Jewish Tribune – Tazria Metzora

**Positive House Rules**

In this week’s sedra, we revisit the halachos of *tzara’as,* a spiritual disease which was brought about by one of several possible factors, the most well-known of which is lashon hora.

The Gemara in Arachin (15b) says the remedy for lashon hora is to speak words of Torah. Refraining from negative speech is not enough.

This is symbolised by the Metzora taking birds (which chirp and twitter) killing one and releasing the other. The Metzora kills his negative speech and instead, tries to use this precious commodity more productively.

A person suspected of having *tzara’as* was quarantined for one week and kept away from his family and friends. Because *tzara’as* was a punishment for *lashon hora* or one of the other listed aveiros, the ordeal brought shame with it as well. Presumably, it also caused financial damage, forcing the metzora to close his business for a whole week.

After one week the person was re-examined. If, at that time, the Kohen determined that the blemish was not *tzara’as* after all, the person would go free.

It would seem that in such a case there has been a miscarriage of justice! An innocent person has suffered; shamed and separated from the community for seven days, seemingly for no reason. In today’s litigious world, he may well sue!

The Imrei Emes (the third Gerrer Rebbe) explains that in fact, it was not for nothing. The “false alarm” was a punishment in itself, not for forbidden words that have been spoken, but for positive words that had been left unspoken.

Not speaking *loshon hora* is not enough, we need to speak more *loshon hatov*, using our power of speech to compliment, praise and thank people.

A new Artscroll book entitled “40 Days of Caring” (page 191) tells of the time that Rabbi Dovid Kaplan spoke at a Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation Yom Iyun. He had just given a shiur at a seminary in Yerushalayim. As he was leaving, one of the seminary students went over to him and said “I really enjoyed your shiur. Thank you!”

Rabbi Kaplan was impressed with the girl’s confidence and gratitude. Not every 18-year-old would seek out a speaker and offer a warm and sincere compliment.

“That was very nice of you to say so,” said Rabbi Kaplan. “It isn’t always easy for most girls to do,” he added.

“Oh, I learned this from my parents,” she replied. “We have a rule in our home: If you’re thinking something good about somebody, say it.”

Employing this rule himself, Rabbi Kaplan says he is always amazed at the abundance of happiness small compliments bring. If a child gives up a seat for him on the bus, he asks the child his name and calls his parents. Usually, the response is to wait with foreboding for the complaint that they assume will come. Who bothers to call a child’s parents unless there is a problem.

When the message is simply “I want to tell you what a wonderful son you have,“ the parent’s entire demeanour changes.

The habit even has the power to bring shalom into a home. Rabbi Kaplan recalls that he once called a mother on a Friday afternoon to tell her that her 12-year-old son had greeted him warmly on his way out of shul, and that he had enjoyed watching the father and son learning together.

When the mother first answered the phone, her voice was slow and sullen. By the time she hung up, it had risen to a musical lilt.

That Sunday, Rabbi Kaplan’s daughter enlightened him as to the full power of that quick phone call. Her friend was a child of the same family. This friend had seen her in school and reported, “Shabbos in usually kind of tense in our house. My parents don’t get along so well. But that phone call put my mother into such a good mood that we had the nicest Shabbos!”

We should also take the advice of the seminary student. Don’t let your positive thoughts and observations about others hide in your head. Bring them out in to the open and convey them to those who will appreciate them.

One time, after leaving a shiva house and hearing wonderful things about a recently departed individual, my wife commented to me, “I wonder if all those nice things were ever said to the person in question. Did he know how people really felt about him?”

It’s true, Why wait until the shiva! Say them to the person, or write a note or at least tell the people who will appreciate hearing it.

As our parsha teaches us, the “false alarm” of *tzara’as,* was a punishment in itself, not for forbidden words that have been spoken, but for positive words that had been left unspoken.

Not speaking *loshon hora* is not enough, we need to speak more *loshon hatov*, using our power of speech to compliment, praise and thank people.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**