



Parshas Mishpatim

February 12, 2021

A Taste of Torah Thrown to the Dogs

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Lashon hara (slander) is a big deal, a serious infraction whose severity is, according to the Talmud, on par with the three cardinal sins. The prohibition of *lashon hara* extends to one who listens to the malicious talk, as well, as taught in this week's parsha. The Torah warns (Mishpatim 23:1), "You shall not accept a false report." This verse is understood by our Sages as referring to accepting negative talk about another person without independent verification of its truth. Our Sages further interpret the verse as referring to the slanderer himself, as the verse can also be read, "Do not cause a false report to be accepted."

The Talmud (Makkos 23a) adds another layer of harshness to the speaker and listener of *lashon hara*. The Talmud points out that the verse preceding this prohibition states that meat of a *tereifa*, a kosher animal with physical defects that render it non-kosher, be thrown to the dogs. The juxtaposition of the ordinance to throw such meat to the dogs with the verse forbidding speaking or hearing *lashon hara*, says the Talmud, teaches that one who is guilty of speaking or accepting *lashon hara* ought to be thrown to the dogs, as well!

This lesson certainly conveys the magnitude of this sin, but some explanation is still needed to explain why "being thrown to the dogs" is a fitting punishment for *lashon hara*.

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) provides an eye-opening explanation. He notes that Rashi explains that the Torah granted *tereifa* meat to the dogs because, as the Torah tells us, they did not bark at the Jewish People as

they left Egypt during the Exodus. The dogs' silence serves as a lesson for humans. If G-d rewards dogs, who do not possess free will, for keeping their mouths shut, all the more so must a person, who does possess free will and will be rewarded for good deeds and punished for sins, keep quiet when required to do so.

The Alshich further points out that the reason a human is permitted to consume the meat of another creature is because humans have a higher spiritual status than animals. (Indeed, the Talmud makes clear that ideally, only a *tzaddik*, a righteous, refined person, should be consuming meat.) When the Torah discusses the creation of Man, it states (Bereishis 2:7) "And man became a living being." Onkelos, in his Aramaic translation of the Torah, interprets this as, "A speaking spirit." The unique trait of humanity above the animal kingdom is the power of speech.

When a human misuses the ability of speech, continues the Alshich, he falls from his perch atop the world and descends to a spiritual level below that of animals, who have not misused their G-d-given abilities. The roles are, in a sense, now reversed: The animal occupies a higher spiritual plane than the person who has spoken inappropriately. It follows, then, that the human should become the food of the animal. As noted above, the dog is the one animal that demonstrates the idea of knowing when to keep quiet, and so the it is most appropriate that a human who has been involved in *lashon hara*, a gross abuse of the capacity to speak, be thrown to the

Stories for the Soul

Payment Plan

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962), founder and dean of Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood, NJ, spent a great deal of time fundraising not just for his yeshiva, but also for other important Jewish educational causes. There are countless stories associated with his fundraising work in an era when many people were apathetic to the cause of advanced Torah education.

One time, Rabbi Kotler was on his way to visit a philanthropist and was accompanied by another individual. The two began walking, and Rabbi Kotler headed toward the subway. The man was aghast that Rabbi Kotler would take the subway, and suggested they take a taxi. Rabbi Kotler told his companion that he was welcome to take a taxi, but he always took the subway. The man again said that they should spend the small extra fee to take a taxi, adding that it was rush hour.

At this point it appeared Rabbi Kotler was willing to accede to the man's request, but he told him that he only had enough money for the subway. Realizing that Rabbi Kotler would not accept an outright gift to cover the cost of the taxi, the man offered to lend the great Torah leader the money he lacked.

Rabbi Kotler forcefully responded, "Absolutely not!" He explained that although he regularly borrowed large sums of money to cover the yeshiva's budget, he was not concerned that he would forget about repaying those loans, since they were large sums of money. For

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Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL 23RD ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION VIRTUAL EVENT ON MARCH 10

The Kollel will hold its 23rd Anniversary Celebration, *The Journey*, on Wednesday, March 10 at 7 pm. The event will feature *A Journey of a Thousand Miles: The Sperber & Aragon Story*, and *A Never Ending Journey: The History of the Kollel Movement*. org. Reserve by February 25 and receive a gift bag and a special book. For details and to reserve, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: When would the purpose a particular ingredient serves within a food determine the proper blessing for that food?

Answer: When a food item contains an ingredient from the five types of grain (wheat, barley, spelt, rye and oats) that require a blessing of *hamotzi/mezonos*.

Normally, a food that contains one of the five types of grain requires a blessing of *mezonos* to cover the entire food, even if it is a small percentage compared to other ingredients, since the five types of grain are always

considered the *ikar* (primary) item in the food. However, if the grain item included in the food is only present to serve as a thickener or a binder, then it is not significant, and the regular laws of *ikar* and *tafel* (primary and secondary) apply in determining the correct *bracha* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 208:2).

This week's question: Two identical fruit pies were made, yet one seemingly minor difference between them changes the *bracha* to be made upon them. What is this difference?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XVI

This incident angered Dovid ben Zakkai greatly, and he declared that Rabbi Saadia was no longer the Gaon of Sura, appointing someone else, Rabbi Yosef ben Yaakov in his stead. Rabbi Yosef ben Yaakov's father, Rabbi Yaakov ben Natruna'I, had also served as Gaon of Sura from around 911 until 924. Rabbi Sherira Gaon, who served as Gaon of Pumbedisa in the latter half of the 10th century, makes it clear that Rabbi Saadia was far greater.

Rabbi Saadia, for his part, declared that Dovid ben Zakkai was no longer the *Raish Galusa*, and appointed Dovid's brother Yoshia as the new Exilarch. Although the Torah scholars and much of the Jewish community supported Rabbi Saadia, Dovid ben Zakkai had the support of the Caliph, putting him in a far stronger position than his brother, and Yoshia was forced to flee. The dispute became a full-fledged war, with pamphlets written by each side against the other.

A Taste of Torah

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dogs.

Appreciating not just our power of speech, but the enormous spiritual

power and potential for destruction that is contained within it, will enable us to utilize it properly.

Stories for the Soul

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a small loan, however, he was nervous that he would forget to repay the loan.

The companion finally persuaded Rabbi Kotler to accept the loan, but only after the fellow accepted upon himself as a binding obligation that he would make sure to ask Rabbi Kotler

to repay the money in the event that he himself would forget.

This week's parsha focuses on monetary law. Apart from one's obligations toward the possessions of others is also the responsibility of integrity when dealing with such matters.

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