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A PEOPLE WHO CHOOSE GOD

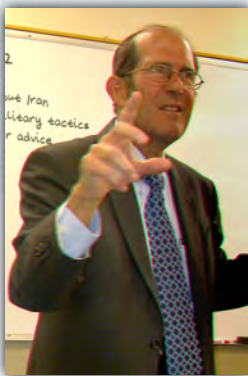
An inspiring
Yom Haatzmaut message
from **Rabbi Reuven Mann**



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**LASHON
HARA**



GOD'S CHOSEN



Thoughts on Yom Haatzmaut

RABBI REUVEN MANN

At this time of the year, Jews and righteous gentiles celebrate Yom Haatzmaut (Israel Independence Day). The modern State of Israel came into being in 1948 and was immediately attacked by surrounding neighbors seeking its destruction. Things did not work out according to their plans. Israel prevailed in that battle and the many subsequent ones launched by her antagonists. Israel has developed into one of the most culturally and technologically advanced societies in the world with a military second to none. What should our feelings be as Israel celebrates her sixty fourth birthday?

To begin with, all civilized people should acknowledge that “there is a G-d in the world.” No people have a more astounding history than the Jews. For many centuries we were dispersed and persecuted, at the complete mercy of every tyrant who rose to torment us. Anti Semites took every possible advantage of our defenselessness. We were subjected to expulsions, inquisitions, wholesale slaughters and systematic annihilation. No other people could have withstood the relentless pressure to which we were subjected. We should have disappeared from the scene a long time ago. We must ask, how did a lamb manage to survive among “seventy wolves?” It should be noted that all the mighty empires that sought to destroy us have themselves perished and been consigned to the dustbins of history. The Jews not only survived but are a vital force in the world. No group has contributed more to the spiritual, intellectual and cultural life of mankind than the Jews. What is the secret of the Jews?

In the middle ages the Jews of Yemen were reeling under the persecution of their Muslim rulers. They turned to Rambam for guidance and support as many were beginning to question whether they could still regard themselves as G-d’s chosen people. Rambam responded to them in his famous “Iggeret Teiman” in which he said, “the Lord has given us assurance through His Prophets that we are indestructible and imperishable and we will always continue to be a pre-eminent community. As it is impossible for G-d to cease to exist so is our destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable. Hashem declares “For I am the Lord I have not changed and you who are the children of Jacob have not ceased to be.”

On Yom Haatzmaut we should feel a deep sense of profound gratitude to Hashem for the miracle of our survival, the return to Eretz Yisrael and the attainment of political independence. We should realize that all this has transpired because there is a Higher Power who rules the world and He has singled us out from all the nations to be His Chosen People. Let us rejoice and celebrate the birthday of Israel and rededicate ourselves to doing all we can to support and defend it. Let us remember that our support of Israel must also include a commitment to fulfilling our mission as the Chosen People. Let us study Torah, pursue justice and display compassion in a manner which causes Hashem’s Name and His Holy Torah to be sanctified in the sight of the whole world.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

Lashon Hara & Contamination

RABBI E. FEDER
AND RABBI A. ZIMMER

The last Rambam in Sefer Tahara (Mikvaos 11:12) explains that halachik contamination (tumah) contains allusions to the philosophical contamination of the mind (corrupt thoughts and character traits). In the last Rambam in 16:10 (Tumah and Tzaraas) he gives an example of such allusions in the case of leprosy. We would like to explain how some of the unique laws of the leper (that he must leave the camp and that he transmits contamination via his dwelling place) are in line with these philosophical allusions.

The Rambam in Tumah and Tzaraas says that leprosy was not a natural affliction. Rather, it was a miraculous affliction only for the Jewish nation, for the sin of lashon hara; speaking slander, gossip, etc.

As a person spoke more and more lashon hara, the affliction of leprosy would spread. It would start with the walls of his house. If he didn't stop speaking lashon hara, it spread to his furniture. After that, to his clothes.

Finally, if in spite of all these afflictions he still couldn't stop, it spread to his skin and he became a leper, an outcast from society and was thereby prevented from further evil speech. He was sent out from the Jewish camp. The Rambam explains (Bias Mikdash 3:2) that the reason he is distanced further than every other person who is tamay, is because the leper transmits contamination when he enters a house. No other living person who is tamay does that; only a corpse.

Why does the leper have this distinction? We suggest that the reason is because the leper, the one who is addicted to lashon hara, contaminates his environment. He creates divisiveness and thereby destroys the social fabric of a society which harbors him. He must be cast out of the Jewish camp. (Rashi on Vayikra 10:14 identifies the very purity of the camp with this law. He states that holy things

can only be eaten in the Jewish camp which is pure from having lepers in it.)

The idea that the leper, through his malicious speech, destroys social relations and is therefore sent out of the camp, is expressed in a gemara Aruchin 16b:

"Why is the leper unique that the Torah says that he should dwell alone outside of the camp? Since he separated between a man and his wife, between a man and his friend, so too the Torah says that he should dwell alone."

We now extend this idea to explain the leper's uniqueness of transmitting contamination to his place of dwelling (for further elaboration on the halachik aspects of this uniqueness, see www.blogoshiur.com, "Lepers and the Dead"). It is not only society as a whole that suffers from those who speak lashon hara. The leper morally corrupts those individuals who come into contact with him; philosophically poisoning those who sit down and converse with him. A person who speaks lashon hara contaminates those who are in his dwelling through social contact.

It is for this reason, the Rambam says, that it is fitting for someone who wants to follow a proper path to distance himself from their dwelling and from speaking with them, so that he does not get trapped in their web of evil and foolishness.

In summation, the halachik contamination of the leper extends to his dwelling. Likewise, the philosophical contamination of someone who speaks lashon hara extends to those who sit down to hang out with him. Halachikly, a leper must be cast out of our society. Philosophically, the same is true with those who speak lashon hara. The only remedy for him is to dwell in isolation. ■

Analysis of Lashon Hara

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

From the ease of violation to the profound words of our Rabbis and Sages addressing our human nature, there's much to discuss regarding the prohibition and appeal of Lashon Hara. What is so wrong with Lashon Hara? What is the appeal? Why does Maimonides say it equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba? As God structured all laws, there must be great insight; far surpassing our simple understanding of "degrading others." Hopefully the sources quoted herein will sensitize us to the damage we cause others, and ourselves.

The Torah Prohibition

A Rabbi once taught that the source for any Torah law is derived from the Five Books – the Chumash. Prophets and Writings may elaborate that law, but these other books cannot add a new law to the 613.

Leviticus 19:16 says, "Do not go as a talebearer in your people, and do not stand by the blood of your friend, I am God." In Hilchos Dayos 7:1 Maimonides explains why the talebearer is placed in the same verse as a murderer: from the tales we spread, we can cause many deaths. Maimonides cites the example of Doeg the Edomite whose words – although not negative in themselves – caused the murders of many innocents. We may also add that slander is an act of assassination; character assassination. When we slander, on some level we wish the demise of the personality we attack. King Solomon said one has "thrown arrows" at another.

Maimonides states that this case of Doeg is an example of the head category, "Richiluss." Richiluss is the act transferring private information from one to another; that which is not yet public knowledge. The Rabbis argue whether this information must be negative, or as Maimonides teaches, even neutral information. But all agree that the violation is in spreading gossip. Maimonides already explained what is so negative about this: many can die. But is there something negative lurking inside the "one who spreads" gossip, inside this instigator? Let's first list the other three subcategories of Richiluss. And they are subcategories, since they are only quantitatively different from Richiluss.

Richiluss is spreading information, but the "manner" in which we do so may come under one of the three other headings. Maimonides then formulates the second category:

There is yet another sin much greater than this, in this category, and it is called Lashon Hara. It is the act of speaking of the negative aspects of one's friend, even though he speaks the truth.

Maimonides' third category is Motzei Shame Ra, or character assassination. This refers to one who spreads lies about others. But quite interesting is Maimonides' fourth and final category, "Bal Lashon Hara," or the "a frequenter of Lashon Hara." Why is this its own category? Maimonides defines this infraction:

One who sits and recites matters about another, that his forefathers were such and such people, and that he heard certain matters concerning him, and all he says are matters of derision. On this [case] does the Torah say, "God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters (Psalms 12:4)."

Let's start to understand Lashon Hara...

King David on Lashon Hara

God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters (Psalms 12:4).

This verse in Psalms commences with "God." Why is this so? Many verses in the Torah that cite evildoers merely address the evil; God is not mentioned in the verse. God is included here since man wishes self-aggrandizement. Our egos are very powerful, always seeking satisfaction. And when we encounter someone we estimate (correctly or not) is superior to ourselves, our egos sense a threat and go into defense mode...unless we have come to learn that such competition is against the goals of the Torah. Therefore, King David carefully wrote, "God should cut off all those with smooth lips, tongues that speak grandiose matters." God is mentioned in purposeful contrast to the sinful objective of the talebearer, whom King David says wishes to "speak grandiose matters." The speaker is attempting to elevate himself. Therefore, King David pits God against man in this verse to highlight the issue. Man should not seek competitive advantage, but rather, he should be cognizant God, who is superior to you. Contemplating this, man will hopefully humble himself.

The next verse in Psalms continues this theme:

That they say, "With our tongues we shall become powerful; our lips are with us, who will rule over us!"

Maimonides states that these people deny God, as they say, "Who will rule over us!" What additional aspects of the sin are highlighted in this verse?

The ego senses that with the power of speech, we may project a grandiose image of ourselves: we can manipulate how others see reality...how we see reality. We can cause much damage. That is the first lesson of "with our tongues we will become powerful."

Then they say something strange, "our lips are with us..." This unveils a deep emotion. Man feels that what is in his control, is his to do with as he pleases. Another aspect of the ego is thereby unveiled: total domination. The ego rejects opposition and restraint.

(continued on next page)

I once witnessed a lecturer in his fifties go into an intolerant, screaming frenzy when someone much younger than himself corrected him during his class. Egomaniacs do not seek truth, but rather, a platform for projecting their “greatness.” The last words embody their goal, “Who will rule over us!” That is not a question. They are saying, “no one will rule over us!” Lashon Hara seeks unrivaled expression, and pity the person who stands in opposition. We must realize this unruly part of human nature. “Sin” wears many masks: mistake, crookedness, and wantonness. This last one is called “peshah,” and what we address here: the unruly tendency.

Why So Many Types?

Why must a person ridicule others? This stems from one’s own insecurities. If man realizes that his life’s goal is to study God and His creations, and not compete, he would not need to reduce others to elevate himself. His insecurity is generated from allowing his social status to dominate all concerns. Therefore, the gossip is an insecure person. The gossip also unloads his or her news on others due to this insecurity, and seeks out others who might side with them.

But we can violate gossip in four ways. Richiluss is when we contribute to defaming others, although we do not necessarily utter negative words, like the case of Doeg above. We are instigators. But our corruption is present. We are merely distributors of what we hear. Lashon Hara is when we actually talk negatively, originating the content and citing truths. And Motzei Sham Ra is when we lie.

What is the difference between Lashon Hara, and “Bal” Lashon Hara – a “frequent speaker” of Lashon Hara? Maimonides tells us that the Bal Lashon Hara talks about the person’s forefathers. That seems quite odd. What does this have to do with the slanderer’s attempt to destroy another person?

The Bal Lashon Hara is clever. He doesn’t mean to merely tarnish one’s reputation; he wants to throw a knockout blow. This is a different type of viciousness. The other party must be removed. And he accomplishes this by saying that his very “inception” was evil: “Look at who his parents were!” With such a statement, he gives the listeners no chance to view him in a good light. “He came from bad blood” as they say. “He is essentially no good.” The Bal Lashon Hara most closely approximates the act of murder, as he seeks to utterly destroy another human being.

Viciousness

We noted that viciousness is part of the sin. Talmud Archin 15b cites a metaphor:

In the future, all beasts will approach the snake and ask, ‘The lion tramples and eats, the wolf tears and eats...of what benefit then is there to you snake, that you bite, and do not eat?’ The snake will reply, ‘And of what benefit is there to man who speaks evil?’

A Rabbi once lectured on this metaphor. He taught, just as the snake has no motive in biting and does so by nature alone, so too, man is vicious by nature. There is no need for any ulterior motive. Just as the snake bites merely to afflict, man’s nature is to be vicious. In that Talmudic portion, God metaphorically says:

What more can I do to prevent Lashon Hara? I created the limbs upright, but the tongue lying down [to keep it dormant]. All limbs are external, but the tongue is inside (to restrain it). I created around the tongue, a wall of bones [teeth] and a wall of flesh [lips] [to halt Lashon Hara].

The Rabbi said this teaches that speaking Lashon Hara is practically unavoidable, as if “God did all He can do, with no success.” Of course, since we receive great punishment for Lashon Hara, we are to blame. But this portion has one message: Lashon Hara caters to strong impulses. Therefore, we must be stronger, and more knowledgeable so as to fight it.

Most Severe

Why does Maimonides say Lashon Hara equates to sexual immorality, idolatry and murder: three sins causing punishment here, and the loss of Olam Haba? What is murder? It is the attempt to eliminate another from one’s reality. Lashon Hara does the same; one reduces another with speech. Sexual immorality is man’s unbridled instinctual expression. Lashon Hara too is man fully expressing his instinctual drives of aggression, ego. But how is Lashon Hara akin to idolatry?

What is idolatry? It is not the mere prostration to statues. Idolatry is an attempt to twist reality and conform it to how we wish it to be. Although an idolater never sees a stone god perform acts, he accepts that it does. He distorts reality. He denies what natural law indicates, and follows imagination. When one speaks Lashon Hara, he uses speech to delude himself. In reality, John is a great guy, and helps others genuinely. But in “my world,” he has surpassed me, I feel threatened since I concern myself with competition. I need to “correct” this. I assume my speech has a reductive quality on John’s value. So I say things that are true about him, but only to those who will resent him too. His downfall is soon at hand. I now feel the world is good again.

Summary

We live in a fantasy world; we desire to hurt others who do not deserve it, and we outlet base emotions without thinking. We reject God’s plan to abandon petty issues and strive towards perfection. Lashon Hara also seems to go unnoticed; as we speak so much, and we deny we did anything wrong with those few words about John. Because of its subtleties, we must be all the more sensitive to our motives when we talk. We can correct our tongues, but only after we correct our hearts. And the competitive emotion that drives us to seek fame and honor is at the root of this sin. The Torah teaches the proper attitude: “And the man Moses was exceedingly humble from all men that are on face of the Earth (Num. 12:3).” ■

Evil Speech & Leprosy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah teaches of the punishment of leprosy, (Tzaraas) which afflicts a person on account of his or her speaking “Lashon Hara”, derogatory remarks concerning others. Leprosy visits the person in stages. At first, leprosy attaches itself to the person’s home. If the person heeds the warning and repents, it is gone. If not, it excels towards the person’s garments. Again, if one repents, it is gone. If God’s warning is still ignored, it finally attaches to the person’s body.

What is the purpose of this progression, and why these three, specific objects? Additionally, the Torah states that for one to be atoned, one must bring two birds: one is slaughtered, and its blood is caught in a bowl. The live bird is dipped therein along with a branch of hyssop and myrtle, and the live, bloodied bird is now set free over an open field.

On the surface, this seems barbaric, or at the least, unintelligible. However, as we know God is the Designer of the Torah, and “all its ways are pleasant”, there must be a rational explanation for these required practices and the objects used in attempting to correct the person who spoke viciously.

In order to understand how “mida k’neged mida” (measure for measure) works in this case, we must first understand the crime. Speaking derogatorily against another has at its source: the desire for self-affirmation of one’s greatness. An insecure person will usually be found degrading others. In his mind, he now feels higher in comparison to the ridiculed party. However, a secure individual does not seek social approval, as this doesn’t affect his self-estimation. He is more concerned with God’s approval. Being secure, another person’s level has no effect on his status. What then is the remedy for this egomaniacal type of personality? It is to diminish his imagined grandeur with a dose of alienation. Part of the need to elevate oneself is the desire to be loved by others. When this cannot be, as a leper is banished outside the camp of the Israelites, he is faced with the fact that he is not the great image he conjured. He must now confront his insignificance.

However, God the merciful, seeks to avoid the worst by hinting to the person that he has done wrong. God does not send leprosy to the body at first. He initially uses other vehicles with which the person identifies, viz., his home, and his clothing. God commences with the home, as this is furthest removed from the person, but related

enough to him so as to awaken him: there is something distasteful in him that he should delve into. If the person is obstinate, God sends the leprosy to a closer object, his garments. This is more closely tied to one’s identity, and is more effective. But if not heeded to, God finally delivers leprosy to his body, which is undeniably ‘him’. We see from here God’s mercy, and intelligence in using objects, with which we identify.

These three objects, namely the house, clothes and body, correlate exactly to Mezuzah, Tzitzis, and Tefillin. These are also tied to the idea of identification, but from a different angle: since God desires that people place their trust in Him, and not in their own strength, God created these three commands.

Mezuzah reminds one not to invest too much reliance in his home, as God should be recognized as the One, true Protector. The home is correctly viewed as a haven from the elements. But God desires that we act in line with reality, which means, above natural law, we must trust in His ‘shelter’, over structural shelters. So we place a reminder on the doorway, which is the best place for us to be reminded of God, as a doorway receives all of the traffic of a home. We are urged not to place too much importance on our dress, and therefore we are commanded to wear Tzitzis. Clothing again is an area where people express their identity. But when we gaze at the Tzitzis, we are reminded about investing too much importance in our dress. Lastly, but most closely tied to our self-images, are our bodies. One is most affected when something happens to his body, even if no pain is suffered. Our bodies are more central to our appearance than our clothes and homes. We define the body incorrectly as the “real me”. This is due to our false definition of what “man” is. Society tells us that man equals his body. The Torah tells us that man equals intellect, perfected values, and ideals. Hence, we are commanded to wear Tefillin: a bodily reminder that we should not invest too much worth here either.

These three, the home, clothes, and body are the three main areas where one identifies, and thus, the three areas where God saw it fit to place reminders that God alone should be the one upon whom we depend. And as these three are where we identify, God uses them again when attempting to focus us on our errors: He attacks with leprosy those objects that we deem are “ours” or “ourselves”: our homes, our clothes and our bodies.

What is the idea behind the two birds? I believe that besides correcting the person’s flaw of overestimation, we must also realize the irrevocable harm inflicted on other human beings. Rashi states that birds in specific are brought, as they chirp, to make clear that the crime had to do with his “chirping” like a bird. The live bird (a metaphor for the sinner’s speech) is dipped in the blood of the other, dead bird (the one humiliated by the speech) and let free over a field. This is to demonstrate that just as this bloodied bird is irretrievable, so is his evil “bloody speech” irretrievable. As you cannot catch the same bird twice, so also he cannot retract his words which were let loose on the world. The damage is done, the “bird is loose”. This will hopefully help the sinner recognize his crime.

The birds acting as atonement teaches that knowing one’s sin is the first step towards forgiveness. ■

The Benefit of Sovereignty

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The day the Jews returned to Eretz Yisrael in 1948 changed us as a nation, as a people, as a community, and as individuals. The benefits are endless, the prospects to strengthen our relationship with God and raise ourselves to higher levels are evident, and, as Rav Soloveitchik notes, we see Divine Providence opening up a door for the Jewish people once again. One of the more remarkable changes emerged with our renewed physical control over Eretz Yisrael. To some, being a powerful nation is the ultimate payoff. As we will see in an important Midrash, our control over the land offers an important opportunity in our overall perfection as a nation.

In an easily overlooked grammatical interplay, we see a word that is presented in both a male and female context take on a completely new meaning. The word for song in Hebrew is both “shir” and “shira”, and is presented in both formats. When we recite in the daily tefila the shevach and hoda’at enunciated by Bnei Yisrael after kriyas yam suf, we recite the following: “Az yashir Moshe u’vnei Yisrael es hashira hazos...” Yet we find in other places the masculine reference. For example, we see in Tehilim (98:1): “Mizmor shiru la’Hashem shir chadash”. One could argue that each reference is germane to that area of Tanach, maybe a better fit into the flow of the verse. However, there is even an instance where this word is distinguished within one thematic environment. At the night of the seder, we recite the following in the paragraph of “Lefichach”: “...ve’nomar le’fanav shirah chadasha...” Just a few moments later, when reciting the bracha at the end of the magid, we switch it to the zachar: “...ve’nodeh lecha shir chadash”. What is even more intriguing is that both reference a “new” (chadash/chadasha) song, making them even more similar to one another. Rather than be a minor question of language, Chazal saw something far deeper in this differentiation.

There is a Midrash found in Shir HaShirim Rabba (1:3) that establishes a clear demarcation between these two uses of “song”. The Midrash, in the name of Rav Berechia, compares Bnei Yisrael to a woman. How so? A woman, upon marriage, is only entitled to a tenth of inheritance from her father when he passes away. This too applied to Bnei Yisrael when they “inherited” (yarshu) the land of Israel. At that time, they conquered the land that was occupied by the seven nations, which is one-tenth of the seventy nations of the world. As such, the female version of song, meaning “shira”, is used to reflect this idea. However, in the future redemption, Bnei Yisrael will be compared to a male. A son’s inheritance does not change based on his marital status – he is still entitled to 100%. The same then can be said for Bnei Yisrael at the time of the geula, as they will inherit the world, so to speak. Therefore, we see the conversion to “shir”, reflecting this change in the status of Bnei Yisrael.

Obviously (and for those who often read these articles, know exactly what is coming), this Midrash cannot be taken literally. What idea are we supposed to learn from this? Furthermore, of all the things to focus on, why specifically yerushas Eretz Yisrael? And is this still relevant, as we know seventy nations is not really a practical reality today?

There is one other source that should be mentioned before trying to answer this question. The Ramban, in his discussion of the mitzvah of yerushas Eretz Yisrael, writes of a distinction one must have when understanding the commandment. He explains that one should not err in assuming the mitzvah of destroying the seven nations is the same as the

mitzvah of yerushas Eretz Yisrael. The mitzvah to destroy the seven nations is limited to just that – their complete obliteration. However, the mitzvah of yerushas Eretz Yisrael is quite different, not simply the by-product of the disappearance of these seven nations. Within the mitzvah of yerushas Eretz Yisrael lies an important idea. If, for example, peace existed between Bnei Yisrael and the seven nations (assuming they did not fulfill the mitzvah of destroying them), Bnei Yisrael could not abandon the land of Israel. And if a utopian period of time would emerge, where everyone was at peace the Jewish people could not leave the land to lie fallow. This, according to the Ramban, is the flip side to the mitzvah.

There is a point the Ramban is emphasizing, an idea we can see as well in the Midrash. Let’s first take a look at the overall theme being presented in the Midrash. We see two types of redemption – the geula from Mitzrayim, and the final redemption of the future, the geula asida. They both are redemptive, sharing this transformative quality. At the same time, there is an obvious distinction that exists. Whereas one is (or was) temporal, the second is permanent. However, within this very discrepancy, there is a further elucidation by this Midrash.

The key here is in understanding how and why yerusha is such a necessary component of a redemptive process. As we noted, the Ramban writes that the deduction one must make from the mitzvah of yerushas haaretz is that Bnei Yisrael can never abandon the land. Why is this point so pivotal? We see one important concept emerge here, a concept that is integral to the perfection of the nation as a whole. Being a sovereign nation has a tremendous impact on the Jewish people, one that is instrumental in our ability to place our security in God. When we left Mitzrayim, we threw off the yoke of slavery. When we received the Torah, we became the ovdei Hashem. Yet without a land which we controlled, there was something lacking. When we conquered Eretz Yisrael, the refutation of being an enslaved people to others was complete. We now controlled the land, and through this yerusha, we now reached a level of security that was monumental. In this sense, then, the sovereign nation meant a more perfected nation – our ability to have dominion over the land gave us the ability to place our security in God. And we can then say that both redemptions partake of this feature, this idea of being sovereign and its ability to perfect us. If this were all, what then would the final geula bring that was not first realized by Bnei Yisrael after their initial conquest of the land? While it is true Bnei Yisrael controlled Eretz Yisrael, there were still external threats. Enemies were lurking beyond the borders, and the world as a whole viewed Bnei Yisrael as anything from a military threat to an ideological menace. Our ability to place our security as a nation in God was enhanced with the yerusha of the land, but it was not complete – thus the use of “shira”. The final redemption will bring a complete yerusha. This does not mean we will defeat all the people of the world, wiping out everyone so that the Jewish people reign supreme. Instead, there is another way the threats will be removed. The people of the world will recognize God as the melech elyon, the Jews will function as ohr le’goyim – and Bnei Yisrael will now be truly sovereign. Therefore, see a clear qualitative difference in being sovereign in the two redemptions. On one level, the fact that we now were sovereign had a tremendous impact on us. However, in the final redemption, our identity as an autonomous nation will take on a whole new dimension, as it will be the highest expression of sovereignty.

We see from this Midrash a development in one component of redemption, the importance of the Jewish people being in control of Eretz Yisrael. This theme of sovereignty, and its overall importance today, can be found in the writings of authors ranging from Rav Kook to Rav Soloveitchik. The idea of the nation being sovereign allows us to remove many of our insecurities and focus on God. And with the geula asida, a complete sovereignty will emerge, as all threats dissolve. May we merit this state of existence bimhera beyameinu. ■

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Tazria/Metzora educates us on the
severity of **Lashon Hara.**

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opportune time to be guided by both;
to reflect on how we treat others to
their faces, and how we malign them
behind their backs, and **stop.**

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