



Parsha Tazriah-Metzorah

The Charity Collector

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

With great admiration, people would call her “Liba the Collector.” It seemed all of Jerusalem’s residents knew the address of the great charity solicitor, and the great acts of kindness that took place in her home. That great woman was my righteous grandmother, my mother’s mother, Mrs. Feiga Liba Gutfarb, of blessed memory.

My grandmother was a charity collector who raised funds for Jerusalem’s poor. She would walk the city’s streets with dedication and a full heart, spreading her righteousness all the while. She regularly helped support Jerusalem’s many Torah scholars, including Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, who lived in our neighborhood. She also helped the great Rabbi Gershon Lapidot, of blessed memory, as well as many other great individuals.

It once became known to my grandmother that, due to high electric costs, the building manager at synagogue where Rabbi Lapidot studied, would turn off the synagogue’s lights at night. This left the building completely dark. Fearing the hours of potential Torah study that were being lost due to this practice, my grandmother arranged with the managers to have a special electric meter with her name on it, and she would pay its bill each and every month.

Every day my grandmother would prepare herself for her difficult job ahead, like the Woman of Valor described by King Solomon in Proverbs. Her work was definitely not simple; many doors were slammed in her face, but she proceeded courageously and with determination. The money she collected was often given directly to local grocery store owners and butchers, thus eliminating debts held by Jerusalem’s needy.

One day as my grandmother went on her collecting rounds, she was joined by another woman who also solicited charity for others. This other woman did tremendous acts of kindness, and often accompanied my grandmother on her outings.

It was a steamy summer day in Jerusalem. The two women passed a house where the door had been slammed in their faces many times. My grandmother said to her friend, “Perhaps we should try going there again?” Her friend made

a gesture with her hand as if to say, “There’s no reason for us to waste our time there,” and they continued on their way.

The matter was forgotten by my grandmother, and she continued in her holy work for the Jewish people for many years to come.

At the beginning of this week an assembly was held in southern Israel, to make people more aware of the laws of forbidden speech. I was asked to say a few words. I told the crowd the above story and added some ideas from the weekly Torah portion, which deals with the purity of speech. The Torah portion says, “This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: he shall be brought unto the priest.”

Our Rabbis tell us in Tractate *Arachin* (15b): “Rabbi Acha the son of Chanina says, ‘If a person related [forbidden speech], there is no remedy for him.’ King David, through prophetic inspiration, has already cut this person off, as it is written, ‘G-d will cut off all of the lips of flattery, the tongue that speaks great things.’”

This idea is amazing, I told the crowd. We know that nothing stands in the way of repentance. So why especially here, regarding the commandment to guard our speech, our Rabbis made an exception and said that a person who commits this sin cannot repent?

This has to do with the teaching that the “attributes of Hashem are measure for measure” (Tractate *Sanhedrin* 90a). Every punishment from heaven has hidden in it a spiritual message for a person to hear. When a person is sick or in pain, this can help him tune in to what needs fixing. This is because, in general, a physical illness can hint to a spiritual one.

This is how Rabbis have interpreted the words of King David, “And You, O Lord, have kindness, for You repay a man according to his deed.” If G-d rewards or punishes a person according to his or her deeds, where is the kindness in this? Our Rabbis have explained that the kindness of G-d is that He gives a person a sickness “according to his deed.” This reminds a person of what he wished to forget. The physical illness is similar, in its essence, to the spiritual misdeed that a person needs to fix.

This idea is, however, different regarding the sin of forbidden speech, where a person speaks inappropriately and assumes the act is insignificant. It's normal for a person to assume that his lips have not committed such a great sin; so what if he said a few unpleasant words about his friend?

Measure for measure, G-d brings upon this person a difficult, painful punishment, without revealing what the person's sin was. Just as the speaker hid his sin and decided he committed nothing wrong, G-d brings upon a trial that may not cause him to repent for the sin he committed.

This is what the Rabbis mean when they say, "The one who relates forbidden speech – has no remedy." With every other illness, a person has a chance to repent. This is not the case with forbidden speech; since the speaker does not feel he committed a sin, he will remain with both the misdeed and his illness.

One day, as my grandmother was carrying heavy baskets through an old Jerusalem neighborhood, she heard someone announcing the funeral of a great woman, one who was involved in charity and many acts of kindness. It was that of the well-known charity collector, who had accompanied my grandmother on her trips for many years.

My grandmother began sobbing bitterly. My mother, of blessed memory, never forgot how my grandmother mourned and cried over this woman, as if her own sister had passed away. For a long time, my grandmother could not be consoled over the loss of her dear friend.

A few days later, her friend appeared to my grandmother in a dream at night. She said, "I am not permitted to tell you all that I have gone through. Only this can I relate: do you remember, Liba, that spring day when we were going from door to door in the lower part of the Batei Warsaw neighborhood? You asked if we should knock on the door of that Jew's home, and I gestured with my hand that we shouldn't go there, remember?"

"Yes," my grandmother replied.

"For that one gesture, I have paid quite dearly," her friend said, and disappeared.

My mother would always tell us, "Denouncing something with the wave of a hand is similar to relating forbidden speech, and relating forbidden speech is like desecrating the Sabbath and committing murder. The act is just as severe. This is exactly what my grandmother's friend made sure to relate.