they are doing differently than us.

THE TAKEAWAY: You are unique and Hashem has given you everything you need to achieve your unique purpose. Comparing yourself to others is evidence of a lack of *emunah* in these points. Comparing yourself to others inevitably leads to improper and damaging speech.

THIS WEEK: Take some time to think about the special character traits that you have. Perhaps you're considered a good friend, a good listener, a *masmid*, a generous person, *chesedik*, creative, someone who cheers people up, whatever it may be. Focus on how Hashem has given you that *mailah* and think about how you can use it to your fullest potential.

§ Shhhhhhh. Don't tell

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

And He called out to Moshe and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying...

The gemara in Yoma (4b) discusses the additional word *leimor* at the end of this *pasuk*. The Torah had already said that Hashem “called” to Moshe and “spoke” to him, why does it then add the seemingly superfluous word “saying.” The gemara explains: **מַנִּיין לְאוֹמֵר דְּבַר לְחֵבְרֵי שֶׁהוּא כְּבַל יֵאמַר עַד שֶׁיֵּאמַר לוֹ: לֶךְ אָמַר: שְׁנֹאֲמַר: “וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר” תַּלְמוּד לֹמַר לֵאמֹר לֹא אֲמַר הַדְּבָרִים אֵלָּא אִם כֵּן נֹתֵן לוֹ רְשׁוּת.**

-From where do we know that regarding something which your friend tells you, you are not permitted to reveal it unless he says “go tell them”? Because it says “And Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed saying...” The Torah teaches (that the additional word) *leimor* is (a contraction of the words) *lo omer* (do not speak) the words unless you are given permission.

Keeping secrets is an important aspect and halacha of Shmiras HaLashon. The Chofetz Chaim states: **הָאוֹמֵר לְחֵבְרֵי אֵיזָה דְּבַר, אָסוּר לוֹ לְסַפֵּר אַחֵר כִּף לְאַחֵרִים: אֲלָא אִם כֵּן נָתַן לוֹ רְשׁוּת עַל זֶה, וְדִוְקָא אִם הוּא דְּבַר דְּלִית בֵּיה לִישְׁנָא בִישָׁא**

-If one's friend tells him something, he is forbidden to repeat it afterwards to others, unless he gave him permission to do so. And then, only if it does not

contain *Lashon Hora*. The Chofetz Chaim adds: כִּי יֵשׁ בְּגִלּוּי הַסּוּד נֹזֵק לְבַעְלָיו וְסִבָּה לְהַפְרֵי מִחֻשְׁבֵּתוֹ, גַּם בְּזֶה הוּא יוֹצֵא מִדְרֹךְ הַצְּנוּעוּת, וְהוּא מַעֲבִיר עַל דַּעַת בַּעַל הַסּוּד - **When revealing a secret, there is damage caused to the person and the overturning of his intentions, there is also a departure from the ways of modesty and a contravention of the will of the person who told him.**

The general consensus of *poskim* is that *one is prohibited from revealing secrets only if one or more of these conditions are present:*

1. the person advised him not to reveal it; or
2. it is obvious that this is something the person would not want to be shared with others; or
3. the revelation could cause damage to the person who confided in him.

However, a scrupulous person will be careful not to share with others information told to him in private, regardless of whether one of these conditions apply. If someone focuses on the *mitzva* of *vehavta lareiecha kamocha*, he will be more careful in this regard since he will be sensitive to things that he wouldn't want others to reveal if he were the one who initially shared them about himself. The punishment for improperly revealing a secret is grave. The Midrash equates it with *avoda zara* and the Ohr Olam equates it with *sfikas damim*.

THE TAKEAWAY: Revealing things that were told to you in private is often a breach of *hilchos Shmiras HaLashon & tznius* and is considered a grave transgression.

THIS WEEK: Resolve to keep the confidences of others and to consider going beyond the letter of the law and keeping secrets even when you are not strictly prohibited from doing so. Develop an appreciation for the fact that people don't necessarily want others to know about what they share with you.

§ Highlighting Carelessness

וְהָבִיָּא אֵיל תְּמִים מִרֵּהֲצֹאן בְּעֶרְבָה לְאִשָּׁם אֵל־הַכֹּהֵן וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן עַל שְׁגִגְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁגָג וְהוּא לֹא־יָדַע וְנִסְלַח לוֹ:
He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a guilt offering. The priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the error that he committed unwittingly, and he shall be forgiven.

This *pasuk* explains that the *korban* called an *asham taloi* needs to be a ram. The *asham taloi* is a seemingly peculiar *korban*. It is brought in a situation where an individual is not sure whether he actually committed a sin. Rashi provides an example: someone has two pieces of fat in front of him and he thinks they are both permitted fats. He eats one of them. He finds out afterwards that one of them was prohibited but we don't know which one -- the one that he ate or the one that he didn't eat. Even though we are not even sure if he ate forbidden fat and even though we know that it certainly wasn't his intention to do so, he needs to bring a *korban asham talui*.

Many commentators question why Hashem required that an *ayil* (ram) be used for an *asham taloi*. A ram is a fairly expensive animal and we don't even know if this person has committed an *aveira*. The question is compounded by the fact that a *korban chatas yachid* which is brought when we know for sure that someone sinned can be a lamb, a sheep, a bird or even a meal offering, all of which are less expensive than a ram.

Imagine this scenario, two friends are sitting together. One of them has a piece of fat in front of him which he thinks is permissible, so he eats it. Afterwards, someone reveals that this piece of fat was indeed not permitted. This person definitely ate prohibited fat and, depending on his means, can bring a simple meal offering as a *kaparah*. His friend has two pieces of fat in front of him and he thinks both are permitted so he eats one. Afterwards, he finds out that one of the two fats was prohibited but we don't know which one. It could very well be that he did not even eat the prohibited fat. Nonetheless, because of the uncertainty he must bring a ram as an *asham taloi*, a *korban* which is significantly more involved and more expensive than his friend's meal offering. Why is it that the offering for a definite sin is less expensive than the offering for a potential sin?

The Rema explains: **וספק עבירה צריך יותר תשובה מעבירה ודאי כי יותר מתחרט כשיודע** – **A potential sin requires greater *teshuva* than a definite sin because someone who knows (that he has sinned) has more regret than one who does not know. Therefore the *korban asham talui* needs to be more expensive than a *korban chatas*. We are inherently good, we want to do *mitzvos* and stay clear of *aveiras*. When we slip up, we naturally feel remorse and regret. However, when it isn't clear that we**

have sinned, we need somewhat of a “wakeup call” to remind us of the importance of being extra careful. One of the lessons of the *asham taloi* is that things that might not seem so important to us need to be highlighted so that we are more careful with them.

There are significantly important things that we overlook. Sometimes it's because we're lazy, sometimes it's because we are forgetful, sometimes it's because we don't realize how important they are, and sometimes it's because we feel we aren't ready to address them. These are the types of things for which we need to create our own wakeup calls. Proper speech is one of those things. Speech is such an integral part of our everyday lives and most of us are speaking fairly constantly throughout the day. Therefore, there is a potential to breach *Shmiras HaLashon* hundreds of times a day without even knowing it. Ignorance is not bliss. As we let those incidents fly under the radar, we lose the regret that forms the basis for *teshuva* and improvement. In order to develop a sensitivity to the potential of breaches of *Shmiras HaLashon*, we need to create our own “wakeup calls” to focus us on the tremendous potential of sin, and the gravity of that sin. We need to set fixed times to learn the *halachos* of *Shmiras HaLashon* so that we avoid areas of potential sin and we need to perform periodic *cheshbonos* of how careful we have been with our speech.

THE TAKEAWAY: The *korban asham talui* teaches that things which we tend to take lightly need to be placed on our radar. We need to take the practical steps necessary to awaken ourselves to the seriousness of *Shmiras HaLashon* so that we can improve it.

THIS WEEK: Set yourself a daily time to learn one *halacha* of *Shmiras HaLashon* and a weekly time to review your speech. The Chofetz Chaim suggests doing a *cheshbon* of your weekly speech on *erev Shabbos*.

§ Mistakes Happen but that doesn't mean we're blameless

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר׃ נֹפֵשׁ כִּי־תִחַטֵּא בְּשִׁגְגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְעָשְׂתָה מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה Speak to the Bnei Yisrael saying: When a person unwittingly incurs guilt in regard to any of Hashem's negative commandments and transgresses one of them.

The *korban chatas* is brought by someone who commits a sin *beshoigeig* -- accidentally -- that if he would have committed on purpose, he would receive the penalty of *kareis* -- spiritual excommunication. If he committed the sin by accident, why should he have to atone at all? If I made a mistake, why do I even need atonement?

The commentators offer several answers to this question. The Alshich, takes the position that there really are no blameless sins. In this view, some other inadvertence or lack of care led to the sin. The Brisker Rav was known for his scrupulousness in *mitzvos* and he was constantly scrutinizing whether he had properly fulfilled a *mitzva*. He would use the *mashel* of someone carrying expensive glass utensils. Since that person knows how valuable the utensils are and how fragile they are, he would be extremely careful. He would make sure not to walk into areas where he cannot see, check twice before crossing streets and remain constantly focused on his precious cargo. This, the Brisker Rav explains, is exactly how someone who truly understands the value of a *mitzva* will act concerning that *mitzva*.

There are essentially two common ways that *mitzvos* are transgressed *beshoigeig* -- what we might call a mistake and what we might call ignorance. A classic example of a mistake is turning on a light because you momentarily forgot that it was Shabbos (after all it was 3 a.m. and you were half asleep). A classic example of ignorance is you remove bones from an entire fish an hour before serving it to adults because you didn't know that this falls into the *melacha* of *borer*. On a deep and often slight level, someone who sins *beshoigeig* bears responsibility. When you turned the light on Shabbos morning, perhaps your level of *kedushas shabbos* is lacking. If you were truly focused on the *kedusha* of Shabbos, it would not ever leave your mind, even when awakened by a baby at 3 a.m. Turning to the fish example, if our knowledge of *hilchos shabbos* is deficient, the mistakes we make, while certainly less than a purposeful transgression are, as they say, "on us".

Rav Dessler says that when we make information a part of us, we never forget it. Most of us don't forget our phone number, our address or our social security number. However, if we view something as not a part of us or not important, we easily forget them and we are bound to make mistakes in those

areas. But those mistakes aren't blameless, they can be rectified or avoided by making that information part and parcel of our beings.

Rav Yisrael Salanter teaches that if we want to develop a greater sensitivity in a certain area, we should learn the halachos that govern that area in depth. The Chofetz Chaim adds that if someone undertakes to learn *hilchos Shmiras HaLashon*, not only will he become more careful in those laws but the *yetzer hara* to speak *lashon hora* will be removed from him. When we fully appreciate the power and importance of speech, we will want to make it a part of us by learning and following the *halachos* of *Shmiras HaLashon*.

THE TAKEAWAY: When we make mistakes in *Shmiras HaLashon*, we are usually not blameless. We bear some blame for either not fully appreciating the value of our speech or not seeing the importance in learning the halachos of *Shmiras HaLashon* so we know how to speak properly.

THIS WEEK: Start learning the *Sefer Chofetz Cahim Yomi* in the original or with one of the many available english seforim. Place a reminder for yourself, to think at least once a day that like the fragile glass in the Brisker Rav's *moshel*, your power of speech is precious and must be guarded carefully.