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פרשת תזריע

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Silence is Golden

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Part I. Leperous Silence

He's Tamei, Tamei, Tamei

כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא, טָמֵא הוּא, בְּרֵד יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבוֹ — All the days that the tzara'as is upon the person he shall be tamei; tamei he should be. He should dwell alone; outside the camp should be his place of residence" (13:46). When reading this *posuk*, we are immediately struck by the repetition of the *tamei* status of the *metzora*, "He shall be tamei; tamei he shall be," and that requires an explanation.

So we'll say as follows: The root "tum" denotes something that is "closed off." That's what the word *tumah* means, and that is the principle underlying all the laws of *tumah*. Wherever we find *tumah*, we must understand that it is a decree of Hashem to teach us what should be avoided and shunned.

So we read the *possuk* as follows: “All the days that the *tzara’as* is upon the person, he shall be ritually unclean.” The first mention of “*tamei*” declares his status. He is an *av hatumah*. That’s information we have to know. It’s a technicality the Torah is teaching us, the basic law that this man is *tamei* and that he makes anything that comes in contact with him *tamei*. But the second “*tamei*” in the *possuk* is giving us the reason for the *tumah* being imposed on him, as if to say: “He shall be *tamei*, because Hashem desires that he should be *closed off* from society.” “He is *tamei*,” because “*tamei* – shunned and avoided – he should be.”

The Lonely Seder Night

Now, that’s something we have to study. Because we’re talking here about a *frum* Jew. He could be a father, a husband, a loyal servant of Hashem who puts on *tefillin* and *davens* three times a day with a *minyán*. His home is a kosher home and his children are all *frum* boys and girls. He’s one of us! And yet, one morning he wakes up with *tzara’as*; and now he must take leave of his family and friends and make his way beyond the walls of the city to live alone. This friend of ours, a fellow Jew, is now *tamei*; he’s closed off from the rest of mankind. “*Badad yeishev* – He shall stay in isolation,” meaning that even other *tamei’im* must avoid his company (Rashi, *ibid.*).

So our fellow Jew is now sitting alone outside of the walls of his city, and there he will remain until the *tzara’as* heals. He’ll miss the Shabbos *seudos* with his family. He might even have to spend the Seder night all alone!

And it’s no accident of fate here. The Rambam says that *tzara’as* is not a natural form of leprosy; it’s a miraculous phenomenon. “*Tzara’as* is one of the miracles that Hashem provides to His nation” (Moreh Nevuchim 3:47) and that’s why a *goy* can’t become *tamei* with *tzara’as* (Nega’im 3:1).

Hashem miraculously sends *tzara’as* upon a Jew, and now he has to be shunned. And it’s not because of contagion, or merely because he can be *metamei* others – it’s because Hashem wants him to be “closed off” from other people. Hashem wants him to leave the *machaneh*, so he should be separated from society and dwell alone.

Looks Can Be Deceiving

And that’s because this man is actually a dangerous man; he may appear to be very *frum*, but the Gemara (Eirechin 15b) says: “כל המספר”

לְשׁוֹן הָרַע נִגְעִים בָּאִים עָלָיו – One who speaks wrong words, who uses his mouth in the wrong way, is stricken by leprosy.” And so we understand that this man misused the gift of people’s company; when he was healthy, he sat around with his friends and wagged his tongue. And that doesn’t mean only that he ridiculed and belittled other people; even just talking *devarim beteilim* is misusing the tongue.

And so, in the great days of *nevuah*, the *nega* of *tzara’as* declared to this man the Word of Hashem: “He shall be *tamei*, and he should be closed off from people and avoided.” He will dwell alone where he won’t have anyone with whom to speak, and now he will study how a person is to use his tongue, and he will understand that the proper way to use a tongue is primarily *by not using it*.

Producing Silence

The Rambam gives us an insight into this: “לְעוֹלָם יִרְבֶּה אָדָם בְּשִׁתִּיקָה” – A person should always *produce* a great deal of silence” (Rambam, Hilchos Dei’os 2:4). You hear that? You have to produce silence as much as you can. Imagine you’re producing goods for a certain purpose. Let’s say you’re manufacturing toothbrushes, or you’re a tailor and you’re sewing suits. Whatever it is, you’re producing. So you have to keep *cheshbon*: “How many goods did I produce today?” “Did I do better today than yesterday?” “What could I do differently in the factory tomorrow to produce more toothbrushes?” So it’s the same with silence. A man should always be *producing* silence in this world. You have to think about that! “How much silence did I *produce* today?”

And it’s considered a service of Hashem: “לָךְ הוֹמִיָּה תְהִלָּה” – To you, Hashem, silence is praise” (Tehillim 65:2). That’s an interesting idea, because we always thought that the *Hallelukahs* and the *brachos* are praise. *Ashrei*, *Hodu*, and *Modim* – that’s how we praise Hashem. And now we’re being told that *keeping quiet* is the real way to praise Hashem; to produce silence is actually a career of praising Hashem. And that needs a good explanation.

A Lesson from the Wise Man

And so, who better to turn to than the *chacham mikol adam*. Shlomo Hamelech tells us in Koheles (5:1): “אַל תִּבְהַל עַל פִּיךָ – Don’t be in a hurry to express yourself; וְלִבְךָ אַל יִמְהַר לְהוֹצִיא רֶבֶר לְפָנֶי ה’ – and your heart, your mind, shouldn’t be in a hurry to say something in the Presence of Hashem.” When you’re sitting at the table with your family, or your

friends, Hashem is present. So keep quiet! “כִּי אֱלֹקִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ – Hashem is in the heavens and you’re down below on the earth; עַל כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים – therefore, your words should be few.” Oh, now something else comes into the picture – Elokim is in the picture! Elokim is in Shomayim, above you, looking at you. And you’re down on this earth. That’s why you shouldn’t talk so much.

If a man opens up his mouth and words flow out without restraint, so it means he doesn’t feel like he’s in anybody’s presence! Let’s say you were standing in the presence of the mayor, or in front of the President of the United States. He’s not such an important person today, but still you wouldn’t talk much in his presence. You certainly wouldn’t be shooting off your mouth.

In the Presence of a Gadol Hador

Now, אִלּוּ הִבְדַּלְתָּ אִתְּךָ הַבְּדִלּוֹת, if you are talking with the *gadol hador*, with, let’s say, Rav Shach, or Rav Moshe Feinstein, whoever is the *Gadol Hador*, would you talk a lot? If you have any sense, you won’t say a word! Let’s say you meet the Sigheter Rav, or you’re standing in front of the Satmerer Rav, and somebody comes over to you and shouts, “Hey, Chaim! What time is it?” Would you say, “It’s three o’clock”? No, you would keep quiet; you keep your mouth shut; you’re standing in front of your *rebbe!* Let *him* talk; you keep quiet. “הַחֵם אֵינוֹ מְדַבֵּר בְּפָנַי גְּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ – Someone with *chochmah* doesn’t open his mouth when he’s standing in front of somebody bigger than him” (Avos 5:7).

So the fact that you keep your mouth closed indicates that you realize that you’re standing in the Presence of Hashem. It’s a demonstration that you possess a sensory perception of the closeness of Hashem. Just like you wouldn’t talk in the presence of somebody important, you don’t open your mouth in the presence of *Elokim baShomayim*. You keep quiet, at least as quiet as you would be in front of the President. At least that!

The Peculiar Man of Our Parshah

So now we can understand why this *frum* man is shunned by Hashem, sent out to live in solitude. If he’s hasty with his words, if he doesn’t think before he speaks, so he needs to be sent out where he will have time to think about this great principle of *Elokim baShomayim*. The *metzora* had to cover his mouth – did you know that? It’s an open *possuk*: וְעַל שֹׁפָם יַעֲטֶה means that he had to wear his cloak in a certain

way so it covered his mouth. What for? Because he was proclaiming to the world this lesson! Part of his *kaparah* was to walk around dressed in this peculiar way; and he had to make a lot of noise, too: “טָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא” – wherever he went, he had to proclaim to everyone that he’s *tamei*.

So here’s a man with his cloak covering half his face, all the way over his mouth, and in his muffled voice he’s crying out: “I’m *tamei*, I’m *tamei*!” It was a strange sight, and anyone who saw the *metzora* took his condition to heart and learned that he’d better get busy covering up his own mouth before the *nega* struck *him*. And so we gained a lot by seeing the *metzora* dressed this way.

A Guide to Gaining Emunah

We’re learning that no matter how *frum* a person is, he has to have *hargashah*, *emunah chushis*, that he’s standing in front of Hashem, and that should motivate him not talk. What does that mean? Suppose you’re an ordinary Jew who never worked on these concepts; you don’t actually feel the Presence of Hashem. But you’d like to do it; you aspire to become a *ma’amin*. Now, of course you won’t admit that you’re not a *ma’amin*, but at least you’ll admit that you don’t feel the Presence of Hashem all the time. And so, each time you wish to open your mouth, you remind yourself: “כִּי אֱלוֹקִים בְּשָׁמַיִם וְאַתָּה עַל הָאָרֶץ עַל כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרֶיךָ מְעַטִּים” – *Hashem is listening and therefore your words should be few*” – little by little, you instill in your *neshamah* an awareness of this tremendous principle, and you thereby acquire *yiras Hashem*.

When someone approaches you and makes a remark, don’t rush to respond. You’d like to talk; you have a wisecrack or a rejoinder; you want to say something. Instead, you should say to yourself, “No, I won’t say it because I’m standing before Hashem.” Sometimes you don’t have to answer at all. If someone says something to you, do you have to say something back? Let’s say a cow says moo, do you have to moo back? A dog barks as you pass by – you have to bark back? So if someone speaks to you, unless it’s necessary, don’t say anything. Just listen. Who says you always have to answer?

And suppose you must answer; sometimes you *must* say something, so just make sure to count your words. You know, some people are like a faucet; they start pouring out everything they have inside. All the emptiness they have in their minds comes gushing out. That means they’re being *masiach da’as* from Hashem. A person must always keep in

mind that Hashem is listening. Keeping your mouth closed, and keeping your words few when you do have to speak, shows that you have *emunah* that Hashem is always listening. If you open your mouth and talk without restraint, it means you think you're a free bird. It means that you have no *emunah*, because belief in Hashem requires that we keep quiet. He's standing right here, after all, and He's listening.

Part II. Professional Silence

Extracting Honey and Gems

Now, in order to appreciate more this career of *yiras Shamayim*, we have to see how the Gemara in Chullin (89a) darshens a *possuk*. As a matter of fact, the following Gemara was once used by the Alter of Slabodka, *zichrono livrachah*, as an illustration of how to appreciate every word of a *ma'amar Chazal*. The Alter thought about every word the Chachamim said, and he sucked as much honey as he could from each *ma'amar*. The Gemara quotes the following *possuk*: “הָאֱמָנִים אֵלִים צְדִיקִים – תְּדַבְּרוּן – *The truth is, silence is appropriate; only speak righteous words*” (Tehillim 58:2). That's the *poshut peshat*, but Chazal revealed some hidden gems in that *possuk*.

First, I'll say the words of the Gemara and then I'll tell you how the Alter explained them: “מָה אֲמָנִים, מָה אֲמָנִיתוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה – What is a man's profession in this world?” From the word אֲמָנִים comes *umnus*, profession. And the Gemara asks a question: What's your job here in Olam Hazeh? And it says that the next word in the *possuk*, אֵלִים, that's the answer: “יַעֲשֶׂה עֵצְמוֹ כְּאֵלִים – Make yourself as if you were a mute, as if you couldn't speak.” So we read the *possuk* like this: אֲמָנִים, what's your *umnus*, your profession? אֵלִים, to be a mute. That's your business in this world.

Baruch Hashem for Accountants

The first thing we see is that man has a *profession* in this world. A “profession” means it's not just a hobby to keep silent, not just a good thing, an added perfection. No, silence is *your business* in this world – that's what you came into this world for. Now, at first glance that's hard to understand, because how could everyone have the same profession? If everyone was a shoemaker, so we'd all have comfortable shoes, but we'd have to tailor our own pants. Without good Jewish accountants,

we'd be paying a lot of extra money to Uncle Sam. So everything is important, but what we're learning now is that whatever you're doing in your life, that's only your second job, a side business; you have to pay the bills, after all. But your *main* business in this world is to be *k'ileim*, to keep your mouth closed.

Now, the Alter, *zichrono livrachah*, emphasized that an *umnus* is not something that you just pick up and do; you have to be trained for a profession. You have to take courses to learn the skill of silence, just like you would for any other serious profession. If you want to be a plumber, let's say, so will you just put on a pair of blue overalls, grab a wrench, and immediately get started?!

Becoming a Plumber Is Not Easy

Nobody ever became a plumber by just saying, "I decided I'm a plumber." You have to roll up your sleeves and get under a sink. And you'll have to lie there on your back and watch the master plumber for months and months to learn all the tricks of the trade. You'll have to carry his tools for him and watch: When do you use this tool? When do you open that valve? When do you close it? It's a *chochmah*, and there's a lot to learn. And if silence is our career in life, that means we have a lot to study.

To become a professional mute, you can't just buy a padlock for fifty cents at the corner hardware store, lock your mouth firmly, and then walk around the street without worries. It's not that easy. If that's all it was, it wouldn't be a profession; it would just be a fifty-cent expense and finished. But it is a profession, and actually, it's "the profession of a person in this world."

Now, the Alter points out something else in this Gemara that's worth our attention: It says, "What is the profession *shel adam* in this world?" The profession of an *adam*! It's this profession of making yourself into an *ileim*, a mute, that will cause you to earn the title of *adam*. An *adam* is expected not to open his mouth unless it's justified. And only one who has mastered this art can boast that he's made it, that he's graduated. Otherwise, you're not an *adam*. Maybe you're a croaking frog, or a blue jay; you're certainly something — you're making noise, after all. But you're not yet an *adam* unless you've mastered this career of silence.

Get Busy!

Now, what usually happens when I speak on this subject? I'll tell you. There's always one idealist who wants to get busy accomplishing. Why not? Rabbi Miller said so! He said it's the profession for *everyone*. A young man comes here and he's inspired by the words of the Alter; now he's ready to make changes! So he goes home after the lecture, and as soon as he walks into the house, he hears his mother talking on the phone. So he bangs on the table, "Uh, uh, uh. *Nu, nu!*" He wants to make sure his mother knows what *her* new profession is!

So the Alter tells us that we have to know how to learn a *ma'amar Chazal*. The Gemara says, "*Ya'aseh atzmo* — Make yourself into a mute." Yourself! Oh, that's a different story already. What are you banging on the table for? Get busy banging on *your own* head! Don't bother other people!

That means when a man comes home to his wife after hearing my lecture tonight, and now his wife wants to talk — she wants to tell him about what happened with the children today, and about what her sister said, and probably some other things as well — so he should let her talk about whatever she wants. He shouldn't say, "Keep quiet; in this house we work on producing silence." That man is a dumbbell! He's working on *her* silence! It says, *Ya'aseh atzmo!* He has to make *himself* an *ileim* — that's who he has to worry about.

Sometimes You Have to Talk

Now, this profession, this career we're speaking about tonight, wouldn't be so difficult if you never had to talk at all. You could just decide never to talk again and, *mazel tov*, you're an *ileim!* But that's not what Chazal are demanding of you; it doesn't say you should *be* an *ileim*, it says "*k'ileim*," like a mute. The extra letter *kaf* would seem to be an unnecessary addition. It could have just as well said, "Make yourself into an *ileim*." What's *ya'aseh atzmo k'ileim*, make yourself like a mute?

What it means is that you *can't* padlock your lips shut! You have to make yourself *k'ileim*, like a mute, *as if* you can't speak. Because you have to talk, and sometimes you have to talk and talk, but you have to talk like somebody who is an *ileim*. If you have to walk through the street, you have to say "Good morning" or "Good evening" to the people you see. You can't just walk around with a deadpan face, ignoring people. Why should your neighbor suffer because you're learning a new

profession?! You come into the home, so you have to walk in and say, “How was your day, Chanaleh?” At least that you have to say! You can’t come in and be an *ileim*. A boy comes in from the yeshiva, he can’t walk in quietly and go to his room. He has to say, “*Vus machstu, Mammeh?*” “How are you, Tatteh?” *Something* he has to say! He’s *k’ileim*, not an *ileim mamash*.

That’s why the Gemara says, “*Yachol lakol* – You might think that once you adopt this practice, so you shouldn’t open your mouth for *anything*. *תְּלַמּוּד לֹא מֵר צָרָק תִּדְבְּרוּן* – So the *passuk* says, ‘Speak righteousness.’” When it comes to words of righteousness, you have to talk. *Divrei Torah* you have to talk. Words of kindness you have to talk. If someone is sad and dejected, you *must* go over and put your arm around his shoulders and say a few kind words to him. *Tzedek tedabeirun*. Good things you *must* say!

Find Things to Praise

To say words of encouragement to your fellow man, to comfort a fellow Jew, that’s what you have a mouth for, that’s part of your profession. You don’t have to babble, though. Think of ways and means of making people happy by saying a timely word. If it’s a child, then sometimes a little *glett* on the cheek and a gentle word or two can be a lifesaver. Tell him something that buoys his self-respect, something that gives him the ambition to continue improving.

If you tell your wife that she cooks well – that’s very important, by the way – that’s *tzedek*. Make sure to compliment your wife when she serves you anything: “Chanaleh, this *challah* tastes excellent.” Of course, if she bought it at the bakery, don’t praise the *challah*; find something else to praise. “This chicken soup is *me’ein Olam Haba*, Chanaleh. *Yasher koi’ach!*”

Now, usually it *does* taste good; it’s usually easy to find things to compliment. So don’t be bashful! That’s not the time to be an *ileim* – that’s the time for *tzedek t’dabeirun*. And even if it happens sometimes that supper is not such a success, if you’ll say “it’s excellent” anyway, there’s no harm in that. Only that most people have it all wrong; when they have what to complain about, then the words come gushing forth – pearls of “wisdom.” But when it’s time for *tzedek tedabeirun*, then suddenly these “*tzaddikim*” remember their profession of being *k’ileim*.

Practice Makes Perfect

It's an art. Always be careful not to say what you're not supposed to say. But what you have to say, you must say. So when you come home tonight and your wife says, "What did he say over there?" Don't say, "Um ...". Say something. Say it briefly but say something. Don't just keep your mouth closed. *K'ileim*, like a mute! That's an *umnus*. It's even harder than lying on your back under a sink studying how to plumb!

And therefore, we should get busy practicing this profession of *shesikah* because it means that we're practicing a career of *yiras Shomayim*! You're sitting at the table at the Shabbos *seudah*, and everyone is prattling away. Talking and talking and talking. So what do you do? You say to yourself, "I'm going to train myself now for my profession in this world. I'm going to sit for two minutes – two minutes on the clock – and listen *and not open my mouth*."

Or let's say you were forced to go somewhere; sometimes you have to go to visit your in-laws in Boro Park. You can't say no this time. So they're eating *melaveh malkah* and everybody is chatting. Or maybe you're sitting at a *chasunah* and all around you everyone's tongue is clacking. While their minds are being ground to pieces by the idle chatter, you can grab the opportunity to work on your profession. So you casually pay attention; pretend you're interested, and smile at the right times. But tell yourself, "Chaim, keep your mouth closed. As much as you can, keep quiet because *Elokim* is *baShomayim*, and He's listening."

Part III. Beneficial Silence

Valuable Health Advice

Now, to make a career out of silence because of *Elokim baShamayim*, that would be enough. That's our primary obligation in this world – to prepare for *Olam Habo* by training ourselves to become more and more aware of Hashem. But it's more than that – it's also your happiness and success in *Olam Haze*h!

There's a *mishnah* in *Avos* (1:17) that says the following: "שָׁמְעוֹן בְּנוֹ – אֹמֵר – *Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel said*, בֵּל יָמַי גִּדְלֵתִי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, *all the days of my life I grew up among the wise men*, וְלֹא מִצָּאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב, *and I found nothing better for the body than silence*."

Now, if this great sage bequeathed to us this gem, it pays for us to study his words. He said, “I’ve found nothing better for the *body* than silence.” He didn’t say it’s the best thing for your *neshamah*; it’s certainly is good for your soul, too, but he is telling us here that for your *physical health*, there is nothing as good as keeping your mouth closed. If you want to live a long, healthy life, then the first thing to think about is the remedy of silence. “סָמָא דְּבַלְיָהּ מְשִׁתּוּקָא – The best medicine of all is silence” (Megillah 18a).

Now, if someone on the street would offer you some health advice, I don’t know how valuable it would be; could be it’s worth something, but you never know for sure. But here you have a man who spent years and years sitting at the feet of the Sages. “All my days, I grew up among the Sages.” And he heard many important ideas, many important attitudes, and he studied them all. And after many years of investigating, he came to the conclusion that of all the things that are good for a person, the best one is *shesikah*, silence.

The Cause of Most Illnesses

You know that most illnesses, most of the disturbances that take place in our bodies, are from emotions that cause a rough reaction in our bodies. It’s remarkable what a great effect emotions have on a person’s physical nature. We are full of glands and hormones that stimulate important functions of the body; but if the body is overstimulated by emotions like anger, tension, and nerves, then instead of being beneficial, these hormones are harmful.

It’s been established already by medical science. All over the body, there are effects from improper stimulation of the emotions. And how are the emotions stimulated most? By talking! Someone says something and you answer back, you argue back and forth, and that’s when the trouble begins. The metabolism is upset, and very many people become ill as a result. A world of illnesses is caused by talking. Many cases of cancer are due to friction in human relationships.

The Quarrel That Kills

I know of a man who dropped dead in the middle of an argument with his wife. He was a fine man, by the way, a good man. But if he would have studied this *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos*, he would have known: “Don’t answer back!” And that would have saved him; he’d probably still be alive today. Who told you to answer back?! If you can be a diplomat and

say something nice, do it. If not, don't say anything. He was a *frum* young man – he probably even knew this *mishnah* – but he never studied it, and so he acted according to his nature and he answered back. He said his piece, and she answered back, and it went back and forth, back and forth until he dropped dead.

It happens again and again. Don't you read sometimes in the paper – a certain man, so and so, died of heart failure. Where did his heart attack happen? Did he die in his business because of his competitors? No, people don't usually die because of their competitors. Did he die on the street because someone in the street insulted him? That's not too common, either. He dies at home! People die because of their wives, because of their husbands! Of course the newspaper will never say that. The obituary published in the newspapers will never say, "Mr. Anderson dropped dead Sunday night after an argument with his wife." No, no, it won't say that! It says, "Mr. Anderson died peacefully in his sleep at his home this past Sunday." But if you know how to read the obituary pages, then you already know what that means.

Let Evils Pass You By

In Mesichta Sanhedrin (7a), it says: "טוביה ושמע ואריש – Happy is the man who hears people saying things that insult him, that bother him, and he ignores it. *הלפונה בישתיה מאה* – A hundred evils will pass him by." Memorize those words; say them to yourself again and again.

Learn to ignore any words you don't like. Somebody said something sharp to you, so שמע, you heard it, but אריש, don't let it bother you. Pay no attention; make believe you never even heard it, and you'll be spared from many troubles. If your husband is mean to you, pay no attention. If your wife is mean to you, pay no attention. And one hundred evils will pass you by. You'll live together happily for the rest of your life.

Most of the time, a punch in the nose is a result of opening your mouth instead of ignoring. Suppose you're walking in the street and a bum says something insulting to you. Forget about it! Don't feel that you have to stand up and defend your honor. Don't do that. I know a man who did that and he got beaten up. Don't even look at the bum; it's dangerous. As far as you're concerned, you didn't hear it; you didn't hear anything. Keep walking and in another minute, you're out of danger. And thank Hashem that you're able to keep on walking. If it's a goy who insults you, so you can give him a *brachah* that he should drop dead.

Don't let him hear you, though! Don't even mutter; don't say it with your mouth. The mouth stays closed!

How to Deal with Hate

Let's say somebody calls you on the telephone and insults you. It happened to me a number of times. People have called the house and cursed me. You know what I did? I didn't say a word! Not a word! And they hung up. It happened again a few months ago and I knew who it was. And after that, this man came into my shul one evening to *daven* and I didn't say a word. And it was finished. But once you start up with these people, who knows what's going to be? You exchange a word for a word, and it can turn into who knows what! There's no knowing how it's going to end! So just grin and bear it.

How many people have lost their jobs by talking back to their boss? Sometimes your boss is in a bad mood, so just swallow what he said, and it could be an hour later he'll be a good boss. He might even promote you. I had that experience once. In my first position in *rabbanus*, a man once came into a meeting of the board of directors and made a grand announcement: He said, "Rabbi Miller, I greeted you last week and you didn't answer me! You didn't answer me 'Good Shabbos!'" He brought it up to the board of directors at a meeting, a complaint against the new rabbi. So the president of the shul came over and asked me about it. Now, it wasn't true, but I didn't say anything. I could have opened my mouth, but I remembered this *ma'amar Chazal* and I kept my mouth closed.

I met this man again and again; he was a shul member, and I was always friendly to him. One day he gets up at a board meeting and makes a motion to give me a raise. *This man!* No one thought of giving me a raise except this one man! Now, had I answered him back, that would have never happened. And so I learned the lesson that it "pays" to keep your mouth closed.

I've seen it all! I've watched as people put themselves in danger by opening their mouths. I've seen good people lose jobs, lose customers, just because they answered back. They lost their wives or husbands, siblings and friends. And sooner or later they lose themselves; they excite their bodies and they end up sick. Many lose years from their lives because of their mouths.

The Key to a Good Life

And that's what Dovid Hamelech tells us (Tehillim 34:13-14): "מִי הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים – Who is the man who wants life?" We think it means eternal life, and that's true; but it's not the whole truth. There's more to it: Who wants to live in this world? "אוֹהֵב יָמִים – You're an ohev yamim?" You like days, don't you? You want more and more of them. "לְרִאוֹת טוֹב – You want to see happiness and good times during those days?" You want to see yourself getting along well with others? You want a successful marriage? You want to see good health? That's all included in לְרִאוֹת טוֹב. "Oh," you say. "That's me! I want to live long! I want to see good times!"

But you don't! You're not really interested in trying to live long. You say it, you repeat it, you might even sing it, but you don't think about it. You have to take steps to live long, and one of the most important steps is to *keep the mouth closed*. "נֹצֵר לְשׁוֹנֵךְ מֵרַע – Guard your tongue against evil." What does "evil" mean? Not only that you shouldn't say derogatory things about people or quarrel with them. The real *lashon hara* is opening your mouth to say stupid things, to chatter and babble and say nothing. The general rule is: Keep your tongue inside your mouth and your mouth closed. That's the rule you should follow. If we live according to that, our physical happiness in this world will increase and we will attain a life of לְרִאוֹת טוֹב, of seeing good times.

A Moment of Silence

So we go back to the great principle that the job of a person in this world is to learn the skill of being quiet, the profession of being like an *ileim*. And before we conclude, we'll listen to the words of a great man, the Vilna Gaon (Iggeres HaGra); these words deserve to be stowed away in our memory. "שְׁעַל כָּל רִגַע וְרִגַע – For every moment, for every minute, שְׂאֵרָם חוּסִים פִּיּוֹ – that a man muzzles his mouth, זֹכָה לְאוֹר הַגְּנוּז – He'll be rewarded by that secret brilliance, שְׂאֵין כָּל מְלֵאךְ יָכוֹל לְשַׁעַר – that no creature, no angel, is capable of measuring."

The reward for *one minute* of silence is so great! We're not talking about a whole lifetime of silence; he says there that for every *moment* you keep your mouth closed, you'll be rewarded with a splendor, a brilliance that is so great that even an angel is not capable of measuring its magnitude, the extent of its greatness. I know that this is a very extreme statement, but the Vilna Gaon is a very responsible personality. So it's not only a profession of *yiras Shomayim*, and not only is it the

best advice for good health and long life, but it's also a career that will reward you beyond your highest dreams.

Learning the Lesson

And so we have to get busy. How can you read about the *metzora* every year, yet continue to ignore the lessons for your own life? Even if today we aren't privileged to see the miraculous Hand of Hashem bringing *tzara'as* on a person, still the lessons remain as applicable today as they were then. When Hashem separated a good man, a loyal *frum* Jew, from his family and friends, he was expected to learn this lesson of "Elokim is *baShomayim* listening to you ... therefore, your words should be few." And we, no less than him, are expected to learn that lesson as well.

And so we have to delve into these *pesukim* and apply them to our own lives. This man had to cover his mouth. So what about me? Am I an *adam* yet? Am I producing enough silence? Am I succeeding at my profession of making myself *k'ileim*? And so, when we study this *parshah*, we can't just let it pass by. As often as you can during the day, a minute here and a minute there, you remind yourself that it's your job to be as silent as you can. Not complete silence – *tzedek tedabeirun!* But as far as everything else, we will try to be as careful as possible and remember that **לְךָ יְהוָה יְהִי דְבָר** – to You, Hashem, silence is praise – and thereby we will gain the great reward of Hashem, a reward unknown even to the angels.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Undertaking A New Profession

I must get busy studying my life's profession of making myself like an *ileim*. This week, once a day for a period of ten minutes, I will concentrate on remaining silent and not speaking unless it is necessary. I will thus train myself to be more Aware of Hashem every time I open my mouth to speak: "Will this speech be positive and productive, or not?"

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

We are told by *chazal* that בניסן נגאלו ובניסן עתידין ליגאל – “In the month of Nissan we were redeemed from Mitzrayim, and in the month of Nissan we will be redeemed from the current exile” (Rosh Hashanah 11a). What is *pshat* in this *ma’amar chazal*?

A: So what do you want to know?

Q: Only in Nissan? In other months, Moshiach can’t come?!

A: What’s wrong with Nissan? *Ha’levai* it should be this Nissan. If you have a *kasha*, I’ll listen to your *kasha*. But I don’t hear the question right now.

Q: What, it can’t happen in Adar?

A: So it seems. According to that *ma’amar* it will be in Nissan.

Q: So what about אהבה לו בכל יום שיבוא – “We are waiting for him to come every day.” Are these words that we always say, a contradiction – to this Gemara?

A: Oh! Now, that’s a *kasha*! Finally, you hit on it!

And the answer is this. If we try hard enough, he can come any day. But if we don’t try hard enough, then he will come anyhow. Sooner or later, he will come anyhow. And when he comes automatically, he will come in Nissan.

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