

The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified, there shall be taken two live, clean birds. (14:4)

Rashi explains why fowl are used as the *korbanos*, sacrifices, to effect atonement for the *metzora*. *Negaim*, afflictions/plagues, are the punishment meted out against one who speaks *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, which is the result of *pitputei devarim*, verbal twittering. Thus, one who “titters” around, talking about people and their activities, inevitably ends up speaking ill of others. Veritably, the one safe way to guarantee that one not speak *lashon hora* is to refrain from speaking altogether! People get sucked into saying something negative – even when their original intent had been to speak positively.

Shlomo *Hamelech* says (*Koheles* 9:12), “For a person knows not his time (when he will be called to answer for his actions, ie. day of death), like fish who are seized by a bad trap.” The *Midrash* comments: “Are there such things as a ‘bad’ trap and a ‘good’ trap? (A trap is a trap, and when the creature is caught, it is over regardless. What difference does it make if the trap is good or bad?) *Reish Lakish* says, ‘This (bad trap) refers to a baited fishing line.’”

There are two types of traps (for catching fish). One form of trap is a net, whereby the fisherman spreads his net over the water and the unsuspecting fish swims right into it. In this instance, the entire fish is caught, trapped in the net. The second form of trap is the fishing line with a bait around a hook. The fish bites into the bait, unaware of the hook that will ensnare it.

The fish falls for the tempting bait, takes a bite and suddenly realizes that its mouth has been punctured by the hook. The fish is trapped – but may not realize it, since the rest of its body seems to have free rein to swim around. The fish may not be trapped inside of the net, and it may have freedom to move, but it is no less trapped than the fish inside the net.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, explains that two types of *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, seek to ensnare us. In one case, a person scoffs at everything: *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, *Kosher*, *Tefillin*, Torah study. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he has rebuffed and thrown off the yoke of Heaven from himself. He is completely ensnared, totally subjugated to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*.

In contrast is the fellow who does it all: rises early to *daven*; studies Torah whenever he has an available moment; observes *Shabbos* with all of its stringencies; observes *kashrus* – the works. The man is the epitome of religious observance, the poster boy for Orthodoxy. He has one issue, however, one area in which the *yetzer hora* seems to dominate his life: his mouth; he enjoys speaking *lashon hora*. Of course, it is not the “real,” course, ugly kind of slander; rather, it is “meaningful” and meant to prove a point – even to inspire others. Such a person is no less a victim of the *yetzer hora* than his non-observant counterpart. In fact, he is worse, since he does not realize that he is a victim. After all, he is still swimming around. He (thinks that he) is not trapped. This is a bad trap. One thinks that he is pious and virtuous, but he is actually an unethical, evil

person who has no qualms about destroying his fellow with the slander that spews from his mouth. It is this trap that destroyed our *Bais Hamikdash* and prevents it from being rebuilt. When brother hates brother unwarrantingly, when controversy and slander are a way of life, the *Bais Hamikdash* will not be returned to us. The fellow that is ensnared by the bait, with his mouth stuck on the fishing line's hook, yet feels that he is free because he can swim around, is the one who is in serious trouble.

Veritably, as *Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl*, observes, no one (observant) really speaks *lashon hora* with intent. In fact, if one were to offer a monetary reward for *lashon hora*, there would be no takers – regardless of the enormity of the sum. When confronted with an *aveirah*, transgression, no G-d-fearing Jew will intentionally sin. So, what happens? It is unintentional. In the heat of a discussion, people forget, and, before they know it, they have just besmirched another Jew's reputation. It is like the fish that is swimming in the water, minding its own business, when all of a sudden it sees a juicy worm. It opens its mouth to grab the worm, and – too late – the hook has caught its mouth. That is *lashon hora*. The juicy worm is the bait. We are stuck on the hook.