

JewishTimes

VOL. XII NO. 12 — APRIL 26, 2013

SPECIAL ISSUE

A handgun is shown lying on a red surface, which is splattered with blood. The handgun is positioned diagonally across the upper half of the image. The background is a solid red color, and the blood splatters are white and red, creating a stark contrast.

a

SIN

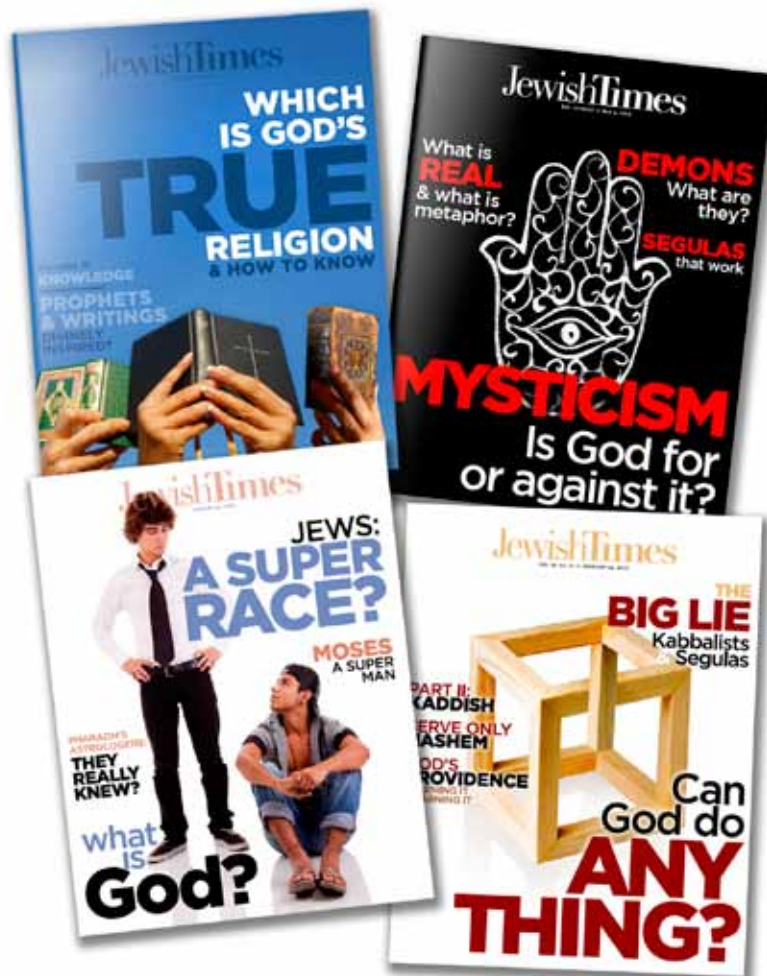
**worse
than murder**

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LETTERS

Why isn't *that* Stealing too?

Eli: Why is there a separate law against using dishonest weights? That's stealing. I know I can't steal, so using dishonest weights is included in that law against stealing. Why does the Torah have an additional law about these weights?

Rabbi: These weights involve a second corruption. A single act of stealing doesn't mean its a way of life. But someone

who makes such weights indicates a philosophy of life, not a single act of greed. A person who keeps these weights is far worse than a crook.

This explains why Deuteronomy doesn't prohibit the "use" of these false weights as we find in Leviticus. In Deuteronomy, we are prohibited to simply "have" them in our pockets or homes. Possession indicates a philosophy. ■

(continued on page 15)

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SIN

worse

than murder

A friend suggested we study Maimonides' writings on Lashon Hara found in Pirkei Avos 1:17. Maimonides' words (quoting the Tosefta and Talmud Arachin 15a) were a precious find. The Tosefta says, "For 3 sins, man is punished in this world and loses his afterlife: for idolatry, sexual prohibitions, and murder; and Lashon Hara is equivalent to them all."

Maimonides then quotes Arachin that says each of the 3 cardinal sins is described in Torah verses using the word "great" (gadol). Regarding idolatry, Moses said of the Jews' Golden Calf sin, "**The people sinned a great sin (Exod. 32:31)**". Regarding sexual prohibitions, Joseph refused to sleep with Potiphar's wife saying, "**How can I commit this great evil (Gen. 39:9)?**" And regarding murder, Cain said of God's punishment of banishment for killing his brother Abel, "**My sin is greater than I can bear (Gen. 4:13)**." But regarding Lashon Hara, the verse says "**Mouths that speak greatnesses (Psalms 12:4)**," using the plural "greatnesses", and not merely using the word "great" in the singular as the 3 sins above. This is understood to indicate that Lashon Hara incorporates all 3 sins, i.e., it includes all the "greatnesses" of the 3 cardinal sins.

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“When man is corrupt in his primary faculties, his sin is more severe. Idolatry, sexual violations and murder are corruptions of our 3 major faculties: the soul, the instincts and the ego, respectively.”

To clarify, the word "great" here refers to "severe." Moses, Joseph and Cain all viewed the sins as severe, and not minor infractions. But what is this message; in what manner are these 3 sins "severe" when compared to all others? It is amazing that the Torah is so precise, and so generous with its clues. Maimonides draws our attention to the fact that Torah goes out of its way to signal us to a pattern of the repeating word "great" in connection with these 3 sins. Then, it goes one further, and uses the word great in the plural – "greatnesses" – to teach that Lashon Hara incorporates all the evils found in idolatry, sexual prohibitions and murder. In other words, God wrote his Torah through His Prophets in a style that hints at deeper ideas. For this alone we must feel a sense of appreciation for the Creator's method of teaching us.

So what is the severity in the 3 sins, not found in other sins? And how is Lashon Hara equivalent to these three sins?

An example is useful here. In terms of harming one's self, not harming others,

which sin is more severe: being overly-jealous, or never giving charity? Both are extremes. I would say the latter is worse. Why? It is because one is corrupted in the area of justice, which is far more significant of moral decay than one's feelings of envy. My acts of justice reflect a more primary nature in man than envy.

What makes one attitude or moral more significant than others? This depends on it's centrality to our being. As humans, we have major and minor components. We have a multitude of attitudes and emotions: envy, sorrow, pity, remorse, humor, delight, revenge, apathy, ambition, the list goes on. If we are deviant in any of these feelings or attitudes, it is not as corrupt as being deviant in major components of ourselves. I refer to what psychologists and our great Rabbis agree are our 3 major components: 1) the soul (intelligence), 2) instinctual drives, and 3) the ego. The Rabbis call these neshama, nefesh and ruach respectively. Freud called them the superego, the id, and the ego. (See Ibn Ezra on Koheles 7:3 for a marvelous analysis, also included in this week's Jewishtimes Letters section.)

Now, if we are deviant in our primary components, then as "man and woman" we are more corrupt, than if we deviate in minor emotions. This is understood. Being a sloppy dresser is not as bad as being crooked in business due to ego emotions. For our style is not central to our definition as a human, whereas ego is a primary component. If we corrupt our egos, that which is more central in ourselves is corrupt, so the sin is worse. Similarly, the sicker person is one with liver disease, not one with a wart. We can now answer what makes these 3 sins so severe.

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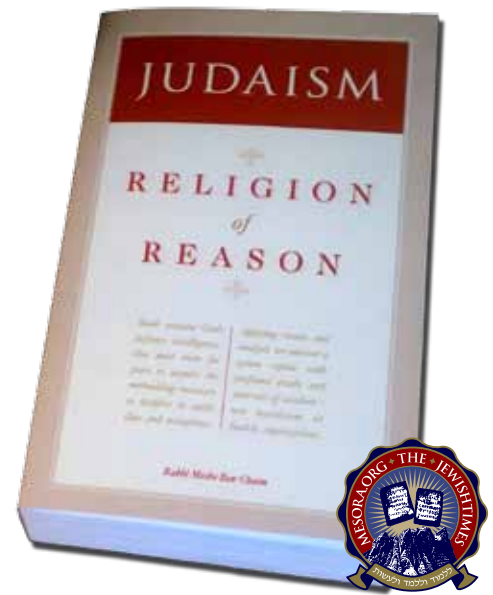
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RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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**"God hinted to us...He
repeated the word "great"
regarding the 3 sins, and
Lashon Hara. The Rabbis
picked up on this repetition,
and taught us God's intent as
learned from His prophets."**



Idolatry occurs when man's grip on reality is lost. He accepts his imagination and fantasy as real. Thus, he bows and prays to stone idols. He has erred in the most important area: what God is. His soul is severely damaged, unlike one who thinks blue is red. In both cases, one maintains a falsehood. But the greater the falsehood, the more corrupt the person.

One who cannot control his sexual desire and sleeps with a married woman has corrupted his instinctual makeup. If this makeup is not under his control, he lives like an animal and forfeits his purpose to live as an intelligent being. And one who murders does so, as he views another person's existence as a threat to his ego. In his world, he feels he set things "right" when the threat is no longer alive.

In all three, the person has distanced himself from God; either through corrupt soul as he thinks God is something else; through overindulgence in lusts which removes him from a life as an intelligent being, or placing himself – not God – as the center of the universe by murdering others. This explains why these three sinners are punished here, and forfeit the afterlife. All 3 sinners have deviated severely (gadol) from the path God set for mankind. Their lives no longer have value. Their souls are destroyed, unless they repent. This is why the word "great" is reserved for application to these 3 sins, for it is these alone, wherein man deviates in his major components.

How is Lashon Hara equivalent to these 3?

We must appreciate that speech is a very gratifying tool; we feel actual satisfaction through our words. This makes it akin to sexual prohibition, for it too aims at satisfaction of an instinctual drive.

When speaking Lashon Hara, we are

intent on character assassination. We don't wish to pay the consequence of a prison term for murder, so we "kill" the person we hate through speech. This is how it is akin to murder. We view another person as worthless, for they threaten our ego. Our concept of ourself in this case is the "center of reality," and this obscures God's position.

Lashon Hara is also akin to idolatry, as we said, one fabricates a "setting it straight" scenario in his psyche when he derides another. In his fantasies he feels that through Lashon Hara, he got even. But in fact, nothing transpired at all, just as nothing is true about the belief in idols hearing one's prayers. In Lashon Hara and idolatry, one accepts imagination as reality.

What's worse, is that Lashon Hara eventually makes a person deny God, as King David said, "They say, 'We will grow mighty with our tongues; our lips are with us, who can rule us (Psalms 12:5)'!" One feels through speech, he attained power over reality; he has created statements heard by others and in his fantasy, he equates his words with true reality. Their is an invincible feeling sensed by one who speaks. This is the message King David revealed to us.

Great sins are where we deviate from God in the most severe degree. This occurs when a major component of our beings is sinful. Our major components of soul, instincts and ego are the focus in the big 3 sins, and in Lashon Hara.

God communicated His knowledge to the Prophets. He hinted to subtle clues in many manners. And in our case He hinted by reserving the use of the word "great" to 3 sins, and Lashon Hara. The Rabbis picked up on this repetition, and taught us God's intent as learned from His prophets.

Fortunate are we who have the Torah. ■



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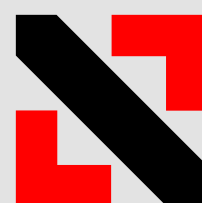
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LASHON HARA

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**What
do the
Sources
Reveal?**



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.

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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.

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.

But 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

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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. This explains the

phrase "character assassination." 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?

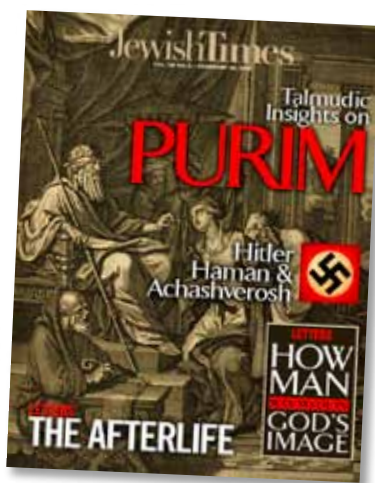
What is idolatry? It is not the mere prostration to statues. Idolatry is an attempt to twist reality and conform it to how we wish it to be. Although an idolater never sees a stone god perform acts, he believes that it can. He distorts reality. He denies what natural law indicates, and follows imagination. 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 am competitive. 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. But this assessment of John, that his place in the universe is now reduced, is all in my imagination...just like idolatry.

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)." ■

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THE LIMITS OF JEWISH EDUCATION

Rabbi Bernie Fox

Tzara'as is an affliction of the skin generally characterized by the appearance of a bright white discoloration. Contraction of tzara'as renders a person tamey - impure. The degree of impurity that is ascribed to the person depends upon the severity of the disease. In its most intense manifestation, the afflicted person is banished from the community until the condition subsides.

The Torah explains that tzara'as is not contracted as a result of a virus or bacterial infection. It is a consequence of moral and ethical failures. Primary among those failings is lashon ha'ra – speaking negatively of others – even if the negative characterization is accurate and truthful.

Maimonides explains that lashon ha'ra has three victims: the person who is vilified, the speaker who disparages another, and the one who listens to the defamation. He adds that the listener is harmed the most. Now, it seems that Maimonides is speaking on a practical level. On a practical level, all of the parties in the dynamic are damaged by lashon ha'ra.

It is obvious that the vilified party has been harmed. His reputation has been attacked and damaged. But it is worthwhile to consider the damage caused to the other two parties in the dynamic – the speaker and listener. We will come back to this issue in a few minutes.

A recent national survey of parents reveals that they have mixed feelings regarding their children's Jewish day schools and high schools. For all schools participating in the survey, on average, less than 50% of the parents reported

that they are enthusiastic supporters, likely to recommend their school to others. The survey also suggests that, on average, 15% can be expected to discourage others from enrolling their children.

An even more interesting aspect of the survey is what it suggests about the core cause of this lack of enthusiasm or dissatisfaction. The survey results suggest that the core, dominant determinant of parent enthusiasm or dissatisfaction is their appraisal of the school's effectiveness in promoting Jewish development. This suggests that the most important reason more than 50% of parents are less than enthusiastic about their children's school is that they feel it has not provided impactful and inspiring Jewish education.

I think that our parents have good reason to be alarmed and concerned. They are observing behaviors and attitudes that give them reason to wonder whether their children will remain committed to observance and Jewish life. They are looking to their schools to respond to their concerns and to rescue their children.

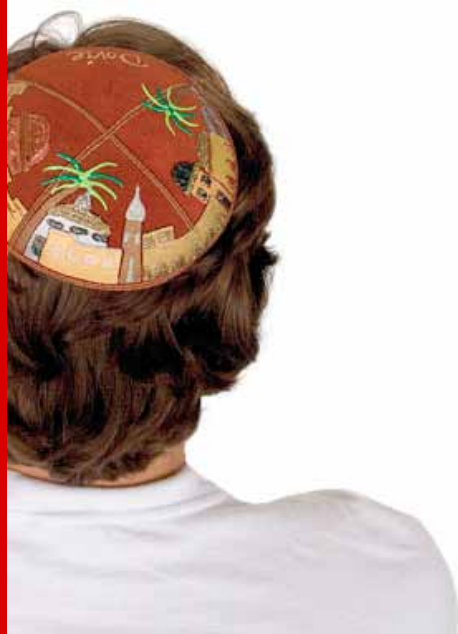
I do not know all of the specific behaviors that concern parents but I can provide one example. In recent years much attention has been given to the phenomenon of Half-Shabbos. Half-Shabbos is a term used to describe the practice of observing Shabbos with the exception of using one's mobile phone. Apparently, nationally, a growing number of otherwise observant Jewish teens and pre-teens will not or cannot resist texting or calling friends on Shabbos.

I agree with the parents with whom I have discussed this issue. Our schools must respond to this development. We must better communicate to our students the importance of Shabbos observance. We must more effectively explain to them why Half-Shabbos is not good enough. Our job as educators is to be aware of emerging trends among our students. We must understand their attitudes and be adaptive in the manner in which we teach, communicate, and work with our young people.

We will continue to improve and increase the effectiveness of our schools. But I strongly suspect that our schools are fundamentally ill-suited to succeed in the task that they have been assigned. We expect our schools to Jewishly educate and inspire our young people. I think that for our schools to succeed they need help. We need broader participation in the process of education and inspiration.

Let me explain. One article discussing Half-Shabbos included a wealth of material from interviews with young people. As you might expect, some justified their behavior by minimizing it or disputing the Shabbos violation. However, others did not deny that their use of their digital devices violated Shabbos. These young people merely observed that no one is

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completely observant. Their parents and many other adults around them compromise in their observance. These young people asserted that they only differ from the adults in where they compromise.

One of the parents with whom I work expressed the issue to me as follows: our children are watching us. They are observing you and me – all of us. We are all role models. Their observations of the adults around them inform their conclusions regarding observance and contribute to shaping their attitudes towards Torah.

Okay, so we can all pitch-in to inspire our children by modeling the values and behaviors that we hope to nurture. What else can do?

Surrounding the First World War, America experienced a tremendous wave of Jewish immigration from Europe. These immigrant families had a troubling experience. Many succeeded in transplanting their Torah observance to this new continent and society. However, far fewer succeeded in transmitting their commitment to their children.

Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt"l suggested that this lost generation of Jews was not compromised because of their parents' lack of commitment. These parents made heroic sacrifices to be observant. This generation was lost because of the "k'vetch". The mother put kosher meat on the table but kvetched over the expense. The father did not work on Shabbos but he bemoaned the lost income. The message communicated to the children was not that observance is worthy of the greatest sacrifice. It was that there is no joy in observance. It is only an experience of sacrifice.

If we are to inspire our children, it is not enough to provide them with a Jewish education. We must communicate to them our joy and our love for that education and for living Jewishly. If our conversation is only about the tuition crisis, the trials and tribulations of car pool, the imposition of attending the school's fundraisers, and the k'vetch, then what message are we communicating? If we aspire for our children to find joy in their Jewish experience in and out of school, then we must express our joy.

Finally, I will share with you an insight from a parent that is relevant to both inspiring our children and to the teaching from Maimonides with which I opened. It is a sad story. I have heard it too many times. But it deserves to be told.

A mother came to me and bemoaned her children's abandonment of observance. She and her husband had made tremendous sacrifices to provide their children with the finest Jewish education available. The children attended day school from kindergarten through middle school and then continued on to yeshiva high school. After high school, all of her children studied in Israel. But none remained observant.

But then she made the most remarkable and difficult



comment. She said to me that to a great extent she and her husband are responsible for her children's abandonment of observance. She explained, that she and her husband constantly bemoaned the shortcomings of their synagogue. They were consistently critical of their Orthodox community and its members. They focused on all of the shortcoming that they observed. She said her children are good listeners. They have no desire to be part of the deeply flawed faith-community described by their parents.

So who is harmed by lashon ha'ra? The victim can recover. The speaker reinforces his own negativity but his malignant perspective was in place even before he expressed it in words. But the listener does not even appreciate that he has been poisoned. His outlook on the world and on his community has been tainted and corrupted though the noxious affect of these reports. He is an innocent whose outlook is poisoned by the speaker.

The bottom line is that we shape the perspectives of others through the messages that we communicate to them. As the mother, whose story I just described observed, this is especially true regarding the messages that we transmit to our children.

If our children are to be inspired by the education we provide, then they must believe in their schools' capacity to inspire. Whether they have this faith in their schools will be determined by their experiences but also by the messages that we communicate as parents and community members.

If school, parents, and community cannot see one another as partners in the enterprise of Torah education, then it will only be left for us to apportion the blame for a lost generation. If we can engage one another as partners, then I am confident we will inspire our young people to be committed, enthusiastic and G-d fearing young men and women. ■

His Mercies are Upon All His Creations

This week's Parsha, Emor, continues to elucidate the major theme of the Book of Vayikra, the sacrificial service and the special laws that pertain to the Kohanim who, alone, were authorized to perform it. Thus the sedra details the many flaws and blemishes which would invalidate sacrifices. The Kohain, also, must be in the most appropriate state, physically and emotionally. He is not permitted to come in contact with a corpse as the encounter with death could make him sad or depressed. An exception is made for his seven closest relatives as the respect for one's family overrides the prohibition. However, the Kohen Gadol (chief Kohen) was not permitted to become impure even for his closest kin. The only exception is that of a "meit mitzvah" i.e. an "abandoned" corpse who had no relatives that were under the obligation to bury him. The magnitude of the chesed involved in providing for the burial of such a person is so great that it overrides the severe injunction against the Kohen Gadol's relinquishing his state of ritual purity.

Two important lessons can be learned from this. First of all, the very high standard of respect we must display toward others is not relaxed when they are deceased. Respect for the dead which focuses around a speedy and dignified burial is a major tenet of Judaism. It is not that the corpse has any intrinsic importance. The essence of man lies in the Divine soul which signifies that man was created in "His Image." Disrespect for the body expresses disdain for the soul which was connected to it and indirectly to the Creator who fashioned it. We also see the supreme importance that the Torah assigns to chesed. No ritual requirement ranks in importance with the service



performed by the Kohen Gadol. Yet, he must incur ritual impurity to personally attend to the internment of a complete stranger who is of such social insignificance that he has neither relative nor friend to tend to him. The compassion one displays toward the most lowly and downtrodden people, with whom he has no personal relationship is the most precious because it is not prompted by any selfish emotion. It is, rather, the purest expression of respect for the Divine image which inheres in man.

A major theme of parshat Emor is compassion. The Torah is categorically opposed to sadism and cruelty. It recognizes that there is a proper place for the aggressive instinct such as fighting wars against evil tyrannies. However, we must seek to be in control of our hostility and to cultivate sympathy and kindness for all G-d's creatures, including animals. Thus, the parsha states that an animal cannot be brought for a sacrifice until it is at least eight days old. Then it says, "you shall not slaughter an ox or lamb together with its

offspring on the same day." At first glance the insertion of this prohibition in this context is puzzling. This law applies to any slaughter of animals and not just to those designated for sacrifices. Why did the Torah see fit to incorporate it in the section dealing with the Temple Service?

The Rambam explains that the reason we are prohibited from killing the mother and its offspring on the same day is that one should be restrained and prevented from coming to a point where we kill the "child" in the presence of its mother. That is because "the pain of the animal under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference between the pain of man and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in man but in most living beings." This idea is communicated to us in the section dealing with sacrifices. We should not think that engagement in Divine service gives us a license to be insensitive or trample on the rights of others. The most important characteristic of the Korban is the purity of heart of the one who brings it. In making an offering to Hashem we implore Him to be merciful and compassionately forgive our sins. To be worthy of Divine mercy we must strive to develop that quality and display it to all His creatures. That is why we are commanded to refrain from afflicting the mother animal precisely in the parsha dealing with sacrifice. We thus affirm that it is our duty to emulate Hashem "whose mercies are upon all of His creations."

Shabbat Shalom ■

LASHON HARA

Ibn Ezra on the Human Condition

Reader: I enjoy your website; it is inspiring to read rational essays which attempt to arrive at truth, rather than the more common type these days which don't seem to go anywhere in particular. My question is about emotions: clearly, God gave them to us for a purpose. However, if we are to approach His wisdom entirely from a rational standpoint, what are the proper role of emotions and sentimentality in our lives and service of the Divine Will?

Rabbi: I will answer your question, and will also address another related question asked by Tamara. She asked why God made people so different from each other: "We all have the same emotions, but the degree of variation in each person, along with his personality and preferences, makes us so different. Why did God want this to be?"

The Talmud states that they once tied up the instincts (Yetzer Hara) and this resulted in chickens not laying eggs, and man not moving to accomplish anything. Emotions are needed to drive man and beast; both require an "energy source." This emotional energy drives man, motivates him, and is responsible in all its forms for man's accomplishments. This energy fuels our many emotions. A Rabbi once explained Ecclesiastes 1:7 (the metaphor of a river flowing) as referring to this "energy source" in each person. This energy may be let loose, when

we do not restrain ourselves from any desire, or they may be directed by our intellect as to when and where we express, indulge or restrain from emotional involvement or gratification. King Solomon opened his work Ecclesiastes with a description of how man operates psychologically, so we may appreciate his subsequent words describing man, his downfalls, and his correct lifestyle. I believe the Torah does the same, using water again in Genesis.

A wise Rabbi once lectured on Ibn Ezra on Ecclesiastes 7:3. There, Ibn Ezra describes the three major components of man, and how one may arrive at the life of wisdom. He commences by describing man's three major components of his mind; 1) the Nefesh (base drives), 2) the Neshama (intelligence) and 3) the Ruach (ego). Ibn Ezra then explains how man can become perfected and negotiate his varied natures towards success:

"It is known that when the base drives (nefesh) of man are strengthened, the intelligence (neshama) becomes weak and has no power to stand before it, for the body and all instincts strengthen that nefesh. Therefore, one who indulges in eating and drinking will never become wise. [But] when one joins the intelligence with one's ego (ruach) one may

succeed over the nefesh, the base drives. Then, the "eyes of the intelligence" are opened a small degree and one is enabled to understand physical science. However he cannot [yet] understand the higher areas of wisdom due to the power of the ego which strives for power; and it is that ego which creates anger. And after the intelligence reigns over the base drives via the assistance of the ego, the intelligence requires to be immersed in wisdom, that it will strengthen it, until the intelligence succeeds over the ego, and the ego is now subjugated to the intelligence."

This amazing Ibn Ezra means as follows: At first, man enters the world as a child, completely controlled by his instincts, as his mind is not yet available. As he grows, his mind begins to stir, but the instincts have a head start on the intelligence, and it is impossible to conquer them alone. Man requires teaming his intelligence with another new, developing part of his mind: his ego. One's ego is a formidable adversary to the base instincts, as one will seek ego satisfaction over instinctual satisfaction at a stage in his development. However, this ego and drive for power and fame limits a person, and causes him to become angry when he does not get his way. This means if his energies are not solely devoted to study for study itself, some of his energy still flows towards the ego. What he must do is to fully immerse himself in wisdom, and only then he will begin to attach himself to ideas, with no ulterior motive. This attachment possesses a greater hold on him, as it is his mind that is now engaged. The mind has the greatest magnetism of all man's components, as God designed man to be attached to wisdom over all else.

God gave man his greatest strengths in the realm of his intellect. But to arrive at this level of attachment to truth and wisdom, Ibn Ezra teaches that man must encounter these various stages, and address each stage as outlined: man must overcome the first set of drives he encounters, i.e., the base instincts, by teaming his ego with intelligence. Then man must immerse himself in wisdom, and this will loosen the hold, which his ego has

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on him. Man can arrive at a state where his mind is attached to the good, more powerfully than how strong his ego and base drives were attached to their objects of passion.

Once at this final level, and even before, God's plan is that man harness his instincts and use them in service of the Torah lifestyle. Thus, King Solomon wrote in chapter three of Ecclesiastes that "there is a time to kill and a time to heal...a time a time to cry and a time to laugh...a time to love and a time to hate". Meaning, no feeling or attitude is correct at all times, but must be guided. What guides it? Our intellect. War may be correct to remove killers, but killing innocent people is not correct. Love is good for creating societies, but wrong when used to pity a murderer. Harnessing emotions for Torah's goals can be expressed positively as in loving your neighbor, lending money to the poor, and negatively by speaking *loshon hora* – evil speech. In some cases we must force ourselves to maintain more positive feelings, as in helping a friend with a heavy burden. At the same time, we must subjugate our "natural" feeling of resistance to helping our enemy, and bear the yoke for sake of the Torah's loftier goals, until we appreciate why we should help an enemy in certain cases.

Emotions, or the *Yetzer Hara*, are comprised of numerous feelings that may be

categorized under larger headings. For example, man's sense of self – his ego – generates many "sub-emotions": ego may be the cause for his hating someone who wronged HIM, as in, "Who does he think he is to do that to ME?!" In this case, one's self image caused him to get riled up, as stated by Ibn Ezra above. Had he cared less about another person's words, or little about his popularity, he would have let those intended insults pass with no affect on his demeanor. But the fool who hears ridicule will seek to protect his fragile ego, subsequently taking revenge on the one who slandered him. He also feels rejection, (the emotion that started this process) another expression of his need to maintain his desired self-image. In all these cases, the primary faculty of "ego" is responsible for all the trouble this poor individual suffered. So from a single faculty – ego – many emotions are heightened and acted upon, or controlled. And although praiseworthy, mere control is only one level. There is yet a higher level of existence we may achieve, where we are removed from the stress of controlling our emotions. That level is when the emotion is minimized as far as possible. How does this work?

What is the Torah's perspective on how to handle insult? The Torah lifestyle is where God always retains the focus. Man is most happy when his essence is satisfied: when his mind is engaged in perceiving new ideas

and he arrives at a new truth about how the world operates, seeing new levels of wisdom in creation. Thereby, the self decreases in focus, and ultimately becomes of little concern: "The righteous eat to satisfy their souls", "Bread with salt he eats", "I am but dust and ashes." These Torah sentiments display the true Torah perspective, where the self is maintained properly, but not excessively, and where one's self-image is accurate: man is but "ashes" compared to God and creation. He does not live as a monk, he is not morbid, but he caters to his needs and desires guided by the Torah's prescription. He strikes the balance where all of his emotions are in check, a middle ground as prescribed by Maimonides. This middle ground is where man is equidistant from both poles of a given emotional spectrum: he is not greedy, and not overly charitable; he is not callous, but not overly empathetic. Being equidistant was explained by a wise rabbi: the means by which the intelligence is the least pulled by the emotional poles. Imagine two magnets at either side of a table. In order to maintain the least pull they may exert over a steel ball bearing, we place that ball bearing exactly in the table's center. Neither magnet has any more of a pull than the other, and the ball bearing remains at the center; never overpowered by either magnet. The emotions work in an identical fashion.

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When man attains a correct perspective of himself, and his emotions fall in line after having studied reality and Torah, he does not need to control himself from lashing out when ridiculed, as the ridicule has no affect at all on his demeanor. He realizes too, that words do not alter reality! If he possesses good values before the insult, the insult cannot change that truth. God and His world humble him, enough, not to be bothered by the insult. Nor did the insult change reality. God created our psyches, and knows best how we should manage them so as to achieve happiness and fulfillment. In this example, man followed God's Torah, and found that what is prescribed by God, works perfectly, that he lives a far better, undisturbed life. Less matters stress him, and thereby, he is even afforded greater energy to pursue God's wisdom.

Now what about Tamara's question? Why is each person designed so differently from the next? Not only do we all possess these various feelings, but also, every person varies in his "degree" of emotional strength (passion) and personality traits. One man may be passionate about money, while another is passionate about ideas and wisdom, caring little for money. The difference in these two people is explained by the latter having developed his mind, and discovering a new truth: wisdom offers a real happiness, which far exceeds the joy imagined by the first man to result from wealth. Both individuals have a large quantity of energy (we all do) but they differ in what they "value" and therefore place their energies in different pursuits. I recall asking a wise Rabbi why there are so few Jews entering the Rabbinate today. "Have people changed?" I asked. He responded, "No at all. But our society has placed higher value on wealth than on wisdom. The same numbers of great minds exist, but they gravitate towards lesser pursuits." He continued, "The Ivan Boeskie's of the world could have been great Rabbis, had they realized that a life of wisdom is far greater than a life of pursuing wealth." If all men and women would be shown the truth, they would all desire it equally. The difference in what people follow has less to do with God's design, and more to do with man's ignorance.

That explains the "choices" man makes about his occupations. But why did God make people so different than one another? Why are some people delicate, others are hard or stubborn; some people like working with their hands, while others lack any such ability? Why are some people leaders and some people followers?

I recall an explanation, but not the source. Peoples' differences enable the world's continued function. Had all men and women become doctors, but not one person became a baker, shoemaker, farmer, Rabbi or a builder, we would perish physically and spiritually. God, in His wisdom, created each person with different inclinations and abilities. Some traits may even be learned, while others are innate. This enables all human needs to be addressed by those suited for the job. Our differences enabled the continued existence of mankind.

I hope this offers some glimpse into why we possess emotions, and why God made us all different.

Now, having gained this knowledge, it will benefit us all if we start to examine ourselves, make note of our individual natures, see where we are failing, admit our errors, and use the Torah as a guide to return ourselves to a life of real happiness and fulfillment. God created our psyches, and knows best how we should manage them so as to achieve happiness and fulfillment. We all possess the ability to examine life, just as King Solomon did. He realized that a life of wisdom far exceeds any other material pursuit, or lifestyle. He was the wisest man next to Moses.

Let us first study his work Ecclesiastes, understanding his teachings, and then be led by reason to alter our lifestyles to match what is true, what is our purpose, and what will offer real happiness. ■

LETTERS:

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JESSIEFISCHBEIN

“3 things a person is punished for in this world and has no world to come: idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder. And lashon hara corresponds to all of them.”

BY JESSIE FISCHBEIN

Why is lashon hara (evil speech) compared to the three most severe sins? Humans are unique creatures. Our speech is an expression of our capacity for abstract thought, but it is also a tool for our instincts.*

There is an interesting psychological phenomenon called "sublimation." About.com says it is a defense mechanism where we channel unwanted feelings into more socially acceptable forms.

We have aggressive impulses and sexual impulses. We don't act them out overtly. But they are expressed in our speech. Much of our lashon hara is a way of enjoying sexual scandals and a way of hurting other people. Of course, we would not actually engage in these violations. We are not so base. However, this statement of Chazal is urging us to see that the underlying impulses that drive lashon hara are often sublimations of these aggressive and sexual urges.

Idolatry is a particularly interesting case. By observing when I speak lashon hara, I noticed

something: I frequently have been insulted or hurt or put down in some way. I feel inferior from this interaction. So what do I do? I call up a friend and get her to agree that the person who made me feel inferior is wrong, and *I* am superior.

This is basically a framework that I invented in my own head. There are imaginary scales in my mind. If I feel bad, I have to balance the scales by getting a friend to agree with me that the person who made me feel inferior is actually inferior, and I am superior. In real life I have achieved nothing. I have not addressed the conflict with the person. I have not put things in perspective (maybe the other person was having a bad day; sometimes I behave like that, etc.). All I have done is spoken negatively about someone to someone else, they have agreed with me---and poof! I feel better. I have constructed an artificial reality inside my own mind about how people are evaluated. But it's not enough to leave it in my own mind; I must get social approval of this construct by getting a listener to

agree with me.

This has an uncanny resemblance to Avoda Zara. A major aspect of idolatry is that it is a manmade construct. Judaism's goal is for humans to relate to the world as it actually IS, how Hashem designed it.** Idolatry, on the other hand, is a human invention that seeks to control destiny. If you don't want to get sick, or you want to make money, you have to sacrifice to a deity. But who invented the deity? Humans.

Lashon Hara does not accept the divine reality that a person is superior or inferior based on values and deeds. Lashon Hara is based on the human contrivance that someone who insults ME has appointed me as inferior and the only way I can fix that is if other human beings appoint ME as superior and HIM as inferior. Idolatry is an attempt to bend reality to your wish. So is Lashon Hara.

As a side note, Lashon Hara is a particularly insidious way of dealing with interpersonal conflict. Instead of dealing directly with the person you have conflict with, you feel bad about the interaction and then you call up a friend and complain about it. Lashon Hara prevents us from figuring out how to have healthier dynamics with people who elicit feelings of inferiority in us. ■

*Bereshis 2:7 says "He blew into his nose a living soul and Man became a live spirit (nefesh chaya)." Onkelos translates the nefesh chaya as "a speaking spirit," meaning that Man was given the ability to speak. Rashi comments that animal and Man are both called nefesh chaya, but Man additionally has knowledge and speech.

**"Tamim tehiye im Hashem Elokecha (Devarim 18:13), you should be complete with Hashem your God," i.e. we should be okay with how Hashem designed the world.

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