



Connecting this Week's Parsha with the Sefirah

The Profound Lesson the Peddler Revealed to Rabbi Yanai How to Transform the Lethal Potion of the Malach Hamaves into a Potion of Life

On the auspicious, upcoming Shabbas Kodesh, we will read from the Torah the double parsha of Sazria-Metzora, which deals with the afflictions of “tzara’as.” In parshas Sazria, we learn about the afflictions that plague a sinner (Vayikra 13, 2): **“אדם כי יהיה בעור בשרו שאת או ספחת או בהרת והיה: “בִּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ לִנְגַע צֹרַעַת, וְהוּבָא אֶל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן או אל אחד מבניו הכהנים— if a person will have on the skin of his flesh a “se’eit,” or a “sapAchas,” or a “baheret,” and it will become a “tzara’as” affliction on the skin of his flesh, he shall be brought to Aharon HaKohen or to one of his sons the kohanim. Whereas in parshas Metzora, we learn about the purification process for one affected by these afflictions (ibid. 14, 2): “זאת תהיה תורת המצורע ביום טהרתו והובא אל הכהן”— this shall be the law of the “metzora” on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the kohen.**

Our sages of blessed memory reveal to us that these lesions constitute a punishment for a person who disgraces and denigrates his fellow Jew by speaking lashon-hara about them. In the words of the Gemara (Arachin 15b): **“כל המספר לשון הרע נגעים באים עליו”— anyone who speaks lashon-hara, lesions are visited upon him.** Furthermore, he is banished from all of the camps and remains in solitary confinement, as it is written (ibid. 13, 45): **“כל ימי אשר הנגע: כד בוד ישב מחוץ למחנה מושבו”— all the days the affliction is upon him he shall remain impure; he is impure. He shall stay in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.**

It gives me great pleasure to establish a relationship between the subject of these parshas and the 49 days of the Sefirah. We will begin by examining the instructions HKB”H provided for the “metzora” on the day of his purification (ibid. 3): **“וצוה הכהן ולקח למיטהר שתי ציפורים חיות טהרות ועץ ארז: “שני תולעת ואזוב. וצוה הכהן ושחט את הציפור האחת אל כלי חרש על מים חיים, את הציפור החיה יקח אותה ואת עץ הארז ואת שני התולעת ואת האזוב, וטבל אותם ואת הציפור החיה בדם הציפור השחטה על המים החיים, והזה על המיטהר מן הצרעת שבע פעמים וטיהרו ושלח את הציפור. The kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar-wood, and a crimson tongue of wool, and hyssop. The kohen shall command; and the one bird shall be slaughtered into an earthenware vessel over spring water. The live bird, he shall take it and the cedar-wood and the crimson wool and the hyssop, and he shall dip them and the live bird into the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the spring water. Then he shall sprinkle seven times upon the person being purified from the “tzara’as”; he shall purify him, and he shall set the live bird free upon the open field.**

Rashi presents the rationale given by Chazal in the Gemara (ibid. 16b) for having the metzora bring birds for his purification: **Since afflictions come on account of lashon-hara, which is an act of verbal twittering; therefore, his purification process required birds that twitter incessantly with a chirping sound.** This prompts the commentaries to ask an obvious question: If the idea

is to infer symbolically that the “metzora” stop speaking lashon-hara, why did HKB”H command that only one bird be slaughtered, while the second bird is set free to fly over the field and continue its incessant twittering?

The Live Bird Atones for Positive Constructive Speech that the Metzora Failed to Speak

The esteemed Admor, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, zy”a, provides us with a valuable explanation and insight. He refers to a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Sazria 46b) regarding the tremendous damage caused by speaking lashon-hara. He deduces from there that likewise, if a person refrains from positive, constructive speech—such as speaking words of Torah, tefilah, performing the mitzvah of “tochachah” (rebuking a fellow Jew for wrongdoing)—he damages and blemishes the power of speech granted him by HKB”H. Hence, he deserves the same punishment as one who actually speaks lashon-hara.

This explains beautifully why one of the two birds brought by the metzora is slaughtered while the other bird is set free to fly across the field. The one that is slaughtered atones for senseless, harmful speech that should not have been spoken; thus, we symbolize the cessation of such negative speech. The one that is set free atones for neglecting to speak words of Torah and “tochachah” that should have been spoken; thus, we symbolize the obligation to use our G-d given power of speech for matters of kedushah.

With this understanding, we can suggest a very nice interpretation of the following passuk (Koheles 10, 20): “כי עוף השמים יוליך את הקול” —for a bird of the skies may carry the sound. The “bird of the skies” is the second bird brought by the metzora that remains alive; it “may carry the sound” of Torah and kedushah to us that we are obliged to speak.

The Cryptic Message Delivered by the Peddler

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, we will continue to elaborate on HKB”H’s

rationale for instructing the metzora to bring two birds for his purification. We will now introduce a fascinating Midrash (V.R. 16, 2):

“This shall be the law of the metzora.” That is what is written (Tehillim 34, 13): “Who is the man who desires life?” There was an incident involving a certain peddler who would circulate in the towns adjacent to Tzippori and would proclaim and say: “Who wants to purchase the elixir (potion) of life?” People would crowd around him. Rabbi Yanai was sitting and interpreting verses of Scripture in his study; he heard him (the peddler) announcing: “Who seeks the elixir of life?”

He (Rabbi Yanai) said to him: “Come over here and sell it to me.” He (the peddler) responded to him: “You and those like you do not need it.” He (Rabbi Yanai) pressed him, and he came to him. He (the peddler) took out sefer Tehillim for him and showed him the passuk: “Who is the man who desires life?” What is written after that? “Guard your tongue from evil . . . Turn away from evil and perform good.”

Then Rabbi Yanai said: “Shlomo also proclaims and says (Mishlei 21, 23): ‘One who guards his mouth and his tongue guards himself from troubles.’” Rabbi Yanai said: “All my life I have been reading this passuk, but I did not realize how simple (obvious) it is until this peddler came and informed (me): ‘Who is the man who desires life.’” Therefore, Moshe cautions Yisrael and tells them: “This shall be the law of the metzora,” the law of the defamer (“motzi shem ra”).

The commentaries find this story baffling; what chiddush did the peddler teach Rabbi Yannai? He most certainly understood beforehand the meaning of the passuk: “מי” —האיש החפץ חיים. Yet, he exclaimed: “All my life I have been reading this passuk, but I did not realize how simple (obvious) it is.” After all, everything the peddler informed him is stated explicitly in the passuk: “Who is the man who desires life? . . . Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.”

Le'asid La'vo HKB"H Will Deprive the "Samech-Mem" of Its Connection to Kedushah

I had a wonderful idea regarding these enigmatic words of Chazal. Rabbi Yannai realized that the proclamation of the peddler concealed an incredible segulah concerning the enhancement of life. The peddler begins his proclamation in Aramaic: "מאן בעי למזבן"; but he concludes it in lashon-hakodesh: "סם חיים"; he did not utter it entirely in Aramaic: "מאן בעי למזבן סמא דחיי". This led Rabbi Yannai to understand that the peddler was alluding to the statement in the Gemara (Yoma 72b): "אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב וזאת התורה: **לא זכה נעשית לו סם מיתה**". Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: **What is the meaning of that which is written (Devarim 4, 44): "And this is the Torah which Moshe placed ('sahm') before Bnei Yisrael?"** The word "sahm" is written with the letter "sin" and means placed; it is pronounced the same as the word "sahm" written with the letter "samech," meaning a potion (elixir) or poison. Interpreted as the latter, it implies the following: **If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of life for him. If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of death (a poison) for him.**

This then is the revelation concealed in the peddler's pronouncement: "מאן בעי למזבן סם חיים". In other words, who wants to ensure that his Torah-study serves as a "potion of life" and not, chas v'shalom, as a "poison"? Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yannai was convinced that the peddler was conveying a vital message concerning the study of Torah; hence, he beseeched the peddler to come to him and elaborate.

Eisav's Ministering Angel סמא"ל Is Sustained by the Two Letters א"ל

To understand the message conveyed by the peddler, let us refer to the following text (Bereishis 32, 25):

"ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, וירא כי לא יכול לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו, ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתנו, ויאמר אליו מה שמך, ויאמר יעקב,

ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל. וישאל יעקב ויאמר הגידה נא שמך, ויאמר למה זה תשאל לשמי, ויברך אותו שם."

And Yaakov remained alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. Upon realizing that he could not overcome him, he struck a blow to the ball of Yaakov's thighbone, and it became dislocated, as they wrestled. He said, "Release me, for dawn has broken." To which Yaakov responded: "I will only release you if you bless me." He (Yaakov's opponent) said, "No longer will your name be spoken of as Yaakov, but rather as Yisrael; for you have contended with divine beings and with men, and you have triumphed." Then Yaakov inquired, and he said, "Tell, if you please, your name." And he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

Rashi enlightens us as to the identity of Yaakov's mysterious wrestling opponent; it was none other than the guardian angel of Eisav. His source is found in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 8): **"A man wrestled with him"—this was סמא"ל, the guardian angel of Eisav.** This same fact is taught in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayishlach 170a).

So, when Yaakov asked him to tell him his name, why did he refuse by saying: **"Why is it that you ask my name?"** According to Rashi, based on a teaching in the Midrash, the malach was informing Yaakov that malachim do not have fixed names; rather, their names change based on the missions they are assigned. This, too, however, requires further explanation. For, we have just learned that the name of Yaakov's heavenly adversary, the guardian angel of Eisav, is סמא"ל, which seems to be its permanent name.

We find a marvelous explanation in the Imrei Yosef (Vayishlach). It is based on the explanation of the Shela hakadosh (Chayei Sarah) that in the name סמא"ל—who is also the yetzer hara—the first two letters **"samech-mem"** stem from the realm of tumah, whereas the last two letters **"aleph-lamed"** stem from the realm of kedushah. He asserts that the desired goal is to abolish the sustenance of the "samech-mem" from the letters "aleph-lamed" through

the service of Hashem. Without sustenance from the realm of kedushah, the source of evil will totally cease to exist. This is the implication of Chazal's statement (Succah 52a): "לעתיד לבא מביאו הקב"ה ליצר הרע ושוחטו בפני הצדיקים ובפני הרשעים—le'asid la'vo (in the anticipated future; in the days to come), **HKB"H will bring the yetzer hara and slaughter it in the presence of the righteous and in the presence of the wicked.** Without the ability to sustain itself from the realm of kedushah, the "samech-mem" will wither like a lifeless corpse.

Accordingly, the Imrei Yosef asserts that when Eisav's guardian angel said: **"Release me, for dawn has broken,"** Yaakov thought that the time of the geulah—analogous to dawn and the break of day—had arrived. At that time, HKB"H will remove the letters א"ל from its name leaving only the letters מ"ם. This is why Yaakov asked to know his name; he wanted to confirm that the geulah had actually arrived by verifying that HKB"H had confiscated the letters **"aleph-lamed"** from him.

To which the malach replied: **"Why is it that you ask my name?"** The malach hinted to Yaakov that the end of days had not yet arrived; its name was still סמא"ל, indicating that it was still being sustained by the letters **"aleph-lamed."** Nevertheless, Eisav's guardian angel blessed Yaakov and conceded the Berachos to him, since its evil power had been weakened temporarily. This concludes his sacred insight.

The Purpose of Serving Hashem Is to Transform the Letters מ"ם into the Letters ח"י

Apropos this matter, we find a tremendous chiddush in the sacred writings of the Panim Yafos (Vayishlach). He writes that the goal of our avodah is to transform Eisav's ministering angel, the yetzer hara, into a force for good, a yetzer tov. This concurs with the exposition in the Mishnah (Berachos 54a): "ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך וגו', בכל לבבך בשני" **"you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart . . ."**—**"with all your heart" means with both of your yetzers, with the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara.** This crucial feat is accomplished by

transforming the two letters מ"ם in the name סמא"ל into letters associated with kedushah.

Now, we are familiar with the letter exchange system of א"ת ב"ש. The first letter of the aleph-Beis, **"aleph,"** is replaced with the last letter of the aleph-Beis, **"tav";** the second letter, **"beit,"** is replaced with the second to last letter, **"shin";** and so on and so forth. According to this system, the letters מ"ם would be replaced by the letters ח"י. As a result, instead of the letters סמא"ל, we will have the letters א"ל ח"י—alluding to the fact that it has been transformed into a force of kedushah with which to serve HKB"H, Who is א"ל ח"י—the **living, eternal G-d.**

In this manner, the Panim Yafos, interprets the statement in the Gemara: **"If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of life for him."** In other words, based on the exchange system above, the letters מ"ם are replaced by the letters ח"י, indicating that the yetzer has been transformed into a force of kedushah and functions as a ס"ם חיים, **an elixir of life.** Conversely, **"if one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion of death for him,"** since the letters מ"ם remain in their original form constituting a **poison.** This coincides with the teaching in the Gemara (B.B. 16a): **הוא" שטן, הוא יצר הרע, הוא מלאך המות" he is the Satan; he is the yetzer hara; he is the Malach-Hamaves.**

We find a wonderful addendum in the sacred writings of the Bnei Yissaschar (Tishrei 6, 15). He also asserts that it is our sacred duty to transform the name of the yetzer סמא"ל into the letters א"ל ח"י. Accordingly, this is why we count specifically **49** days during the Sefiras HaOmer. Since the numerical value of the letters א"ל ח"י is **49,** it symbolizes that during this period, we are supposed to transform the name סמא"ל into א"ל ח"י.

Torah Is the Spice that Transforms the Yetzer into a Force for Good

As a loyal servant in the service of his master, I would like to embellish this thought by establishing a connection between the **49** days of the Sefirah and the avodah of transforming the name of the yetzer סמא"ל into א"ל ח"י. Now,

we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) that HKB”H said to Yisrael: **”בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תכלין”**—**My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote** (literally, a spice). The Orach L’Chaim (Bereishis) presents the following question in the name of the holy Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritsch, zy”a: How can we say that the Torah is a spice that transforms the yetzer hara? In general, a spice improves the taste and quality of a dish; yet, here, it is being used to eliminate and totally transform the yetzer hara.

He explains that indeed the goal of our avodah is to transform the yetzer hara into a yetzer tov by also serving Hashem in mundane matters of Olam HaZeh, in keeping with the exposition above: **”You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart”**—with both of your yetzers, with the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara. However, so long as the yetzer hara has not been transformed into a force for good, it must be driven away and deflected; this is accomplished by means of Torah-study.

This explains very nicely the assertion of the Bnei Yissaschar that the 49 days of the Sefirah allude to the fact that it is our duty to transform the yetzer into א”ל ח”י, whose numerical value equals 49. Since the days of the Sefirah are a preparation for receiving the Torah on Chag HaShavuot, we allude to the fact that studying the Torah is the spice and antidote necessary for combatting and ultimately transforming the yetzer into א”ל ח”י.

Terminating the Sustenance of the Yetzer HaRa from the Name א”ל ח”י

Continuing along this enlightening path, we will proceed to explain the cryptic message concealed in the announcement of the wandering peddler: **”מאן בעי למזבן סם חיים”**. He intended to reveal how to transform the letters ס”מ—the poison of the yetzer hara—into the letters ח”י—an elixir for life, **”chayim.”** Thus, the Malach Hamaves would be transformed into a Malach HaChaim, who would advocate on behalf of Yisrael.

Therefore, when Rabbi Yannai heard the peddler’s announcement and grasped his profound intent, he urged the peddler to come to him. He wanted the peddler to reveal to him how to transform the ס”מ of the yetzer into a ח”י. As we learned above, the peddler proceeded by taking out a sefer Tehillim and showing Rabbi Yannai the passuk: **”מי האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים לראות טוב, נצור לשונך מרע ושפתוך מדבר מרמה, סור מרע ועשה טוב.”**

He pointed out that indeed the Torah possesses the power to transform the yetzer hara and the Malach Hamaves into a yetzer tov and Malach HaChaim. There is a prerequisite, however; one must take care not to befoul one’s mouth with lashon-hara and foolish, pointless speech, of which it says (Tehillim 50, 16): **”ולרשע אמור אלקים מה לך לספר חוקי ותשא בריתי”**—**but to the wicked, G-d said, “What benefit is it to you to recount My decrees and to bear My covenant upon your lips?”** In other words, one must study Torah with a pure mouth; only then is it beneficial and able to transform the ס”מ into a ח”י.

This then is the message conveyed by David HaMelech: **”מי האיש החפץ חיים אוהב ימים לראות טוב”**—**who is the man who desires life?** Who wants to transform the two letters ס”מ of the Malach Hamaves into the letters ח”י associated with kedushah through the study of Torah, which is described as **”tov”** [as they taught (Berachos 5a): **”אין טוב”**—**there is no “tov” other than Torah.**]; and by so doing, use the Torah as a spice to transform the yetzer hara into a yetzer **”tov”**?

The advice suggested by David HaMelech is: **”נצור לשונך מרע ושפתוך מדבר מרמה”**—do not defile the instruments of speech with which you study Torah. Thus: **”סור מרע”**—you will be able to rid yourself of the yetzer hara, who represents a ס”מ—a death potion. Instead: **”ועשה טוב”**—transform it into a yetzer **”tov”** by transforming the letters ס”מ into the letters ח”י. Furthermore, David HaMelech says: **”בקש שלום ורדפהו”**—try to establish peace between the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara, so that instead of fighting

with one another, the yetzer hara will join forces with the yetzer tov to be a good, positive influence.

We now have cause to rejoice. For, we can comprehend why Rabbi Yannai was so exuberant and moved that he exclaimed: **“All my life I have been reading this passuk, but I did not realize how simple it is until this peddler came and informed (me): ‘Who is the man who desires life.’”** The peddler revealed to him David HaMelech’s deeper message. Not only is it important to refrain from speaking lashon-hara, but by safeguarding the kedushah of one’s

mouth, one’s Torah-study is able to transform the **death potion** of the yetzer hara into a **life-giving elixir**.

With this understanding, it gives me great pleasure to suggest a rationale for HKB”H commanding the metzora to bring two birds for his purification. The first one was slaughtered to symbolically eliminate the yetzer hara that promotes foolish, pointless speech and lashon-hara. The second one is set free to fly over the open field symbolizing the process of transforming the yetzer hara into a yetzer tov to promote proper, sanctified speech such as divrei-Torah.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

<p>Yoselovsky Family - לעילוי נשמת his father Reb Shabsy Ben Yitzchok Isaac ע"ה</p>	<p>Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת their dear mother Lea bat Virgini ע"ה</p>	<p>Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה</p>
---	---	--

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com