

This shall be the law of the metzora. (14:2)

The tongue has no mind. It expresses the feelings that the individual has in his heart. A positive person, whose outlook on life and people is positive, invariably speaks only good – because this is what he sees. This is what he feels in his heart. A negative person, whose view on life and people is jaundiced, speaks *lashon hora*, evil speech, because this is all that he knows. In other words, the best protection against *lashon hora* is a positive outlook. A primary component for maintaining a positive view on people is to respect others. This is increasingly difficult for the individual who is himself insecure, thus viewing everyone as a threat. One who is secure in his own skin senses no threat from others, and he is able to respect others without feeling that, if he does so, it diminishes him. While this all seems like simple, common sense, sadly it is one of those areas of common sense which many people have difficulty grasping. The following episode is a perfect example of this failing.

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells the story of a *Rav* in Yerushalayim who found himself spending considerable time counseling young, married couples who were dealing with various crises which may arise in a marriage. Since he was not a professional, just a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, with abundant patience and common sense, he felt it prudent on his part to consult with one of Yerushalayim's leading psychologists. Perhaps he could pick up a few pointers, some sage advice, a practical approach to some of the issues with which he was dealing. He met with the woman, and it was a beneficial meeting, as he gained much from the conversation.

After the initial meeting, the woman asked him what his vocation was. He replied that he studied full-time in the *Mirr* *Kollel*. "Perhaps you know my husband," she exclaimed excitedly. "He sells flowers right next to the *yeshivah*."

Hearing this, the young *rav* tried to visualize a florist shop near the *yeshivah*, but he could not conjure up the image. This was because there was no flower shop near the *yeshivah*. The only florist – "sort of" – was a very short man who sold flowers out of buckets every *Erev Shabbos*. He could not be married to this woman, he thought to himself. She was one of the premier professional marriage counselors in Yerushalayim.

Apparently, his stupefaction was evident all over his face, because the doctor began to chuckle, as she responded to what was coursing through his mind, "Yes, he is the short fellow who sells flowers every Friday afternoon. When he was young, he had polio which severely stunted his growth. My husband has been selling flowers for years. It is meaningful to him and something that he enjoys. He claims that he prefers most of all to sell in front of the *Mir*, because it is the only place that anyone who walks by actually greet him respectfully."

People have feelings. The way we look – or stare – at them makes a big difference. How we greet – or do not greet – them sends a powerful message. When we ignore someone, we are basically saying to him, "You are not worth my time." It actually goes much further than this. Thinking

positive, acting positive, saying nice things to and about people is much more than simple human decency and proper etiquette. It can determine one's future!

In the *hakdamah*, preface, to his *sefer* on *Meseches Bechoros, V'eid Yaaleh*, Rabbi Aharon Dovid Lebovics quotes an incredible statement from the *Zohar* (*Zohar Chadash Parashas Noach*). The *Zohar* addresses the spiritual advantage of Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu in contrast to Noach, who, although referred to by the Torah as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, is held in spiritual disdain for not praying for the evildoers of his generation.

The *Zohar* quotes the Sages who contend that Noach was uncertain enough of his own worthiness that he was unable to pray for others. This is why he did not go that extra mile for others. He simply felt that he was unworthy. Rabbi Elazar says, "Despite all of this, he still should have prayed. For Hashem is pleased to hear good about His children." This teaches us that, despite how little Noach thought of himself, he would have been successful had he prayed. Hashem is a loving Father, Who wants to hear people – regardless of their own worthiness or spiritual standing – speak favorably of His children. Rabbi Elazar adds, "The punishment of the preeminent *tzaddik* of the world who speaks ill of the Jewish People to Hashem, is greater than that of anyone."

A simple Jew will receive unparalleled reward for thinking and speaking positively of the Jewish People. Likewise, regardless of one's past spiritual achievement, if his remarks about fellow Jews are jaundiced, he will be held in spiritual contempt. There are individuals who truly exemplify this idea. They look for every avenue to give the benefit of the doubt regarding the behavior of fellow Jews. Regrettably, others act out this contempt as long as their own virtue is not impugned.

The **Bobover Rebbe**, *Horav Shlomo Halberstam, zl*, was leader and mentor to thousands and the consummate example of an *ohev Yisrael*, one who loves all Jews. One morning, as he was putting his *Tefillin* back into their boxes, he cut his finger on the edge of one of the boxes, which was made of silver. His finger immediately began to bleed. As the *Gabbai* was about to get a band aid to stop the bleeding, he noticed a subtle smile, a sense of satisfaction, on the *Rebbe's* face. The *Gabbai* asked the *Rebbe* why he manifested a portrait of calm and joy as he stared at his finger bleeding. The *Rebbe* replied, "In the *Talmud Chullin 7b*, *Chazal* say, 'When a man stubs his finger in the course of a *mitzvah*, and his finger begins to bleed, the blood which runs is like the blood of a *korban Olah*. The atonement of the blood running from his finger is equal to that of an Elevation offering.' I was thinking to myself, 'What *z'chus*, merit, do I have that I was granted the opportunity to offer up an *Olah*?'

"I realized that I am very demanding of myself never to speak ill of a fellow Jew – regardless of the situation. It is certainly possible, however, that I might have harbored an inappropriate feeling within me against someone. In my mind, I might subconsciously have found fault with individuals. This is a sin *b'machshavah*, in thought, for which the *korban Olah* is *mechapeir*, atones. This is why I am filled with joy!"