

Parashat Tazria

Time to Clean Up Our Speech

Choosing Words of Kindness and Emunah over 'Junk-Speech'

As we enter the 'transition stage' of our Pesach cleaning labor, let us not forget to clean out our speech. "Pesach" – *Peh- Sach* means 'the mouth speaks' and in order to come to the Seder with rectified speech of emunah, we need to first clean out all the junk. 'Junk-speech' includes all kinds of negativity and judgment in both spoken and written words, such as Facebook, What's App and Twitter. It is not coincidental that we read *Parashot Tazria* and *Metozra* concerning the spiritual disease that affected gossipers and slanderers, during the month of Nissan, which is all about rectifying our speech. It is through elevating our power of speech that we best express and actualize our human potential. I recall reading a story by Agnon that touched me. I think it was called *Tehila*. The main thing I remember from the story is the notion that we all have a certain amount of words allotted to us in our lifetime. When we have used up our words, our time is up. This is to remind us how precious our words are and how we must use them wisely. I believe that when we speak positive words of kindness and emunah we may tap into an unlimited store of bonus words which can prolong our lives.

Generating Positivity

I pray that one day my emuna will be so great that I will never ever have to complain- even if people don't keep their promise, don't take responsibility, don't include me in their Pesach Seder, speak disrespectfully or make unreasonable demands on me and my time. I know that there are ways to respond positively to every difficulty life deals out and remain assertive about what needs to be done in each situation. There are times when we need to pass judgments and give constructive criticism. Then, especially, is it crucial to focus on the good and increase the love in our heart for the person we need to rebuke. We learn the importance of generating positivity and love in our heart when declaring "impure" from this week's *parasha*. Even if an expert had confirmed that a person has *tzara'at*, he would not actually be ritually impure until a Kohen utters the words, "You are impure." Thus, the authority to diagnose someone with the spiritual skin-disease of *tzara'at* fell solely on the Kohen. This idea is repeated several times in our *parasha*, for example:

ספר ויקרא פרק יג

(ב) אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אוֹ סִפְחַת אוֹ בַהֲרַת וְהָיָה בְעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרַעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים: (ג) וַרְאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר הַבָּשָׂר... וַרְאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ:
 "When a man shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, or a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his flesh the plague of *tzara'at*, then he shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons the Kohanim. The Kohen shall look at the plague in the skin of the flesh... and the Kohen shall look at him, and pronounce him impure" (*Vayikra* 13:2-3).

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(ח) וַרְאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה פְּשִׁטָּה הַמְסֻפַּחַת בְּעוֹר וְטָמֵאוּ הַכֹּהֵן צָרַעַת הוּא:
 "The Kohen shall look, and, behold, if the scab be spread in the skin, then the Kohen shall pronounce him impure: it is *tzara'at*" (*Vayikra* 13:8).

Pronouncing Impurity with Compassion

Why is the Kohen, rather than the professional physician selected to make the diagnosis that renders the patient impure? Why does the Torah emphasize this fact by repeating it several times? The Kohen is considered a man of kindness and love. Today, all that remains of the service performed by the Kohanim is to bless Israel with love, on Shabbat and holidays (in Israel in the morning prayers daily) as they express in the blessing- prayer that precedes their blessings: "Blessed are You G-d... Who has commanded us to bless your nation with love." Feelings of love and brotherhood are so essential to the Kohen and his blessings, that failure to infuse the Kohanim blessings with genuine goodwill may affect the Kohen's health, G-d forbid! (The Alter Rebbe, Code of Jewish Law, *Ohr Hachaim*, chapter 128:19). Moshe calls the Kohen "a man of kindness" (*Devarim* 33:8) Heartfelt kindness- not just acts of kindness- but actual feelings of love, were central to the personality of the Kohen. The ability to pronounce a fellow-Jew impure was entrusted to the Kohen precisely because of his heightened sense of love and benevolence towards others. Who could possibly be more suited to utter the crushing verdict of "You are impure" than these men of compassion? Who is better to administer a sentence of solitary confinement? (Rabbi Mendel Kamenson, *The Rules of Judgment and Constructive Criticism*).

Prepare for Pesach with Rectified Speech of Love

It is not just what we say- the selection of our words- but the feelings behind them that count most. Even when people have justified criticism of others, if not given over with love, it will only cause dissention and make people defensive. Pesach is not only about rectified speech. Pesach is also about love. It was with the greatest love that Hashem took us out of Egypt even when we were absolutely un-worthy. Therefore, on Pesach we read *Song of Songs* about the love between Hashem and Israel. So, as we clean out our Pesach cabinets, let us remember to clean out the *chametz* of negativity, resentment, disappointment and anger. Let us replace this *chametz* with the matzah of *emunah*, patience, tolerance, benevolence and compassion. May we be able to integrate these elevated character-traits to the extent that they will be infused in the choice of each and every one of our words!