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WORDS MATTER

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Parashat Tazria deals predominantly with the concept of tzara'at, regarded by the Sages as divine retribution for a person who engages in lashon hara (derogatory speech). As is elaborated upon in this week's parasha, those guilty of this offence were to be singled out and ostracised, with the manifestation of tzara'at increasing in prominence as it spread from the offender's home, onto their clothing, and finally onto their skin.

In the Torah, it is Miriam who most notably incurs this punishment. Her affliction with tzara'at follows her decision to speak disparagingly about Moshe (Bamidbar 12:1), and the inclusion of this episode as one of the Six Remembrances traditionally recited after Shacharit is indicative of the gravity of the sin of lashon hara.

Indeed, the potential dangers of lashon hara are laid brutally bare when considering the story of Yosef, who would bring "evil reports" about his brothers to their father Yaakov (Bereishit 37:2). In so doing, Yosef may have incurred the enmity of his brothers who, in turn, eventually sell him as a slave, thus sealing the fate of the Israelite nation for centuries. It's worth noting that the same word for Yosef's report ("diba") is used in the context of the spies, whose "evil report" concerning the Land of Canaan (Bamidbar 13:32) delayed entry into the land by almost forty years and condemned an entire generation to die in the wilderness. To be sure, the misuse of speech had severe ramifications for the trajectory of the fledgling Jewish nation.

And yet, our heritage is simultaneously replete with the notion that words have the power to effect positive change: Esther is roused into action by Mordechai's words of encouragement – "...who knows if it was for such a time as this that you attained the royal position...!" (Esther 4:14) – whilst Chana's heartfelt prayer for a child – granted in her giving birth to the prophet Shmuel – ultimately gives rise to the

establishment of Jewish monarchy. Indeed, according to the Targum, our ability to speak is what renders humanity the apogee of creation (Bereishit 2:7). Most significantly, the Torah describes how G-d created the universe in six utterances. Evidently, words have the potential to be a remarkable force for good.

Similarly, we may explore the positive power of words in a more universal context. In his insightful book *The Culture Code*, organisational psychologist Daniel Coyle highlights the importance of language in cultivating a sense of purpose in teams. He points out how, for example, navy pilots returning to aircraft carriers do not 'land' but 'are recovered'; how the design and consulting firm IDEO doesn't have 'project managers' – it has 'design community leaders'; and how teams at Pixar do not offer 'notes' on early versions of films – they 'plus' them. As Coyle notes, "These might seem like small semantic differences, but they matter because they continually highlight the cooperative, interconnected nature of the work and reinforce the group's shared identity."

To sum up, words matter. They make an impact. Judaism does not put store by the age-old adage that 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.' Words can certainly hurt, and they have done so in every epoch. (In the age of social media, we see the negative effects of language most acutely in the context of cyberbullying. Pew Research Centre found that 59% of US teens had been bullied or harassed online at some point in their lives.) Somewhat paradoxically then, free speech has a heavy price. And the Sages were aware of this, shockingly paralleling the severity of lashon hara with all three cardinal sins combined (Arachin 15b). It seems, then, that the hit Broadway musical *Dear Evan Hansen* is wrong to include a song titled 'Words Fail' towards the end of the show. Words do not 'fail'; they do not fall short. They go a very long way indeed.

**MAX WAS A MADRICH ON H-COURSE MACHANE
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SHABBAT TIMES

London	In 19:18 Out 20:27	Oxford	In 19:20 Out 20:32	Leeds	In 19:23 Out 20:38
Manchester	In 19:29 Out 20:40	Bristol	In 19:25 Out 20:37	Liverpool	In 19:29 Out 20:43
Cambridge	In 19:15 Out 20:28	Birmingham	In 19:23 Out 20:36	Jerusalem	In 18:23 Out 19:36
Stevenage	In 19:16 Out 20:28				

PSYCHOLOGY AND TORAH WITH ELAD ESHEL



The Torah sections dedicated to the phenomenon of tzara'at are almost unparalleled in the rest of the Chumash on account of their extreme detail and complexity. The bulk of this and next weeks' parashiot are the descriptions of the different afflictions,

their appearance, and the descriptions of what makes them tamei or tahor. A further uniqueness is the actual tahara process that the Torah requires in the case of tzara'at – more involved than any other instance of tuma that we find anywhere in the Torah – even more so than that of tumat meit (contact with the dead).

To try and understand this anomaly, we must first take a brief look at the concept that underlies the whole phenomenon of tzara'at, as well as many other mitzvot brought in Sefer Vayikra. What is tuma?

One famous approach is brought by the Kuzari. He understands that tuma is contracted when one comes into contact with death, or connected to loss of life. Obviously tumat meit fits well with this understanding, but also the tuma of a woman who is nidda – being the loss of the potential for new life. So too for a zav and zava, where the infection is found in the reproductive organs.

But if we are dealing with the more severe sources of tuma in these parashiot, how come the tuma that comes from a dead body – the ultimate source of tuma (avi avot hatuma) – is nowhere to be found?

As I mentioned earlier, all of the categories of tuma discussed in this week's parasha and the next have an intense process of returning to a state of tahara. Specifically, the kinds of tuma listed in these parashiot are those that required the bringing of a korban as part of their tahara process. What does this mean? Despite the fact that in other cases of tuma, all a person needs to do is to dip in a mikveh, and in some cases wait a certain period of time, if a metzora, yoledet and zav/a were to do only this, they would still be considered 'mechusarei kapara' – meaning lacking in repentance/cleansing. But still, why does tumat meit not appear here – why is there no need for them to bring a korban?

Sigman Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, developed a theory after encountering many patients who were intent on causing themselves harm, who were completely neglectful of themselves and others, and had no interest

whatsoever in treatment and in improving their situation. He concluded that, whilst we have a drive for life, to survive at all costs – we also have a desire for death, ruin, and chaos – even of ourselves. In these patients that he met, life events had tipped the scales between these two natural pulls, and they had sunk into the depth of self loathing, caring not for the continuation of even their own existence.

This understanding can help to enlighten the common denominator between the tuma categories listed in these parashiot, to the exclusion of all others, and connect it to the explanation brought above to understand what tumah is all about – death. How does this help to answer our question? When it comes to a tumat meit, yes there is an intense interaction with the dead body – you are in its presence and you must handle it in order to bring it to burial. But the line between life and death is very clear, stark even. There is no doubt where the realm of life ends and the domain of death begins.

However, it is specifically those sources of tuma which come from the body – which we explained before as having an element of death to them – the line between what is part of the drive for life and what is part of the drive for death become blurred and confused. When the element of death comes from the individual themselves, there is an extra need to purify and cleanse the body which has become caught up in these negative, darker elements of the human condition. As we know, these physical appearances were mere symptoms of the spiritual state of the individual.

Often one of the goals of therapy is to perform this analysis on a person's behaviours – which derive from our inherent drive for life and growth; and which stem from our innate ability to harm ourselves and for chaos. This is a difficult process – but it is essential that we are able to steer ourselves away from those forces within us that pull us towards negative, self-destructive behaviours. The Torah identifies the need to take a firm stance on this matter – for though the effort is great, it is the only way that kedusha is able to reside within us.

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SNAPSHOT FROM THE CHOVERET

The Choveret is the educational handbook that Bnei Akiva UK madrichim use to create their activities and discussions in Sviva each week. This week, it looks at the prohibition of lashon hara.

This first thing that we can learn from the prohibition against speaking and listening to Lashon Hara is the power of speech. All social interaction is built on speech. Non-verbal or (where appropriate) physical communication can only ever be supplements to the verbal relationships we have with each other. This is true of our relationships with our parents, our friends, and our Chanichim, but also with complete strangers. Consider, for example, the power of a political speech to rouse a whole nation to violence or peacefulness.

Through the way we speak we can become truly "living" or, alternatively, "dead," and cause the same for others. The Talmud (Arachin 15b) explains that negative speech is worse than a sword – as it kills many people at once and even over great distances.



In fact this is one of the pieces of imagery we see in Parashat Metzora (spoiler for next week). Our 21st century minds may find the purification process of the metzora unsettling.

"Take two live birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. Have one bird killed in an earthen vessel over running water. Dip the remaining items (including the other live bird) in the blood of the first bird. Sprinkle the mixture on the one being purified, then let the live bird go free." (14:4-7)

The live bird, after being dipped in the blood of the slaughtered bird, is set free over the open field—it flies away thinking it is free, while in truth, it is forever entangled with the slaughtered bird and carries its blood on itself. So too is a person who casually utters unkind words about another person causing untold damage to that other person, to themselves, and to the one who listens to their gossip. They go off having forgotten the incident without realizing that they have entangled themselves with the subject of their talebearing.

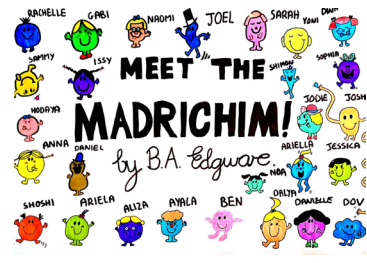
THE WEEK IN PICTURES



The Kinloss Sviva Tzevet make the most of a photo opportunity before their Shabbat Ha'irgun



Roshot Ella and Adina prep some food for the Kinloss Shabbat Ha'irgun



What beautiful artwork by the Edgware Sviva Tzevet!



Chanichim enjoy a Motzei Shabbat Bowling spree at Edware Shabbat Ha'irgun



The Bushey Sviva Tzevet look pleased with themselves at the end of their Shabbat Ha'irgun



The Lilmod Ul'mamed participants enjoy a session with Rebbetzen Lauren Levin

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- **Lishmah** is now open to **all Bogrot and Sixth-Formers** and will be back after Pesach!
- Calling all male Bogrim! Join **Rav Joel** for a **Va'ad** on Tuesday evenings at 10:15!
- **London Student Bet Midrash** is taking place weekly on **Thursday evenings** for high school and university students. For more info about London or Birmingham SBM email chinuch@bauk.org
- **Tafkid applications** are now open for **Summer Machane!**
Junior Tafkidim: bauk.org/junior-tafkid
Senior Tafkidim: bauk.org/senior-tafkid
- Are you in **Shevet Seenai**? Sign up for the **Shevet Seenai Shabbaton** taking place **next week**: bauk.org/seenai-shabbaton
- We hope all of our Bogrim have a Shabbat Shalom at **Shabbat Bogrim** this week!
- Keep an eye out for **exciting Bnei Akiva updates** for all ages!
- Be sure to like our **Facebook page (Bnei Akiva UK)** and follow our **Instagram (bneiakivauk)** to get regular updates with what is going on in the Tnuva.
- Visit **bauk.org/feedback** for contact details for all Mazkirut members and to leave any general feedback!

This week's edition of Shabbat Lashem is sponsored by Waffle Me Up



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