

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Tetzaveh

Tel: 815-301-1928

Fax: 815-301-1928

Email: shabbatshalomfax@gmail.com

ShabbatShalom.org

Insights into life, personal growth & Torah

11 Adar, 5780

Over **300,000** Readers Worldwide!

The Fax of Life

ת"וב

March 7, 2020

GOOD MORNING! Many people know that the three “cardinal sins” of Judaism are 1) murder 2) idol worship and 3) illicit sexual relations. But I am fairly certain that very few people know the sin that Jewish tradition (*Arachin* 15b) considers as severe as the three of them combined: the sin of gossip – also known as “*loshon hora*” or evil speech.

Loshon hora – gossip – is insidious, and yet the almost uncontrollable desire to repeat it is universal. In fact, the Talmud laments that nearly everyone one is guilty of some form of gossip (*Bava Basra* 165a). Unfortunately, it is so prevalent that people often take a cavalier attitude. I once had a friend tell me “I never repeat gossip – so listen carefully the first time!”

You may be aware that man’s first sin was disobeying God by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, but the first instance of gossip precedes even that! In *Genesis* (3:1-6) we find that the snake lures Chava (“Eve”) to eat from the Tree of Knowledge by telling her that the reason God prohibited man from eating from the Tree is because God knew that if man ate from it, then man would become God like.

Thus, the first instance of gossip is from the snake in the Garden of Eden and was the first evil act in the world. (Thirty years ago I remember reading a column from “Dear Abby” discussing all the terrible aspects of gossip and one of her points was that even the very name “gossip” hisses – which is unsurprising considering the original source.)

The snake, being dissatisfied with his place in the world, desired to be with Eve and wished to do away with Adam. The snake was aware that God had told Adam that he would die if he ate from the Tree of Knowledge (*Genesis* 2:17). So he plotted to do away with Adam by getting him to eat from what God had forbidden him to eat. Thus the original sin of *loshon hora* was utilized to try and eliminate a rival.

According to Jewish tradition (See Ramban *Genesis* 2:7) speech is the attribute that makes man absolutely unique in the animal kingdom. In Judaism, man isn’t referred to as a rational animal; rather man is called a “*medaber* – a creature of speech.” Speech isn’t merely communication, which many animals have mastered to varying degrees. The power of speech is that people can articulate ideas and thoughts that are reflective of their individuality and express them in a myriad of ways; to convey love, gratitude, empathy, and a host of other concepts.

After the Jewish people received the Torah on Mount Sinai they sinned with the incident of the Golden Calf. This transgression drove a wedge between them and God. In order to restore this relationship, God offered them the opportunity to build a home for Him to dwell within their midst. This “home” was known as the Tabernacle, and as we discussed last week, the entire nation participated in its construction. This was a place for the Jewish people to commune with God and bring Him sacrifices to express their desire to reconnect.

In this week’s Torah reading, we find a fascinating insight into the sin of *loshon hora* and what drives people to commit this very destructive sin. The Jerusalem Talmud points out that not only were the sacrifices that they brought an atonement for their sins, but even the clothes worn during the services by the priestly caste, known as *Cohanim* (which is the plural of *Cohen*), served as an atonement. The Talmud goes on to explain which clothes atoned for which sin.

One of the garments worn by the high priest was called “*me’il*” – it was a four cornered robe of sorts made of wool dyed sky blue and ringed along its bottom hem with thirty six golden bells. The purpose of these bells was to announce the comings and goings of the high priest as he entered the different rooms of the Tabernacle. The Talmud says that this particular clothing atoned for the sin of *loshon hora*. As the Talmud puts it “a clothing that makes sound will atone for the sin of sound (i.e. gossip).”

But this requires a deeper explanation. How is it that so serious a transgression is merely reduced to being a “sin of sound”? One would hardly think that the damage caused by evil speech should be reduced to merely being a violation of a noise ordinance! Moreover, in Judaism, in order to receive atonement there has to be a connection between the atonement and the sin, how do little tinkling bells indicate a lesson learned or offer any kind of atonement?

As previously mentioned, the snake, who introduced the concept of gossip into the world, was

driven by his dissatisfaction with his role in the world. He wanted more, and in fact he hoped to replace Adam as the primogenitor of mankind. But instead of developing himself he focused on destroying Adam so that he himself could rise.

Have you ever noticed what happens when a crowd suddenly hears a large noise? Everyone instinctively turns around to look for the source of the sound. Sound has a way of attracting attention. The Talmud is teaching us a very deep lesson here.

This self-serving intent of the snake is the same motivation that drives people to speak *loshon hora*. The person speaking *loshon hora* is looking to attract attention to himself and be compared favorably to the person who is the subject of the gossip. Their deep personal dissatisfaction with themselves is ameliorated by pushing others down. Essentially the offender is saying "look at me!" It is therefore **precisely** a sin of the principle of sound!


How then does the robe offer an atonement? The robe also serves to call attention to the wearer. The difference is that the sound of the tinkling of the bells is there to pay respect to the presence of Hashem. Meaning, the high priest is cognizant that the presence of God is immanent and that he is a visitor. The bells serve to announce his movements and serves to **respect** the presence of others. Thus, this atones for the sin of gossip, which essentially is trying to aggrandize oneself at the expense of another.

In fact, from the bells on the bottom of the robe of the high priest we learn that even when entering one's own home (when there are others within it), the proper etiquette is to knock on the door first. In other words, you're supposed to announce your arrival prior to entering. Meaning, you are calling attention to yourself to pay respect to the personal space of others (spouse, children, etc. within) and not just barge into their space. In this way, we learn to manage our own egos and respect the space of others.

Lastly, we should all remember that there are three things a person can talk about: 1) ideas 2) things and 3) other people. The highest level of conversation is to discuss ideas and concepts. That is the subject matter where we should strive to maintain the majority of our conversations. The next level down is to talk about things (e.g. cars, wealth, experiences, or current events), it is acceptable but not preferable.

The third category, that of talking about people, should be avoided in almost all circumstances, unless you are trying to prevent harm from befalling others. Most importantly we should consider choosing our friends based upon these guidelines of what they like to discuss, as it absolutely will tell you what quality of person they are.

TORAH PORTION: Tetzaveh, Exodus 27:20 - 30:10

 **The Torah** continues this week with the command to make for use in the *Mishkan*, the Portable Sanctuary -- oil for the Menorah and clothes for the *Cohanim*, the Priests. It then gives instruction for the consecration of the *Cohanim* and the Outer Altar. The portion concludes with instructions for constructing the Incense Altar.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 5:05 Miami 6:07 Guatemala 5:53 Hong Kong 6:12 Honolulu 6:19 Jo'Burg 6:14

 LA 5:36 London 5:35 Melbourne 7:34 Mex. City 6:25 New York 5:35 Singapore 7:00 Toronto 5:55 Moscow 5:57

"QUOTE OF THE WEEK": Gossip is when you hear something you like about someone you don't.
— Earl Wilson (famed gossip columnist)

In Honor of my Husband of 41 years.

Alan Altschuler

A kind, generous man of integrity.

Love, Rona



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

Honor a Loved One! Dedicate an edition of the Shabbat Shalom Fax ShabbatShalom.org (IRS# 65-0389241)

Friend of the Fax \$54 Benefactor \$118 Patron \$252 Fax Dedication \$360 Partner \$1,000
Shabbat Shalom Fax ● PO Box 402666 ● Miami Beach, FL 33140

To be removed: Send the name & fax number to: rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org — or ... fax/call: 815-301-1928