

To rule on which day it is contaminated and on which day it is purified; this is the law of tzaraas. (14:57)

The one who speaks *lashon hora*, who slanders with impunity, has a jaundiced view of people. In order to speak negatively about someone, it is natural (and probably necessary) to knock down his personal opinion of the subject of his *lashon hora* a few notches. He, therefore, has no qualms about humiliating him, because, after all, what is he? While this attitude may not course through the mind of every *baal lashon hora*, the mere fact that he is callous and unfeeling concerning the feelings of his fellow Jew is an indication that he has a low opinion of him. In order to achieve atonement properly, he himself must feel the pain of being the subject of condescendence, feeling belittled, treated like a dishrag – used and thrown away.

In his *Haamek Davar* commentary to the *parshah*, the *Netziv*, *zl*, cites the *Raavad* in his commentary to *Toras Kohanim*, who explains the word *l'horos* as to teach others to recognize the signs of an impure plague. Indeed, he is encouraged to call other *Kohanim* to explain and teach them, so that they will know what to do when they are asked to rule regarding the impurity of a plague. The *Netziv* explains that this is what is meant by *Zos Toras hatzaraas*, for it is only concerning *tzaraas* that we have an enjoinder to teach. Veritably, why should the *metzora* be subject to the scrutiny of an entire class of *Kohanim*? Why should he suffer the indignation of having a group of novice *Kohanim* studying his skin, looking at his body as if it were a piece of meat? Anyone who has been a patient in a teaching hospital has been subject to such scrutiny when his attending physician enters his room with a class of interns, poking and prodding. The *Netziv* explains that the *metzora* is treated to his own medicine. He had no problem shaming his fellow and putting him in an awkward position. So, too, in the course of expiating his sin, he will be treated in a similar manner.

It all boils down to how we view others. If our opinion is low, our treatment of them will reflect it. We have to find redeeming merit in every person, to elevate him in our eyes. After all, Hashem considers him worthy enough to be here, alive and well. Why should we not act likewise? The *Koznitzer Maggid*, *zl*, had a *chassid* who was a well-respected *Rav* in Cracow. He was a *halachic* decisor of note, loved and admired by all of Cracow. Everything seemed to be going well, except for one dark cloud in his life which plagued him. He and his wife had yet to be blessed with a child.

The *Rav* made numerous trips to petition the *Maggid's* blessing for a child. Sadly, the *Maggid* averted his request. Finally, the *Rav* broke down and asked, "Why can the *Rav* not bless me? Am I different from all the others who have been blessed, and who are today embracing their child?"

When the *Rebbe* heard this, he looked deeply into his *chassid's* eyes and said, "My dear friend, I would do anything in my power to help you. Alas, all of the gates in Heaven are sealed to your blessing. I have tried and tried, but I have been unsuccessful in opening them."

When the *Rav* heard this, he was visibly shaken. “Does this mean that there is no hope for me to have a child?” he asked dejectedly. “No, there is one person whose access to Heavenly favor is great. His name is Yosef Drudick. Go to him and petition his blessing.”

When the *Rav* heard the name Yossele Drukick, he was bowled over. Who did not know the elusive Yossele? Rather, nobody knew him because he refused to interact with people. He was the most feared person in the community. He was introverted and wanted nothing to do with anyone. Children ran from him in terror. How could such a person be his only option for a blessing? But when the *Koźnitzer* spoke, it was not to be questioned. He would make it to Yossele’s broken-down shack on the outskirts of town and petition his blessing. No one had ever seen the inside of the shack that Yossele shared with his wife and children. It was where Yossele remained enclosed in his own world, isolated from everyone. During the week, however, he would go out and travel from village to village repairing pots and pans.

The *Rav* figured that he would just show up at Yossele’s door *Erev Shabbos* and say that he had nowhere to spend *Shabbos*. Could he be their guest? The following Friday he implemented his plan, arriving at Yossele’s house just before *Shabbos*. He knocked on the door and was met by a woman who asked what he wanted. He related his tale of woe and pleaded with her to allow him to stay for *Shabbos*. Her response was an emphatic, “No.” “My husband does not allow people into the house.” After tearful begging, she said, “You can stay in the back with the horses, but the house is strictly off limits.” He went to the back and made himself comfortable with the two old horses that would pull Yossele’s wagon. This was not his idea of *Shabbos*, but he must listen to his *Rebbe*.

Just before sunset, as he was about to usher in *Shabbos Kodesh*, he heard a loud knock at the door. He opened it to come face to face with the dread Yossele. “What are you doing here?” he asked. The *Rav* began to stammer out his story. “You can remain here, but under no circumstances may you come to the house,” Yossele warned.

That *Shabbos* was one to remember. The *Rav* had some *challah* that he brought with him. It was to be his meals, which he ate in solitude together with the horses. On Friday night, he was fitful, as sleep was hard to come by between the odor of the horses and the cold that seeped through the old broken walls. *Shabbos* morning was no better. Indeed, he was counting the minutes until he could escape from this misery.

All day, he was disconcerted by the thoughts coursing through his mind. Why was he here? To get a *brachah* from a man whom he had (like so many others) shunned and reviled. He had erected a wall between himself and the Yosseles of this world – and now he needed him. It was the Yossele whom he had avoided that held the keys to his becoming a father. He introspected on this: “I have erected a wall between me and ‘them’. They have neither been accepted nor welcomed, because they were different.” The *Rav* said to himself, “I am really not deserving or worthy of Yossele’s blessing. I have shunned him, and now I ask for his favor? This is hypocrisy!” When he realized his

shortcomings vis-à-vis those who did not fit in his “circle,” he broke down in bitter weeping.

It was at that moment that he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to behold a man with a silver-white beard that seemed to glow. His eyes shone brightly and (he felt) bore through him to the core of his soul. The image was metaphysical. “Come into my home,” the man smiled. “Let us wash for *shalosh seudos*.”

He walked into the house as if in a trance. There was a table covered with a clean, white tablecloth. There was challah, wine and gefilte fish, but above all, it was a welcoming, although other-worldly, scene. The *Rav* just sat there and listened to the beautiful melodies emanating from Yossele’s mouth. Suddenly, Yossele stopped singing and moaned, “Oy, *Srultche Koznitzer ken mir shoin oichet*, “Oy, the *Koznitzer Maggid* also knows about me.” (Apparently, Yossele was one of the *lamed vav*, thirty-six, holy *tzaddikim*, that grace each generation. They seek neither recognition nor acclaim. They devote their lives to unblemished devotion to Hashem.)

Yossele asked the *Rav*, “How can I help you?” “I request a *brachah* for a child.” “You will be blessed with a child” was Yossele’s immediate response. “There is one condition. You must name him Yossele.”

The lesson is quite clear: If we bond with others, we will not speak negatively. Hashem will then listen to our prayers.