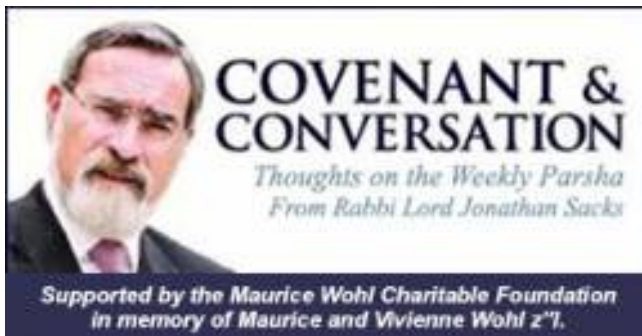


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## How to Praise

The Sages were eloquent on the subject of *lashon hara*, evil speech, the sin they took to be the cause of *tsara'at*. But there is a meta-halachic principle: “From the negative you can infer the positive”<sup>1</sup> So, for example, from the seriousness of the prohibition against *Chillul Hashem*, desecrating God’s name, one can infer the importance of the opposite, *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying God’s name.

It therefore follows that alongside the grave sin of *lashon hara*, there must in principle be a concept of *lashon hatov*, good speech, and it must be more

than a mere negation of its opposite. The way to avoid *lashon hara* is to practise silence, and indeed the Sages were eloquent on the important of silence.<sup>2</sup> Silence saves us from evil speech but in and of itself it achieves nothing positive. What then is *lashon hatov*?

One of the most important tasks of a leader, a parent or a friend is focused praise. We first discussed this idea in parshat Vayeshev, where we examined the classic text on this – a Mishnah in Tractate Avot (2:11) in which Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai enumerates the praises of his five beloved students:

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: a plastered well that never loses a drop. Joshua ben Chananya: happy the one who gave him birth. Yose the Priest: a pious man. Shimon ben Netanel: a man who fears sin. Elazar ben Arach: an ever-flowing spring.

Every Rabbi had disciples. The imperative, “Raise up many disciples”<sup>3</sup> is one of the oldest rabbinic teachings on record. What the Mishnah is telling us here is *how* to create disciples. It is not difficult to create followers. Often a good teacher will, over time, notice that they have developed a large following, students who are uncritical devotees – but how to encourage these followers to become creative intellects in their own right? It is far harder to create leaders than to create followers.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was a great teacher because five of his students became giants in their own right. The Mishnah is telling us how he did

it: with focussed praise. He showed each of his pupils where their particular strength lay. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, the “plastered well that never loses a drop,” was gifted with a superb memory – an important ability in an age in which manuscripts were rare and the Oral Law was not yet committed to writing. Shimon ben Netanel, the “man who fears sin,” may not have had the intellectual brilliance of the others but his reverential nature was a reminder to others that they were not merely scholars but also holy men engaged in a sacred task. Elazar ben Arach, the “ever-flowing spring,” had a creative mind constantly giving rise to new interpretations of ancient texts.

I discovered the transformative power of focused praise from one of the more remarkable people I ever met, the late Lena Rustin. Lena was a speech therapist, specialising in helping children who struggled with stammers. I came to know her through a television documentary I was making for the BBC about the state of the family in Britain. Lena believed that the young children she was treating – they were, on average, around five years old – had to be understood in the context of their families. Families tend to develop an equilibrium. If a child stammers, everyone in the family adjusts to it. Therefore if the child is to lose their stammer, all the relationships within the family will have to be renegotiated. Not only must the child change. So must everyone else.

By and large, we tend to resist change. We settle into patterns of behaviour as they become more and more comfortable, like a well-used armchair or a well-worn pair of shoes. How do you create an atmosphere within a family that encourages

change and makes it unthreatening? The answer Lena discovered was praise. She told the families with whom she was working that every day they must notice each member of the family doing something right, and say so – specifically, positively and thankfully.

She did not go into deep explanations, but watching her at work I began to realise what she was doing. She was creating, within each home, an atmosphere of mutual regard and continuous positive reinforcement. She wanted the parents to shape an environment of self-respect and self-confidence, not just for the stammering child but for every member of the family, so that the entire atmosphere of the home was one in which people felt safe to change and help others to do so.

I suddenly realised that Lena had discovered a solution not just for stammering but for group dynamics as a whole. My intuition was soon confirmed in a surprising way. There had been tensions among the television crew with which I had been working. Various things had gone wrong and there was an atmosphere of mutual recrimination. After filming a session of Lena Rustin teaching parents how to give and receive praise, the crew likewise began praising one another. Instantly the atmosphere was transformed. The tension dissolved, and filming became fun again. Praise gives people the confidence to let go of the negative aspects of their character and reach their full potential.

There is in praise a deep spiritual message too. We think religion is about faith in God. What I had not fully understood before was that faith in God should lead us to have faith in people, for

God’s image is in each of us, and we have to learn how to discern it. I then understood that the repeated phrase in Genesis 1, “And God saw that it was good,” was there to teach us to see the good in people and events, and by so doing, help to strengthen that goodness. I also understood why God briefly punished Moses by turning his hand to *tsara’at* – because he had said about the Israelites, “They will not believe in me.” (Ex. 4:1) Moses was being taught a fundamental lesson of leadership: *It does not matter whether they believe in you. What matters is that you believe in them.*

It was from another wise woman that I learned another important lesson about praise. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, in her book *Mindset*<sup>4</sup>, argues that it makes a decisive difference whether we believe that our abilities are innate and determined once and for all (the “fixed” mindset), or whether we may assume that talent is something we achieve through time by effort, practice and persistence (the “growth” mindset). People who take the former approach tend to be risk-averse, afraid that if they fail this will show that they are not as good as they were thought to be. The latter group embrace risk because they take failure as a learning experience from which they can grow. It follows that there is good praise and bad praise. Parents and teachers should not praise children in absolute terms: “You are gifted, brilliant, a star!” They should praise effort: “You tried hard, you gave of your best, and I can see the improvement!” They should encourage a growth mindset, not a fixed one.

Perhaps this explains a sad aftermath in the life of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s two most gifted

pupils. The Mishnah immediately following the one quoted above states:

He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] used to say: If all the Sages of Israel were in one scale of a balance and Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the other, he would outweigh them all. However, Abba Saul said in his name: If all the Sages of Israel, including Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, were in one scale of a balance, and Elazar ben Arach in the other, he would outweigh them all. (Avot 2:12)

Tragically, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was eventually excommunicated by his colleagues for failing to accept the majority view on a matter of Jewish law.<sup>5</sup> As for Rabbi Elazar ben Arach, he became separated from his colleagues. When they went to the academy at Yavneh, he went to Emmaus, a pleasant place to live but lacking in other Torah scholars. Eventually he forgot his learning and became a pale shadow of his former self.<sup>6</sup> It may be that praising his students for their innate abilities rather than their effort, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai inadvertently encouraged his two most talented students to develop a fixed mindset rather than engage with colleagues and stay open to intellectual growth.

Praise, and how we administer it, is a fundamental element in leadership of any kind. Recognising the good in people and saying so, we help bring people’s potential to fruition. Praising their efforts rather than their innate gifts helps encourage growth, about which Hillel used to say: “He who does not increase his knowledge, loses it” (Mishnah Avot 1:13). **The right kind of praise**

**changes lives. That is the power of *lashon hatov*. Bad speech diminishes us; good speech can lift us to great heights.** Or as W. H. Auden said in one of his beautiful poems:

In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.<sup>7</sup>

## AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. What is the problem with praising a person's innate abilities?
2. How could Rabban Yochanan have used praise to encourage a growth mindset in his students?
3. Does targeted praise and encouragement of your efforts motivate you?

## NOTES

1. Nedarim 11a.
2. See for example Mishnah Avot 1:17; 3:13.
3. Mishnah Avot 1:1.
4. Carol Dweck, *Mindset*, Ballantine Books, 2007.
5. Bava Metzia 59b.
6. Shabbat 147b.
7. W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940).



## Power of the People

The book of Vayikra makes a sudden shift from the world of the Mishkan to the laws of purity

(*taharah*) and impurity (*tum'ah*). In a sense, these are two sides of the same coin: Those who encounter *tum'ah* are banished from the Mishkan; we may say that *tum'ah* is the antithesis of what the Mishkan stands for. Therefore, a person in the state of *tum'ah* must separate from the place of holiness. What is this state of impurity? Where does it come from and how is it resolved? As is the case with many technical terms, translation can only produce an approximation of the concept we call *tum'ah*. In general terms, *tum'ah* may be associated with death or quasi-death experiences. Even childbirth generates *tum'ah*: Although it is the most basic, most immediate experience of life, childbirth is part of the cycle of mortality that is part and parcel of the human experience. The newborn child will, inevitable, inescapably, "suffer" from the same mortality that lies at the base of all *tum'ah*.

Similarly, if not somewhat strangely, a person who suffers from "living death," from the physiological manifestation of the spiritual disease known as *tzara'at* (often lamely translated as leprosy) is considered more profoundly impure than a person who comes into contact with actual death. The leper is sequestered, quarantined, removed completely from all three concentric rings that made up the Israelite camp. Not only is the leper completely isolated, he or she must warn one and all of the affliction, alert everyone they encounter to keep a safe distance - by calling out "*Tameh! Tameh!*" On the other hand, when a person dies, family members who became *tameh* in the course of the burial must leave the Mishkan, but the community comes to them. The mourners are not sequestered, not isolated. They

are cared for, consoled and comforted, gently reintroduced into the community and, eventually, the sacred confines of the Mishkan. Not so lepers: Until they are completely healed, they remain *personae non grata*.

There is an unmistakable linguistic parallel that may bring this contrast into sharper focus. Describing the leper, the Torah states:

The ... *kohen* must declare him unclean. When a person has the mark of the leprous curse, his clothing must be **torn**, he must go without a **haircut**, and he must cover his head down to his lips. '*Tameh! Tameh!*' (Unclean! Unclean!) he must call out. As long as he has the mark, he shall remain unclean. Since he is unclean, he must remain **alone**, and his place shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:44-46)

Some of the terms here are familiar to us from an earlier narrative: The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, died suddenly in the Mishkan itself, and Moshe instructs the family not to mourn:

Moshe said to Aharon and his sons, Elazar and Itamar, 'Do not go without a **haircut** and do not **tear** your vestments; otherwise you will die, bringing Divine wrath upon the entire community. As far as your brothers are concerned, let the **entire family of Israel** mourn for those whom God burned. (Vayikra 10:5)

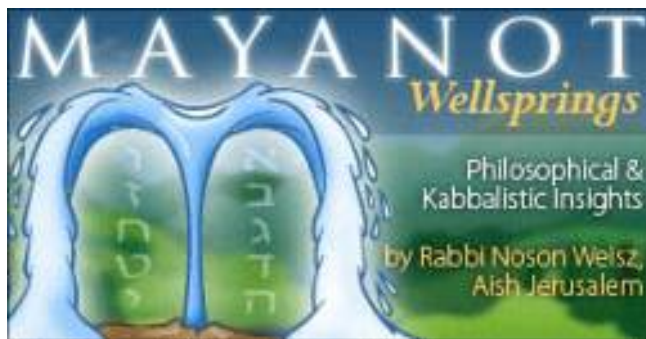
Here, then, is the inverse of the leper: The leper is completely estranged from the Mishkan and all of society, while the *Kohen Gadol* and his sons are

commanded **not** to leave the Mishkan. The leper must comport himself like a mourner, letting his hair grow long and tearing his clothes, while Aharon's family is forbidden to show any of these outward signs of mourning.

A concise comment in the Talmud may shed light on this inverse relationship. We noted above that the leper must call out and declare to all he is *tameh* (spiritually impure). The simple understanding of this behavior is pragmatic: The leper suffers from a severe spiritual malady, and his condition may be highly contagious - especially according to the Talmudic opinion that connects leprosy with speaking gossip (Erachin 16b). It becomes eminently clear why this person must be removed from society. Yet the Talmud sees the leper's cry as something else altogether: The Talmud teaches that the leper's cry "*Tameh! Tameh!*" is, in fact, a call to anyone who hears his cries to pray for him (Shabbat 67a). The leper must ask the very people whom he may have slighted to show greatness of spirit, to forgive him, to have compassion and pray for him. The leper's plea to his community serves to teach him to value the very people he had slandered, those for whom he had shown disregard and disrespect.

This contrasts starkly with Moshe's instructions to Aharon and his remaining sons in their time of pain and mourning: The task with which they had been entrusted, the position of *kohen*, was not one they could walk away from. Aharon was given both the responsibility and the power to pray for the entire nation; he no longer had the luxury of private time. The *Kohen Gadol* is not only the representative of the people before God, he is also the servant of the people. Aharon would no longer

have the luxury of "time off," even to mourn his personal loss. Whereas the *kohen* embodies the greatness, the power and the holiness of the community, the leper is forced to beg the community to pray for him, teaching him to value his community as the first step towards reconciliation and rejoining the community.



## The Cutting Edge

*On the eighth day you shall circumcise the foreskin. (Leviticus 12:3)*

Until very recently the practice of circumcision was faithfully carried out by all Jewish people, regardless of their general level of commitment to the observance of the remaining commandments. But in the last few decades even this sacrosanct Jewish custom, which began with the circumcision of the very first Jew, Abraham, has come under attack as being nothing more than a barbaric ritual.

What possible spiritual significance can there be in the removal of a fold of skin from the human body?

## SAME OLD ARGUMENT

"There is nothing new under the sun," said King Solomon. And it turns out that the practice of circumcision has already been subjected to attack in ancient times on very similar grounds.

Turnusruphus - the Roman governor who ruled Judea shortly after the destruction of the second Temple and who executed Rabbi Akiva, one of the Ten Martyrs - asked Rabbi Akiva, "Whose actions have greater beauty, God's or man's?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, "Human actions are more beautiful and complete." Turnusruphus responded, "Regarding the heavens and the earth, can any human accomplishment conceivably match them?" Rabbi Akiva responded, "You cannot point to phenomena that are beyond human capacity, I was referring to matters that lie within the human province."

Turnusruphus then asked, "Why do you Jews circumcise yourselves?" Rabbi Akiva told him, "I understood immediately that this question was the one you were really asking, and I therefore preempted you by stating that the actions of human beings are more complete than the actions of God. Bring me sheaves of wheat and baked rolls ... [when they were duly brought, Rabbi Akiva pointed out] these are the produce of God and these are the products of human beings, and yet aren't the rolls more complete? Bring me stalks of flax and linen fabric produced in Beth Shan ...

[when these were duly brought, Rabbi Akiva pointed to them once again] this is God's produce and this is produced by human industry, and yet isn't the linen cloth more beautiful and perfect?"

Then Turnusruphus asked, "If God prefers circumcised human beings, why don't they emerge from their mother's womb already circumcised?" Rabbi Akiva then asked, "Why does the umbilical cord emerge with the baby so that it needs to be cut by the mother? As to why God did not create the human being circumcised, God gave the commandments to the Jews so that they could perfect themselves through their observance ... (Tanchuma, Tazria 7)

Rabbi Akiva's point could surely have been stated a lot more simply without the illustration of the sheaves of wheat or the stalks of flax. If these were convincing in themselves, why didn't Turnusruphus concede the point? Indeed, why didn't God create the universe so that it could grow rolls and rolled flax cloth? What is this discussion really about?

It is important to keep in mind that this discussion is taking place between:

- a. Turnusruphus on the one hand, who speaks as the representative of the conquering Roman culture that embraced the ancient world, and stands for the forces of progress and modern civilization of those times, and

- b. Rabbi Akiva, the representative par excellence of Rabbinic Orthodox Judaism which is always regarded as the very antithesis of "progressive" ideas.

And that the point under discussion is fundamental to the very idea of all commandments.

## **THE IDEA OF THE COMMANDMENTS**

From a superficial perspective, commandments are a mixed bag. Some of them are clearly character enhancing, such as those that deal with loving one's neighbor or honoring one's parents. Others are aimed at fostering correct ideology such as those whose purpose is to commemorate the events of the Exodus or the Sabbath whose observance is a constant reminder that God is the author of creation.

Still others are related to ritual observance such as the laws of purity and those involving Temple sacrifices, aimed at making the service of God central to one's life. There are clearly other laws that are directed at the maintenance of family purity and act as a barrier against the possible descent into licentious behavior.

Circumcision is one of the few that cannot be conveniently pigeon-holed. To circumcise a child on the eighth day of its life seems to serve no spiritual purpose. At that age anything that happens to the child is obviously not only involuntary, but pretty near unconscious. It is difficult to see how such an experience could affect the human character. As a lasting brand that serves to identify the one circumcised as being God's servant, it has the disadvantage of being

impressed on a body part that is always concealed. It seems to have no other purpose than the correction of some built in physical blemish.

That precisely was Turnusruphus' problem with it. Why would God create man with a physical blemish that must be repaired when affecting such a repair seems to serve no real purpose? This then is the underlying significance of the question.

Rabbi Akiva's thesis amounts to a statement that God created man deliberately defective but repair worthy, and left man to apply the finishing touches to himself.

### **THE FIRST MAN**

The Maharal traces the roots of this idea to the very name *Adam* - which means "earth" - that the Torah assigns to the first man. The Torah provides the rationale that as man was created out of dust, it is only fitting that he should be named after the earth from which he was taken, but in fact this concept could just as well be applied to any other living creature. According to the Genesis story, they were all fashioned by God out of the primeval dust.

The Maharal explains that the true background to man's name is the fact that he needs to labor in order to bring forth his hidden potential. Out of all life forms he was the only one created by God in a state of imperfection. Other life forms are named *b'hema*, meaning "what it is, is already inside," or *chaya*, meaning simply "life form." They may derive from the earth but their natures do not resemble it.

However man is precisely like the soil. The soil will produce nothing without intensive labor, but

careful husbandry can elicit a positive cornucopia of vegetation that sustains all other life. Similarly man is capable of great things despite his innate defects.

### **INHERENT DEFECTS**

What is the nature of these inherent defects that the need for circumcision symbolizes?

Rami Bar Aba said: "[According to Jewish tradition, a human male has 248 parts to his bone structure, corresponding to the 248 positive commandments of the Torah.] Abraham was first known as Abram, which adds up to 243, signifying the number of limbs that God placed under man's control when he created him. The addition of the Hebrew letter *heh* [with the numerical value of 5] involved in the name change from Abram to Abraham, raises this number to 248. The five additional limbs represent the assertion of human control over the two ears, the two eyes, and the part of the body involved in intercourse. [The name change and this additional control were brought about by circumcision.]" (Nedarim 32b)

Man has two aspects. On the one hand he is a creature of the nether world the same as all species. He may possess greater intelligence, but he has the same drives and the same life force as other living creatures. On the other hand man is also the link between this world and the higher world of the spirit. When God wants to provide an input into the physical world it always comes through the soul of human beings. Even the



miracles of Egypt and the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai required Moses to act as God's intermediary.

This added dimension of human beings, their ability to see beyond the physical and to hear the message of the Infinite, requires a special control over the eyes and ears that is not innately programmed into man. The eyes and ears are normally only passive recipients of the information that is already to be found in nature. Man hears and sees only what other lower life forms hear and see. His capacity to interpret is greater, but he only has access to the same information.

To be able to see and hear beyond nature, man must somehow teach his eyes and ears to be more than passive recipients. He must be able to use these organs of perception to access information from the world of spirituality, take the information thus obtained and make it part of the natural world. In the process, he transforms his world into a place where the spirit of God can safely reside.

## **NEW LIFE AND NEW INTELLIGENCE**

New intelligence is brought to the world by new life, which arrives through the process of human reproduction. As long as man's eyes and ears are attuned only to this world, there can be no new intelligence that is not already a part of nature. As long as his eyes and ears are ordinary eyes and ears and he is not himself open to seeing and hearing the Divine message that comes from beyond, the new life that man brings into the world will also amount to nothing more than a recycling of the information that is already there.

In Jewish thought God is seen as running the world by making use of primarily two Divine traits: Divine strength and Divine goodness. When the world is run by the attribute of strength, the Divine energy that flows into it is only sufficient to maintain what is already in existence; it does not allow expansion and growth. Such periods are marked in the world by eras of economic depression and war. The lack of expansion of world resources causes severe competition over what already exists, leading to inflation, depression and war.

In periods where the Divine attribute of goodness predominates, there is overabundance in the world. These eras are marked by peace and prosperity. The Divine energy flows through the human soul. If the human soul is open to the beyond, man's eyes and ears are attuned to God, the life force he brings into the world through the new life that he creates will be a source of expansion and new energy.

Not that Abraham was the first human being to speak to God. But even speaking with God has no effect on removing the inherent defects built into man. Until these defects are removed and completeness is reached, the world doesn't progress. Abraham was the first to reach human completeness, and thus the first to be circumcised.

Rebi said: "Great is the merit of circumcision. Despite all the great acts of devotion performed by our Patriarch Abraham, he was not referred to as complete until he became circumcised, as it is written ... *walk before me and be complete* (Genesis 17:1)."

Another way of expressing the idea: great is the merit of circumcision. If not for circumcision God would not have created his world, as is written, *if not for my covenant, which is present constantly by day and by night*, [taken as a reference to circumcision, the only commandment whose performance is constant for the rest of one's life] *I would never have established the laws of heaven and earth.* (Jeremiah 33) (Mishna, Nedarim 3:11)

## A WORLD OF SHELLS

The point of being in the world is only to provide the possibility of man's opening himself to perfection. As long as the eyes and ears of man are closed to what is beyond physical existence, as long as he pours out his entire life force into the maintenance and enhancement of the physical world, he is on the very outer rim or shell of existence. Such a state is referred to in Jewish thought as the *kliqa*, literally "shell" or "peel." Any goodness of God that would be poured into a world set up by people who have not gained control over their eyes and ears, would be energy expended on the enhancement of the peel.

The peel exists only to shelter the core that is inside. God wants to pour His goodness into the core. The peel must be cut away to start the flow of goodness. The shearing of the foreskin represents the separation of the nourishing "fruit" from the surrounding human "peel" represented by living for physicality and pursuing it.

## SPIRITUAL LEPROSY

The main topic addressed by this week's Torah portion is the subject of *tzaraat*, a disease of the skin that has no clear English translation. It seems to be a type of spiritual leprosy. Its appearance according to Jewish tradition is caused by *lashon hara*, or evil speech, and its cure is offering of spiritual penance and sacrifice. It infects the human skin, or clothing, or the walls of an inhabited house - the interface between man's inner and outer world.

The *Sefer Yetzirah*, the "Book of Formation," one of the oldest works in the Jewish library, makes a connection between the *bris hamoar*, classic circumcision, and the *brit halashon*, the circumcision of the tongue. The place of circumcision is the medium through which man pours his physical life force into the universe, while the tongue is the medium through which man pours his thoughts and ideas into the world.

*Lashon hara* aims at separation and judgment. The eyes and ears are directed at finding fault and weakness and the tongue is employed to expose the defects discovered by the intelligence.

Man's intelligence is the power of goodness that he has to shower on the world. The focus of his power on the negative corresponds to God's regarding the world from the standpoint of strength rather than goodness. It represents a focus on the surface (the shell) rather than on the depth (the fruit).

The outward appearance of this misapplied human power manifests itself in the physical appearance of defects on the interface between man's inner and outer world, the peel of his

existence. His skin or his clothing or the walls of his house become diseased.

### THREE PLACES OF CIRCUMCISION

The life force in man is focused in three places, his intelligence, his organs of reproduction, and his heart. Two of these he has the obligation to circumcise. On the eighth day his parents circumcise his organ of reproduction. It is up to them to turn their child into a channel for God's goodness to enter the world through proper training and education. If they do their job well, parents can correct this defect.

It is up to the individual himself to circumcise his tongue, to employ his adult intelligence to open his eyes and ears to the positive in other people and in the world.

The circumcision of the heart is more complex and awaits the end of days.

*The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. (Deut. 30:6)*

This ultimate circumcision has the affect of removing the evil inclination entirely and shuts down the present era of human history by bringing free will to an end.

The commandment of circumcision – *brit* in Hebrew – has the numerical value of 612, which is just one short of the number 613 the number of commandments in the Torah. The word *brit* also means "covenant," and derives from the word *briah* meaning "creation" according to Nachmanides.

The point of the other 612 commandments is only made apparent through the final commandment of circumcision. The object of human existence and the observance of commandments in general is the removal of the human defect of living in the *klipeh*, the peel of existence, and perfecting man by teaching him how to live in the core. Such a life is the point of creation and only it can release God's goodness.



### Changing the Eye

When a *tzaraas* lesion remains on a garment after all the instructions of the *Kohein* have been followed, he examines it one last time. If it "has not changed appearance," the garment is burned. The exact Hebrew language is "*lo hafach hanega es eino*," which translates literally as "the lesion has not changed its eye." Although the meaning is clear, we cannot help but wonder why the Torah chose such an unusual form of expression.

The affliction of *tzaraas* is spiritual rather than medical in nature. The Talmud discerns (*Arachin* 16a) seven different causes for *tzaraas*, the most famous of which is *lashon hara*, improper speech. The other six are not as well known. One of them is *tzarus ayin*, which translates literally as

“narrowness of the eye.” It refers to mean-spiritedness, a tendency to see the negative and overlook the positive in everything. It is a singular lack of generosity in all things, a constricted view of the world and everything in it.

If this affliction of the spirit caused the lesion on the garment, then the therapy is to transform the trait of *tzar ayin* into *tov ayin*, literally “a person with a good eye.” Instead of being a sour-faced, mean-spirited curmudgeon, he must become a smiling, generous, expansive, optimistic, warm and friendly person. Then the lesion will fade away. If he does not change, the lesion remains on the garment, and it must be incinerated.

This is what the Torah means, explains the Chiddushei Harim, by the words “*lo hafach hanega es eino*, the lesion has not changed its eye.” The owner of the garment has not changed his narrowness of the eye into goodness of the eye; he has not transformed himself from a mean-spirited person into a kind and generous man. Therefore, the garment is burned.

The Chiddushei Harim concludes with a classic *chassidische vort*, an interpretation in the Chassidic style. The Hebrew word for lesion or affliction is *nega*. The opposite of affliction is pleasure, which is *oneg* in Hebrew. Both words are constructed of the same three letters. *Nega* is spelled *nun, gimmel, ayin*. *Oneg* is spelled *ayin, nun, gimmel*. The only difference is in the placement of the *ayin*. Move it from the back to the front, and affliction is transformed into pleasure. The Torah is telling us that “the lesion has not changed its eye (*ayin*).” He is the same

narrowed-eyed person he was before. Therefore, the *nega* was not transformed into *oneg*.

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