



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת תזריע תשס"ח • Parshas Tazria 5768

SECURE YOUR FORTUNE

Last week, we reflected on the immense volume of reward opportunities that Hashem, in His infinite goodness, provides for us. Through little or even no effort, a *Yid* can accrue phenomenal amounts of *s'char*. For instance, by refraining from consuming such disgusting creatures as ants and leeches--which one would have avoided anyway--a Jew receives reward worth more than all of the combined pleasures of this world. Additionally, by learning Torah for 10 minutes, he fulfills the equivalent of 1,226,000 *mitzvos* and is accorded the commensurate reward. These examples are merely the tip of the iceberg of the myriad daily possibilities of accumulating eternal merit.

The result of this extremely happy arrangement is the fact that each and every *Yid* who observes the Torah is in possession of a spiritual bank account of gargantuan proportions.

The hitch, however, is that there exists the possibility of erasing one's entire account in an instant. What a shame it would be to find out after it's too late that one's eternal fortune has been totally wiped out! Furthermore, as we shall see, the entire prize can be awarded to someone else.

How could this tragedy occur?

AVRAHAM'S WINDFALL

We actually find such a concept ascribed to Avraham Avinu. The Mishnah in *Avos* (5:2) states:

עֲשָׂרָה דוֹרוֹת מִנֶּחֱ וְעַד אַבְרָהָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ בְּמָה אֶרְךָ אַפִּים לְפָנָיו, שֶׁכָּל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ מְכַעֲסִין וְבָאִין, עַד שֶׁבָּא אַבְרָהָם וְקִבֵּל שְׂכָר כָּלָם.

“There were ten generations from the time of

Noach until the time of Avraham. This teaches us the extent of Hashem's sufferance. He tolerated their existence for all of this time, despite the fact that each generation would cause Him increasing displeasure through their wicked deeds. This state of affairs continued until finally, Avraham Avinu came along. His righteousness appeased Hashem; consequently, he was richly rewarded. In addition to reward for his personal deeds, he was also granted whatever merit the previous generations had accrued.”

Although the members of those generations were overall evildoers, here and there some of them may have performed a good deed. Yet, when they passed on to the Next World, eager to collect the reward for their (meager) meritorious acts, they discovered that not only were their coffers empty, but their deeds were credited to Avraham's account.

This week's *parshah* deals extensively with the depiction and laws of *tzara'as* (a type of skin condition). In doing so, the Torah illustrates the deleterious effects of *lashon hara* (derogatory gossip); for Chazal tell us (*Arachin 15b*) that *tzara'as* is brought on through the violation of this *aveirah*.

Aside from the affliction of *tzara'as*, other disastrous consequences result from *lashon hara* as well. In fact, it is through the offices of this sin that a person could forfeit the reward investment spoken of before.

A SCENARIO YOU'D LIKE TO AVOID

Many people, upon arriving in the next world, will be met with some real surprises--some pleasant, and some harrowing. The *Chovos Halevovos* (*Sha'ar Hakeniah, ch.7*) vividly portrays the proceedings

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before the Heavenly Tribunal. Here is a scenario based on his rendering:

Reuven and Shimon, standing before the Heavenly Tribunal, are shown their personal ledgers containing an account of the deeds they performed in this world. Upon opening his ledger of merits, Reuven is shocked to find record of numerous meritorious deeds that he had never performed!

"There are many righteous acts attributed to me here which I never did!" he exclaims. "What is the meaning of this? A mistake?"

"There is no mistake," the Beis Din answers. "Those extra deeds were performed by Shimon. On such and such a day, he was speaking with his friend, and he proceeded to speak lashon hara about you. At that moment, his merits were removed from him, and granted to you. That is why they are recorded in your ledger; you are entitled to the reward for those deeds, in addition to your own."

Of course, when it is Shimon's turn, he is in for a major disappointment. While perusing his ledger, he discovers--much to his chagrin--that many of the mitzvos that he performed in his lifetime are missing.

"Why is there so much blank space here?" he asks. "I davened three times a day, learned Torah, gave a lot of tzedaka; why isn't that recorded?"

"On such and such a day, you spoke lashon hara about Reuven," comes the reply. "That was quite foolish; by doing so, you gave him all of your merits!"

At this point, things go from bad to worse for Shimon. He now opens his ledger of aveiros to view the records of the sins he committed in his lifetime, for which he must now receive the appropriate punishments. Amongst the listed items, he discovers many aveiros which he never performed!

"What's going on here?" Shimon cries. "I haven't done half of this stuff! There must be some mistake!"

"Sorry, Mister, this is Heaven. There are no mistakes here. Why didn't you listen to your Rebbeim when they exhorted you to avoid speaking lashon hara? You knew it was a bad deal! When you spoke ill of Reuven, you swapped everything: he got your merits, and you took away his sins for yourself."

Reuven checks his demerit ledger. Sure enough, it is blank!


As in material matters, we need to protect our spiritual revenues. To be sure, refraining from evil gossip is no simple matter, but it can be done. Neglecting to do so can have devastating effects. Next week, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, we will discuss some strategies to safeguard our investment.

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