Jewish Tribune – Tazria Metzora

**Positive Talk**

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.

Rabbi Berel Wein tells the story of when he once had a speaking engagement in an out-of-town location somewhere in mid-west America. After his talk, he went to the local kosher restaurant. To his amazement he recognised the man behind the counter slicing the salt beef. It was Moshe who had been in yeshiva with him many decades earlier.

“Moshe!” exclaimed Rabbi Wein, “I can’t believe it’s you”. “How are you? What are you up to?”

Moshe explained that he’d been working at the restaurant for years.

Rabbi Wein couldn’t hold himself back. “But they said about you that you were the next Rav Aharon Kotler! You were the ilui of the Skokie yeshiva in Chicago!”

“Really” said Moshe, “They said that about me?”

Moshe paused and then said: ”So why didn’t they tell me?”

What a terribly sad story. Potential unfulfilled. We have an obligation not just to desist from loshon hora but to speak positively. To thank, build and compliment. And to speak words of Torah.

Our youngest is coming up to his bar-mitzvah. After shul recently, he asked me why is it that people say “shkoyach” to someone who received an aliyah but not to the Ba’al Koreh. Hasn’t the Ba’al Koreh put in so much more work and is more deserving of a “shkoyach” than someone who simply gets an aliyah and says the berachos? A good insight from someone who knows well the preparation needed to lein!

But he’s right. Do we thank the unspoken heroes of our community, be they those who lein, daven or do a myriad of things that make our kehilla not just function, but a joy to be a part of?

As ever, the message of the metzora is a useful reminder of this.

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