



## RAV BRAZIL PARSHAS VAEIRAH

## LASHON HARA – SHECHIN OR SHECHINAH YOUR CHOICE

The Medrash (Shmos Rabba 9,23) explains that the *Ten Makkos* were divided into four sections. The first three of *דָם צְפְרָדָע בְּנִים* which were on the earth were brought about by Aharon. The next three *בָּדָרָה וּחֹשֶׁךְ* which plagued the air and atmosphere were brought about by *Moshe Rabbeinu*. The remaining two *עֲרֹב דָבָר מִכְתַּבְרָוֹת* were brought about by Hashem. The remaining plague of *שְׁחִינָה* was brought about by all three. As the Medrash explains Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon take for yourselves two handfuls of ashes from a furnace and Aharon's ashes were placed miraculously into Moshe's hands as well. Moshe then threw the ashes heavenwards and Hashem transformed the ashes into *Shechin* - leprosy in the heavens and then it descended upon the land of *Mitzrayim* as a dust falling on the entire population and its livestock.

Why were the plagues divided amongst three implementers and why was the plague of *Shechin* shared by all three? The Minchas Ani answers that *Mitzrayim* sinned against the earthly body of *Am Yisrael* by their severe bondage that was forced upon them. They were therefore punished with the first three *Makkos* which were on the earth. They threw their children in the Nile brought to them punishment to them with *בָּדָרָה וּחֹשֶׁךְ* which struck in the atmosphere which is equally close both to the heaven (the neshmah) and the earth (the body). The third sin that they rebelled against Hashem was punished with *עֲרֹב דָבָר מִכְתַּבְרָוֹת* executed by Hashem alone.

The question that we have to deal with is why did the plague of *Shechin* come about specifically by all three of them? He answers that *Shechin* which is a type of *tzaraas* is given as the punishment for *Lashon Harah* (Vayikrah Rabba 17,3). Concerning every case of *Lashon Harah* (Eruvin 15b) *Chazal* say that the minimum of two people sin, the one who speaks *Lashon Harah* and the one who accepts it as true. The one who speaks *Lashon Harah* produces a severe *aveirah* in that it ascends all the way up to the *Kisay Hakavod*.

This explains why the *Makkah* of *Shechin* was set aside with its own category brought about by all three Moshe, Aharon, and Hashem. This was in order to convey the *severity* of the *aveirah* that it effects directly the one speaking, the listener, and Hashem. The reason why *Mitzrayim* was struck with *Shechin* was because they spoke *Lashon Harah* on *Am Yisrael*. They claimed *הַבָּה נִתְחַכֵּם לֹא וְנוֹסֶף גַּם הָא* which is translated to mean they made us look bad in their eyes by fabricating conspiracy theories and fake narratives. The name *פָּרָעָה* which consist of the two words *פָּה רָע* evil mouth, convey that it was him who spread these false accusations on *Am Yisrael*.

This is the reason why the first sign demonstrated to Pharaoh by Moshe and Aharon was his staff turning into a snake. The Primeval Snake was the first being to speak *Lashon Harah* against

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Hashem. He said to Chavah that Hashem ate from the *Aitz Hadaas* in order to enable himself to create the world. He therefore forbade you from eating from it because He fears competition from you. All *Lashon Harah* stems from this episode. Even the word שׁוֹן possesses the letters of נָחַשׁ. Moshe with his staff transforming into a snake was telling Pharaoh that you are being punished because you as the snake have spoken *Lashon Harah* on *Am Yisrael*. Your empire will collapse without anything to stand on just like the *Nachash* lost its feet and erect stance.

However, Pharaoh was not quick to acquiesce for he reasoned that *Yisrael* also speak *Lashon Harah*. You Moshe, fled from *Mitzrayim* for fear of death due to the *Lashon Harah* of Jewish informers. *Yisrael* could not get themselves freed from bondage if they themselves possessed the same flaw which they did. As *Chazal* say on the *passuk* אֲכַל נָדַע הַדָּבָר that Moshe after his confrontation with Dasan and Aviran who reported his killing of the *Mitzri* to Pharaoh commented and said now it is revealed to me the reason why *Yisrael* is still in bondage. It is because they speak *Lashon Harah* and thereby lack *achdus* amongst them which is presently restraining their exodus from *Mitzrayim*.

Little did Pharaoh know how Yosef came down to *Mitzrayim* as a slave for otherwise he would have become even more adamant in refusing *Yisrael* to leave the country. It was a story that incriminates his brothers with the *aveirah* of *Lashon Harah* towards Yosef that he conspired to remove them from being a part *Klal Yisrael* and to lose favor in the eyes of their father.

Therefore if their offspring still speak *Lashon Harah* today, they have not corrected their shortcoming which brought them down to *Mitzrayim* in the first place, However Pharaoh did not know that *Yisrael* already did *teshuva* on this particular *aveirah* and therefore they are truly redeemable from *Mitzrayim*. Many proofs have been brought to attest to their repair of *Lashon Harah*. The Medrash says that because of four reasons *Am Yisrael* were redeemed, they did not change their names, their clothing, their language and did not speak *Lashon Harah*. Secondly, during the night of *Maakas Bechoros* there was the phenomenon that no dogs barked even though there was not a house in which there did not occur a death which naturally triggers dogs to bark. *Chazal* Pesachim 118 say that one who speaks *Lashon Harah* should be thrown to the dogs. If it was true that *Yidden* have not yet corrected this particular *aveirah*, then the dogs surely would have barked. Thirdly, Hashem told the *Yidden* to borrow from the Egyptians golden and silver vessels to hold for a year until they leave and then take them with them during their exodus from Egypt. If *Yisrael* were so immersed in *Lashon Harah* neighbors would have told the Egyptian lenders that in reality they do not any intention to return all the riches back to them. Yet we find that *Yisrael* were described as leaving with a great wealth which demonstrated that no one spoke *Lashon Harah* on their neighbors.

This is the reason why we find by the plague of *Shechin* representing the *aveirah* of *Lashon Harah*, a novel detail that was absent by the first five *Makos*. By *Shechin* Hashem hardened his heart וַיַּחֲזַק ה' אֶל־לְבַדּוֹ in contrast to the previous plagues where we find that he himself hardened his own heart (see *Rishonim*). Rav Chisda says that one who speaks *Lashon Harah*

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removes the *Shechinah*'s presence from one's midst (Sota 42). This goes hand in hand with what we mentioned above that the sin of *Lashon Harah* causes a direct affront to the dignity of Hashem's *Shechinah* residing at the *Kisay Hakavod*.

This will explain why the *Pirkei D'Rav Eliezer* writes that by the severity of *Shechinah* we find that Pharaoh was never cured from it. Pharaoh the רע was the source of spreading his *Lashon Harah* concerning millions of *Am Yisrael* and spreading it to the entire *Mitzrayim* population. The massive quantity made it impossible to reverse and correct his evil wrong doing. Today with modern technology unfortunately a text or post can reach millions very quickly and cannot be retrieved once the damage is done.

Furthermore, פרעה was the embodiment of the *Nachash* and he is called snake (Yechezkail 29,3) *Chazal* say

א"ל הקב"ה אתה ספרת לה"ר סופך ללקות בצרעת שנאמר שם ויאמר ה' אלהים אל הנחש כי עשית זאת אחר אתה מכל הברhma במה אררו בצרעת שנאמר ויקרא יג כי צרעת ממאורת היא אמר רב הונא בשם רבי"ל הסלעים שהן על הנחש היא צרעתו ולא עוד אלא כל בעלי מומיון מתרפאין בעולם הבא והנחש אינו מתרפא שנאמר בראשית ג' אדור אתה מכל הברhma מכאן שהכל מתרפאין והוא אינו מתרפא Hashem cursed the *Nachash* with *tzaraas*. Rav Hunah said that is why the skin of the snake appears like *tzaraas*. All those that possess blemishes will have them cured in the future except for the snake. According to this *Chazal* we can say that since פרעה embodied the snake with *Lashon Harah*, his punishment of שחין will be everlasting just like the *Nachash*. Therefore one might have thought that since the punishment of *Shechinah* will not go away, Pharaoh would do *teshuvah* and wouldn't become stubborn as before in order to rid himself of the lingering *tzaraas* and then there would be no further need for the four future *Makkos*. Therefore Hashem hardened his heart in order to smite *Mitzrayim* with four more *Makkos* in order to build up to Ten correlating to the Ten sayings through which the world came into existence. Even Yaakov Avinu davened to Hashem to save him from speaking *Lashon Harah* as the Medrash says on this *passuk* (בראשית כח ב) (אם יהיה אלקים עמוני ושמרני בדרכ הזה אשר אנכי הולך).

The Chofetz Chaim explains

שלכך ביקש יעקב על עזון הרע בפרט כיון שהוא הילך לבן שהוא מקום סכינה והוא צריך שמירת ה' יתברך ובזעון לשון הרע השכינה מסתלקת לכך ביקש יעקב אם יהיה אלקים עמוני שישמרני שלא אחטא בעזון לשון הרע ואזacha שה' יהיה עמוני ושמרני וモבטח אני שאשוב בשילום בבית אבי

Yaakov's going to live and work by Lavan was a grave danger both physically and spiritually. Yaakov davened to be protected from speaking *Lashon Harah* because only then will Hashem be with him to protect and watch over him and bring him home in peace to his father. If we speak *Lashon Harah* then all the nations will spread *Lashon Harah* on us which places *Am Yisrael* in daily danger as we have seen an increase of episodes over the last few months of serious and precarious acts of Anti-Semitism. Are we doing enough as individuals of *Klal Yisrael*

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to stop their big mouths when we allow our own mouths to open up and speak the same *lashon hara* on our fellow *Yidden*. You can save the lives of our brethren by doing your part every day. Every day before you lies a choice of either Shechinah or Shechin. One cannot have a loose tongue and expect at the same time to have protection from Hashem. Even Yaakov with his greatest ruchniyus understood this very well and that is why he *davened* to Hashem to save him from this *aveirah*.