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## The Way to Ruin Your Children's Future

Rabbi Eli Mansour

The Haftara read on Shabbat Parashat Tazria-Mesora is taken from the Book of Melachim II (7), and tells the story of four Mesoraim – people stricken with

the Sara'at skin infection, which made them impure and required them to reside outside their city. These Mesoraim were outside the city of Shomron during a period of siege, and the story goes on to tell how they discovered the great miracle that G-d performed to rescue the city.

Our Sages identify these four men as Gehazi and his three sons. Gehazi was the disciple and personal attendant of the prophet Elisha, and he was stricken with Sara'at for a grave sin which he committed. As we read earlier in Melachim II (5; this section is read as the Haftara when Parashat Tazria is read by itself), Elisha miraculously cured the Sara'at of the gentile general Na'aman, who then offered to pay the prophet a huge reward. Elisha refused to accept any payment, but after Na'aman left, Gehazi ran after him and falsely told him that Elisha changed his mind. Gehazi's act of greed and deceit was prophetically revealed to Elisha, who decreed that Gehazi and his children would be stricken with Sara'at. These were the three afflicted men who were

residing outside the city of Shomron during the siege.

The question arises, why were Gehazi's children punished? Why did they suffer from Sara'at because of the sin their father committed?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky (1891-1986) once asked, why is the Jewish Nation not producing great Torah sages? There are so many children enrolled in Yeshivot studying Torah at a high level. Why are they not becoming outstanding scholars? He explained that the reason is because of the lunch the children are eating. When the schools send the parents the applications for government subsidies for their children's lunch, the parents give false information about their income in order to qualify for the discounts. Their children thus end up going to yeshiva and eating stolen food for lunch. And a child eating stolen food in yeshiva will never grow to become a great scholar.

This explains why Gehazi's children were stricken with Sara'at like him. He was greedy and sought to acquire wealth through dishonesty. When a person lives this way, he ends up raising his children with stolen money. This has a grave effect on their inner beings, and they, too, become sinners.

People who deal dishonestly in business or in conducting their financial affairs justify their wrongdoing by claiming that they are concerned about their children's future. The truth is, however, that dishonesty is the way to destroy one's children's future. We ruin our children's prospects for greatness if we raise and support them, and pay their Yeshiva tuition, with ill-begotten gains. The best way to care for our children's future is by living as honest, upstanding, observant Jews, as the Torah tells us to live, and trusting that Hashem will care for us and our families. 📖

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## Revealing Our Hidden Treasures

Rabbi Eli Mansour

Parashiyot Tazria and Mesora describe several different kinds of manifestations of Sara'at – discolorations on a person's skin, garment or home, which, under certain conditions, brings a state of impurity. Our Sages have explained that Sara'at would strike a person as a punishment for repeated violations of the sin of Lashon Ha'ra – negative speech and slander about other people.

One of the manifestations of Sara'at, as mentioned, is discolorations on a person's home. If the discoloration is confirmed as Sara'at, then the entire house must be dismantled.

Rashi (14:34) famously cites from the Midrash that this manifestation of Sara'at was, in truth, a blessing for the people: "The Emorites hid golden treasures in the walls of their homes throughout the entire forty years when Yisrael were in the wilderness, and as a result of the affliction [on the walls], one dismantles the house and finds them." A Sara'at plague on the walls of one's home would end up as a "blessing in disguise," as by dismantling the home, one would discover the treasures which had been hidden in the walls by the nations which inhabited the Land of Israel before it was conquered by Beneh Yisrael.

The question arises as to why Rashi mentions here specifically the "Emoriyim" (Emorites). Seven different nations inhabited the Land of Israel before being vanquished by Beneh Yisrael. Why are only the Emorites spoken of as concealing their treasures in the walls of their homes?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994) explained that the word "Emoriyim" in Rashi's commentary contains a deeper message. This word is associated with the verb "E.M.R." – "speech," and thus alludes to the cause of Sara'at – forbidden speech. Rashi here is alluding to the fact that Sara'at would strike specifically the homes of the "Emoriyim" – those who speak inappropriately about other people.

But if so, then we must ask why the person would then be worthy of receiving a precious gold treasure. If he is guilty of the grievous sin of Lashon Ha'ra, then why does he receive a large fortune?

The Rebbe explained that the "gold treasure" mentioned by Rashi alludes to "golden speech" – appropriate and

valuable speech. After enduring the punishment of Sara'at, and taking the lesson to heart, the individual is then able to turn his speech around, to transform it from harmful and destructive gossip and slander, to precious "pearls of wisdom," to words of Torah, words of praise and encouragement to other people. The purpose of Sara'at is not to lead a person to be silent, to stop speaking, but rather to reveal his hidden treasures, to help him find the power of constructive speech, to uncover the greatness within him. Speech can inflict great harm, but can also bring great blessing. Once we recognize the evil of inappropriate speech, we can then unearth the hidden treasure of positive, productive speech.

More generally, Rashi's comments teach us that sometimes, when our lives are "dismantled," disrupted and shaken, we are given the opportunity to discover "hidden treasures." We have many strengths and gifts which might be obscured by the pressures and bustle of day-to-day life. These "treasures" are concealed deep within us, but we cannot see them, because we are distracted by the many different things which occupy our time and our minds. But when our lives are "dismantled," these precious gifts are unearthed. We hope and pray that the current crisis, which has shaken our lives to their core, ends very soon, and that we will emerge from this difficult time with precious "treasures," newfound reservoirs of faith, strength, and love for our fellowman and for Hashem, Amen. 🇲🇵



## Avoiding Lashon Ha'ra at the Shabbat Meals

Rabbi David Sutton

The Shem Mi'shmuel cites the Sefer Yetzirah as commenting that words with similar letters are closely related to one another, and sometimes represent polar opposites. For example, the word הוד means ill, or depressed (as in the verse in Echah, כל היום דוה), but when read backwards the word becomes דוה – splendor, or majesty. The Shem Mi'shmuel applies this concept to the word נגע, which means "affliction," as in the phrase נגע צרעת – a leprous infection. If we rearrange the letters of this word, however, we arrive at the word ענג – "pleasure," or "delight," as in ענג שבת, the special mitzvah to enjoy oneself on Shabbat.

It emerges, then, that תערצ affictions and the special delights of Shabbat are polar opposites of one another. These two concepts – צרעת and ענג שבת – stand at opposite

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ends of the spectrum. In what way are these two concepts the opposites of one another?

The affliction of צרעת, as we know, is the result of the sin of lashon ha'ra – speaking negatively about other people. And thus if צרעת is the opposite of ענג שבת, this must mean that speaking lashon ha'ra is the antithesis of the enjoyment we are to experience on Shabbat. Why is this so? How does the sin of lashon ha'ra, in particular, undermine the experience of ענג שבת ?

The three Shabbat meals correspond to the three patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov. Each of the three avot worked to rectify one of the three cardinal sins – idolatry, immorality and murder – and thus the three Shabbat meals that we have each week serve this same purpose, to rectify these three sins. Now Hazal tell us that the sin of lashon ha'ra is a more grievous offense than the three cardinal sins. Clearly, then, if we sit at the Shabbat table speaking lashon ha'ra about people, then we have completely undermined the essential purpose of these meals. We eat these meals to rectify the three grievous sins of idolatry, immorality and murder, but in so doing we commit an even graver sin. This is one reason why ענג signifies the diametric opposite of ענג.

Moreover, the Shabbat meals serve to rectify the first instance of lashon ha'ra – the sin of Adam and Havah, which resulted from the lashon ha'ra spoken by the snake about G-d. The snake convinced Havah that the reason why G-d forbade eating from the עץ הדעת was because He did not want mankind to derive the special benefits from this tree, to enjoy this world to its fullest. As such, the sin of Adam and Havah is rooted in the sin of lashon ha'ra. And for this reason, our tradition teaches that David Ha'melech worked to rectify the sin of lashon ha'ra. As we know, Adam Ha'rishon was to have lived for 1000 years, but he “donated” 70 years of his life to David Ha'melech. David was given these years to rectify the original sin of the forbidden tree, and he thus worked to rectify the sin of lashon ha'ra, which was the root and basis of the sin of the tree. Hence, the Rabbis teach that the Melaveh Malka meal, which we eat on Motza'eh Shabbat, is connected to David Ha'melech, and serves to atone for the particular sin of lashon ha'ra.

(Our tradition also teaches that there is a special bone in the body that receives its sustenance solely from the food eaten at the Melaveh Malka meal, and this bone does not decay along with the rest of the body after death. And, it will be from this bone that people will be revived at the time of the

resurrection. Foreseeing the sin of the forbidden tree, Hashem, in His mercy, created one small part of the body that is sustained only from food eaten on Motza'eh Shabbat, so it would not be sustained by the forbidden fruit eaten by Adam and Havah. As this bone was unaffected by this sin, it was not included in the consequent decree of death upon mankind, and it therefore remains intact forever, until the time of תחיית המתים.)

The way we rectify the sin of Adam and Havah is by enjoying ourselves on Shabbat, eating delicious foods and having large, festive meals. By eating and enjoying the Shabbat meals, we demonstrate the snake's fundamental mistake, that Hashem specifically wants us to enjoy this world, as the Mesilat Yesharim writes, 'אדם לא נברא אלא להתענג על ה' – “A person was created only to delight in Hashem.” (Rabbi Miller zt”l used to comment that we can even leave out the last words of this phrase – על ה' – and understand that Hashem put us here in this world to enjoy, period.) The Shabbat meals expose the fallacy of the snake's claim, and the grave lashon ha'ra that it spoke against Hashem.

What a shame it would be, then, if we use the Shabbat meals for the precise opposite reason for which they were instituted, for speaking lashon ha'ra, instead of correcting the sin of lashon ha'ra. The ענג of Shabbat is meant to rectify the ענג, the harmful effects of lashon ha'ra, to show that contrary to the snake's negativity, and its claims that G-d does not want us to enjoy this world, G-d actually created the world for our enjoyment. The purpose of the Shabbat meals is to give us a positive, upbeat outlook on life and on the world, and we undermine this purpose by using this occasion to speak negatively and cynically about other people. Let us, therefore, use the special time of the Shabbat meals for the proper purpose – to engender within ourselves and our families a positive, joyous outlook, and not, Heaven forbid, the opposite. 🙏



## Parshat Tazria-Hachodesh: New Moon

Rabbi David Ashear

This Shabbat we read Parashat Hachodesh, which discusses declaring the new month based on the lunar cycle. Rosh Chodesh symbolizes renewal. At the end of each month, the night sky is very dark; it appears as if the moon is fading away forever. Then, suddenly it reappears, steadily growing brighter once again. The same is true of our lives. A person can experience

total darkness and feel that his life is over. He must remember that everything could become bright again, in an instant.

It is interesting that throughout its monthly phases, the moon itself remains unchanged. We merely perceive from different angles in different light. The lesson for us is that viewing an exceedingly difficult situation in a different light, can vastly improve our state. Many times people get depressed, thinking about why they are in their current position. They think their lives would have been so much better, "If only I would have done that differently," or "If only I would have decided to do this earlier," or "If I wouldn't have gone there." The list goes on.

All a person needs to do is internalize one concept: It was all a "setup." Hashem was in charge the entire time, orchestrating from behind the scenes. It didn't just happen; it was meant to be. Each person is living his life exactly as Hashem planned it. We don't decide who gets what job. Yet, we can rest assured that we are exactly in the right place to fulfill our purpose in this world.

Some people endure years of pain. We don't know why, but Hashem does. We don't know what we are accomplishing with each day that goes by in our current situation. We do know that it is tailor made for us, and Hashem is guiding us every step of the way. Just knowing that we are not victims of circumstance can improve the quality of our lives immensely. There are people who are ready to give up on life, לא עלינו, as a result of constantly second-guessing themselves. They would feel so much better, if only they would know that Hashem is with them, holding their hand and giving them exactly what they need for their own benefit.

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman told a story about Rabbi Yosef Palech, from Kiryat Harim Levine, who gave a Gemara shiur to a small group every night in Tel Aviv. The participants were extremely committed to the class, however, one night the weather was so bad, Rabbi Palech was the only one who showed up. The Rabbi had been giving this shiur for years, without missing a single night, and he didn't want to start now. He went out to the street in an attempt to find someone to teach. However, nobody was outside. He said, "Please Hashem, help me find someone." He crossed the street and approached an unkempt house that bore a Mezuzah and knocked on the door. A man who was clearly not observant opened the door, exposing the foul-smelling untidy interior. Nevertheless, the Rabbi politely asked, "I was wondering whether you would be interested in learning Torah with me tonight."

The man opened his eyes wide and tearfully shouted, "Who brought you here? Come in!" The man began to cry, telling the Rabbi his life story. "After the war, I was a lone holocaust survivor. I wanted nothing more to do with Judaism or Hashem. My life has been one long chain of misery. I have

nothing in this world. No wife. No family. No Money. Nothing." He then pointed to the ceiling where a rope was dangling. "Tonight, I was ready to put an end to my misery. Before I took this drastic step, I cried out, 'God in heaven, if You are here with me and You really want me, show me that You need me and I will come back to You.' Since the day I moved into this house, no one has ever knocked on my door. Just moments ago, when I finished my prayer, you came. Yes, I want to come learn with you tonight, Rabbi. Please guide me back to Hashem."

When Rabbi Palech passed on, this man, who by then was fully observant, came to the Shiva and shared this story with the Rabbi's family. (I just had this story verified by somebody who was close to Rabbi Palech)

Hashem loves all of us, and He is always with us. Life can be difficult; if we realize that everything is planned by Him for our benefit, we would be so much happier. 🙏



## Pirke Avot

Rabbi Eliezer Zeytouneh

לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא ותולעה. ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון. סרוחה, ולאן אתה הולך, למקום עפר רמה ולאן אתה הולך, ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון. מאין באת, מטפה הסתכל בשלשה דברים ואין אתה בא לידי עברה. דע, מאין באת, עקביא בן מהללאל אומר,

Akavia Ben Mahalalel says: "Look at three things and you will not come to sin. Know from where you came, and to where you are going, and in from of whom you will judgment and accounting. From where did you come? From a rotting drop. And to where are you going? To a place of worms and vermin. And before whom will you give judgment and accounting? Before the King of Kings The Holy Blessed Be He."

Our Tanna in this Mishna provides us with the antidote against the Yesser Hara. By observing these three truths, a person will realize how trivial materialistic life is and will focus on amassing as many good deeds as possible. Yet, when learning our Mishna, many questions arise. The Tanna first teaches that we should "look" at three things. We are then instructed to "know" three things. Why did your Tanna change the behavior was should exert in order to fend off his inclination?

In life, one's perspective can change the course of a person's life. Some people see things and are unaffected.

They go on with their lives as usual. Others, however, can observe the same things and these experiences can change their lives. What is the difference between the first type of person and the second? The second person learned a lesson from the episode he transposed the experience onto his own life. He took his observation and turned it into knowledge. The first person saw the same things but it also was superficially remarkable.

Our Tanna first asked us to observe three things. The Rabbi then tells us that observing alone does not suffice. “Know”, turn the “sights” into knowledge! Rashi has taught that דעת only come to a person after חכמה and הניב. Wisdom, חכמה, is what a person learns from others. Understanding, הניב, occurs when one takes what he learns and applies it to other situations. Knowledge, דעת, is only a byproduct of the previous two. It is not enough to merely look at three things. He must fully internalize them and turn them into truths. This will surely guard him against his inclination.

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The question arises however, what are the three things one must observe? It is possible that the Tanna does not specify what we should look at, for it is insignificant. The goal is to obtain the three things a person must know to defend himself from the Yesser Hara. Any observation that will bring him to such truths is a worthy observation.

The Tanna tells us that we must first “know” that we came from a “rotting drop”. Hashem gave us life in such a wondrous manner! We are living miracles! This truth can be acquired by observing child birth! It can also be accomplished by observing wildlife or botany! It doesn't matter what you see! Watching how Hashem is able to fashion a baby within a mother can bring a person to realize how precious life is. Doing so one will be inspired not to waste his life following the dictates of the Yesser Hara! 🇲🇵



## Halacha:

**Sefirat Ha'omer – Training Children in the Misva;  
The Status of Women Vis-à-vis Counting the Omer  
Rabbi Eli Mansour**

There is a Misva to train children to count each night of the Omer with a Beracha. Each night throughout the Omer period, a parent should recite the Beracha over Sefirat Ha'omer with the children and count with them, to train them in the Misva.

Hacham Ovadia Yosef, in his work Yabia Omer (vol. 2, Siman 13), writes that a parent should have the child count the Omer with a Beracha even if the child had missed a day of counting. When it comes to adults, as we know, somebody who missed a day of counting continues counting the subsequent nights without reciting the Beracha. However, Hacham Ovadia rules that this does not apply to children, and they should recite the Beracha over Sefirat Ha'omer even if they had missed a day. He explains that the prohibition of reciting a Beracha Le'batala (a Beracha in vain), which is derived from the verse, “Lo Tisa Et Shem Hashem Elokecha La'shav,” does not apply to children. Children may recite Berachot as part of their training, even in situations where a Beracha would not technically be required, and thus when counting the Omer, too, children should recite the Beracha even if they had missed a day of counting.

Women are exempt from the Misva of Sefirat Ha'omer, as it falls under the category of “Misvot Aseh She'ha'zman Gerama” (“time-bound” Misvot), which generally do not apply to women. Strictly speaking, a woman may count the Omer if she so wishes, despite her exemption, though without a Beracha. According to Sephardic custom, a woman may not recite a Beracha over a Misva from which she is exempt but chooses to fulfill, and therefore a woman who chooses to count the Omer should not recite a Beracha.

However, the Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) writes that according to Kabbalistic teaching, women should not count Sefirat Ha'omer at all. The Ben Ish Hai notes (in his work Rav Pe'alim) that this was the view of the Arizal (Rabbi Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572), and this is also the ruling of Rabbi Eliyahu Mani (Baghdad-Israel, 1824-1899). From the Kaf Ha'haim (Rav Yaakov Haim Sofer, Baghdad-Israel, 1870-1939), by contrast, it appears that a woman may count the Omer, though without a Beracha.

Our practice is to advise women not to count Sefirat Ha'omer at all, in accordance with Kabbalistic teaching.

Ashkenazim follow the view that a woman who voluntarily performs a Misva from which she is exempt may recite the Beracha. Interestingly enough, however, the Mishna Berura (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933), in Siman 489 (3), cites the Shulhan Gabo'ah as ruling that even according to this custom, women should not recite the Beracha over Sefirat Ha'omer if they decide to count. The

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reason, as the Mishna Berura cites from the Shulhan Gabo'ah, is that "they will certainly forget" one of the days of the Omer. It is unclear from the Mishna Berura's citation what precisely the Shulhan Gabo'ah had in mind, but when we look at the original text of the Shulhan Gabo'ah, we immediately understand his intent. It is very common for people to forget to count a day of the Omer, and in such a situation, as mentioned earlier, the Beracha over the counting must be omitted on subsequent nights. The Shulhan Gabo'ah feared that due to women's limited knowledge of Halachic minutiae, a woman who counts the Omer and forgets a day will not know that she must now count without a Beracha. She will thus end up reciting many Berachot Le'batala. Therefore, he ruled that it is preferable for a woman who decides to count the Omer to always count without a Beracha, in order to avoid complications.

Clearly, however, this concern would not apply nowadays, when women attend schools from a young age and receive a comprehensive Halachic education. Unlike in the times of the Shulhan Gabo'ah, women today certainly have the Halachic sophistication to realize that they must count without a Beracha if they missed a day of counting, and therefore, as long as they did not miss a day, they may – according to Ashkenazic custom – count the Omer with a Beracha.

As mentioned, however, Sephardic custom forbids women from reciting a Beracha over Sefirat Ha'omer, and our practice is to advise women not to count altogether.

Summary: Children should be trained to count Sefirat Ha'omer each night with a Beracha. A child who missed a day of counting should nevertheless continue counting each night with a Beracha. Women are exempt from Sefirat Ha'omer. From a strictly Halachic standpoint, a woman may count Sefirat Ha'omer, though without a Beracha (and according to Ashkenazic practice she may even recite a Beracha). For reasons related to Kabbala, however, our custom is to advise women not to count altogether. 📌

## Sefirat Ha'omer – If a Person Counted Either the Days or Weeks Incorrectly

Rabbi Eli Mansour

The Talmud states, "U'mi'talmidai Yoter Mi'kulam" – meaning, a Rabbi learns more from his students than from

his own Rabbis. I recently experienced this axiom firsthand, when an astute reader noted that a ruling presented in an earlier edition of our Daily Halacha series runs in opposition to an explicit ruling of Hacham Ovadia Yosef.

The issue under discussion is a situation where one counted the Omer and made a mistake in his counting of either the days or the weeks, but not both. For example, on the 15th night of the Omer, he said, "Hayom Arba'a Asar Yom... She'hem Sheneh Shabuot Ve'yom Ehad" ("Today is the 14th day...which is two weeks and one day"), or "Hayom Hamisha Asar Yom...She'hem Sheneh Shabuot" ("Today is the 15th day...which is two weeks"). Meaning, he counted either the days or the weeks correctly, but the other was counted incorrectly. In our previous posting, we concluded that in such a case the individual is considered as though he missed a day of counting, and may thus no longer count the Omer with a Beracha. Unless he counted again, correctly, at some point that night or the following day, we said, he does not recite a Beracha when counting the Omer henceforth.

It was pointed out to me, however, that this is not the ruling of Hacham Ovadia Yosef. In Hazon Ovadia – Sefirat Ha'omer (p. 251), Hacham Ovadia writes that as long as one counted either the days or the weeks correctly, he may continue counting with a Beracha. This is also the ruling of the Mishna Berura (489:38, as Hacham Ovadia mentions in note 36). Therefore, I would like to retract the ruling issued in the previous posting, as the correct conclusion, following the ruling of Hacham Ovadia, is that in such a case one continues counting with a Beracha. Needless to say, one should make an effort to count both the days and weeks correctly, but nevertheless, if one counted either one of them incorrectly, as long as he counted the other correctly, he continues counting with a Beracha.

Summary: If one made a mistake in only part of the Sefirat Ha'omer counting, that is, he counted either the days or the weeks incorrectly, but counted the other part correctly, he continues counting with a Beracha henceforth, and is not considered as having missed a day of counting! 📌





















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