

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Portion of Kedoshim

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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About the Yad Avraham Institute

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita
Dean

1. Honoring and Revering One's Parents is Pivotal to the Entire Torah

The Torah states, **“Every man: your mother and father shall you revere. My Sabbaths shall you observe - I am Hashem, your G'd.”** Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin, which points out that regarding “honoring” one’s parents, the father is mentioned before the mother as it states, **“Honor your father and your mother.”** However, regarding “reverence” the mother is mentioned before the father, as it states, **“Your mother and father shall you revere.”** Why in each context does the Torah choose to differentiate regarding which parent is mentioned first? The Gemara explains that regarding the obligation to honor one’s parent, which entails the child providing food and feeding the parent, dressing the parent, and assisting him in other physical needs, the Torah mentions the father before the mother. The reason the father is mentioned first is that it is natural for a child to have affection and love for his mother to a greater degree than his father because the mother protects and provides all the physical and emotional amenities required by the child. In contrast, the father is more stern with his children (as a result of his expectation). Therefore, regarding the mitzvah of “honoring one’s parent” the Torah mentions the father before the mother to teach us, that although emotionally the child has a natural affinity to the mother because of what she provides for him; nevertheless, the child must honor his father no less than his mother.

In contrast, “reverence” is something that stems from how one esteems and quantifies another as a role model. Since the father is the authoritative figure and the provider, the child naturally esteems and reveres him. Therefore the Torah mentions the mother before the father regarding “reverence,” to teach us that although the child naturally reveres and esteems his father, he must have reverence for his mother no less than his father.

The Gemara explains that although there is a Torah obligation to revere one’s parents, one may think that if his father commands him to violate the Shabbos on

his behalf, he would be obligated to abide by his request. Thus, the Torah thus concludes **“I am Hashem, your G'd”** to teach us that although one has an obligation to honor one’s parent, his obligation to honor G'd supersedes the reverence of one’s parents, because they are also obligated to revere and honor G'd.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, regarding this verse, offers a profound insight. He explains that the credibility and authenticity of the Torah, is based on its immutable transmission from Sinai. As the Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshuah. Yehoshuah transmitted it to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly....” The transmission of Torah, from the time of Sinai, has been from father to son throughout the generations. Although the child was not actually present at the time of the giving of the Torah by G'd at Sinai, one must have absolute faith in what his father is teaching him is authentic and true as the Word of G'd in its original form. The only way to guarantee that a child will give special credence and value to the teachings of his father, is only if he truly reveres his parents within the dynamic of the hierarchy of the family. Thus, if the child is obligated to honor and revere his father and mother, he will give special value to the teachings of his parents. However, if one did not revere and see his parents in a special light, the transmission of the Torah from father to son would be in jeopardy, because the teachings of the father would not be valued to a greater degree than the stranger who shares information with him that lacks in its credibility. Therefore, the Torah obligates the child to honor and revere his parents to guarantee the ongoing transmission of the Torah in its purest form. If all the hierarchy of the family is in place, then the Shabbos, which is a testament that G'd is the Creator, will be observed. As it states **“...shall you revere. My Sabbaths shall you observe...”**

The first four of the Ten Commandments, which are written on the first tablet are mitzvot between man and G'd. However, the last of the five is to honor one’s father

and mother. Seemingly, it would be more appropriate to include this commandment with the other commandments on the second tablet that pertain to man's obligation to his fellow. Nevertheless, G'd chose to conclude the first tablet with the mitzvah of honoring one's parent. Why did He do so? It is because all of the commandments between man and G'd can only be observed and accepted as truth if one sufficiently honors his father and mother. If one honors his parents and sees them to be special, their teachings regarding one's obligation to G'd as a Jew will be established and secure.

2. *The Jewish People's Relevance to Eternity*

The Torah states, **“You shall be holy because I your G'd am holy.”** There is a positive commandment that a Jew must sanctify himself. It is to achieve a commonality with G'd. By sanctifying himself, the Jew will be able to have a special relationship with G'd, Who is holy. Rashi explains that the meaning of “sanctification” is referring to sanctifying oneself by distancing himself from forbidden sexual relations. Ramban explains, that one must sanctify himself by removing himself from things that are permitted to him. Although one is permitted to partake of the material, that is permitted by the Torah, one should only do so to the extent that what is absolutely necessary to maintain one's existence. By removing oneself from what is considered to be excess, one has relevance to G'd Who is totally spiritual. If one utilizes the material only to facilitate the spiritual then the value of the material is not classified as engaging in the material. However, if one allows himself to indulge in the material then it is engaging in the material as an end unto itself.

The Midrash states, “G'd said to the Jewish people, ‘Before I Created the world, the angels would praise Me through you. They would sanctify My Name with you.’ What would they say? ‘Blessed is G'd who is the G'd of Israel from this world to the world (referring to the world to come).’ When Adam came into existence the angels asked G'd, ‘When we bless You as the G'd of Israel, is this the one to whom we are referring?’ G'd responded, ‘No, it is not. He is a thief. I had commanded him not to eat from the Tree, yet he ate.’ When Noach came into existence the angels asked, ‘Is this the one to whom we are referring?’ G'd responded, ‘No, it is not. He is a drunkard. As it states, **‘He drank from the wine and became drunk....’** When Avraham came into being the angels asked, ‘Is this the one to whom we are referring?’ G'd responded, ‘No, it is not. He is an alien (*ger*). This is

because he fathered Yishmael.’ When Yitzchak was born the angels asked, ‘Is this the one?’ G'd responded, ‘No, it is not. He loved My enemy. Yitzchak loved his son Esav, who was evil and against Me.’ When Yaakov was born the angels asked, ‘Is this the one?’ G'd responded, ‘Yes, it is he. When you praise Me as the G'd of Israel, this is the one to whom you are referring. In addition, the entire Jewish people will assume his name- as they are known as ‘Israel (*Yisroel*).’ G'd sanctified the Jewish people with the name of Israel (Yaakov), saying, ‘I will be glorified through you. Since you have been sanctified through this name, even before the creation of the world, you must be holy because I am holy.’” Just as Yaakov is quantified by G'd as “Israel” the Jewish people, being his descendants are quantified by G'd as “Israel” meaning their destiny is the same as Yaakov's.

The original intent of Creation was, that man should not die, but rather he should live eternally as a physical/spiritual being. The Torah tells us that Adam and his descendants are subject to death because he had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. It was because he had eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, which contained within it evil that he could no longer be an eternal being. Before he ate of the Tree, he was the equivalent of what the Jewish ultimately people became, which was assuming the status of “Israel,” being totally spiritual. Although Adam is the father of mankind, because he sinned he was no longer qualified to fulfill the objective of Creation. The generations of righteous individuals that followed Adam such as Noach, Avraham, and Yitzchak were all special and were all of an exalted spiritual dimension; however, because each of them possessed a deficiency in their spirituality, they were disqualified from achieving the status of “Israel.” It was not until Yaakov that this dimension of person came into being. It is only through him and his descendants, the Jewish people could the objective of existence be fulfilled. Since the essence of the Jew is “Israel” he has relevance to eternity. As the Midrash tells us that the spiritual essence “Israel”, which is part of every Jew, existed before G'd created the world. It was only because of the sin of the golden calf that the Jew regressed and could no longer be an eternal being, in the physical sense because he had relevance to death. Had it not been for that grave sin, the Jewish people would have achieved the level of “Israel” in the ultimate sense, and brought the world to its state of perfection. Thus, the Jew is a spiritual being who lives within a physical context.

The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin states, “All Israel has a share in the world to come...” The world to

come is a location where one has an intimate relationship with G'd. Since the essence of the Jew is "Israel" which is spiritual, he has relevance to G'd and thus eternity. In contrast, the non-Jew does not have a share in the world to come, unless he ascends to the level of being a devout righteous gentile, which is still not at the level of "Israel. As it states in the verse, "It is only through you 'Israel' that My Name will be glorified."

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov wrestled with the archangel of Esav, G'd changed his name to "Israel." The name "Israel" signifies his dimension of mastership and dominance. G'd said, "You have lorded over man (Esav and Lavan) and G'd (the archangel). Therefore your name will be Israel" Sforno writes that Yaakov was able to defeat the angel because he was at a level where his mind and focus were not distracted G'd's Presence for a moment. King David writes in Psalms, "I have set G'd before me always..." Although, King David was cognizant of G'd's Presence continuously, the dimension of awareness and connection to the Divine Presence that Yaakov had was of another dimension. Yaakov was not vulnerable to the attack of the angel because of his all-consuming focus on the Divine Presence. It was only when the angel revealed to Yaakov that there would be generations of heretics among the Jewish people in the future, that the pain caused Yaakov to become distracted for a moment and thus the angel was able to injure him. The basis for his distraction was the pain due to the desecration of G'd's Name through his own children.

3. The Jewish people, a Mirror of G'd's Profile

The Torah states, "You shall be holy..." The Midrash cites a verse from Yehoshuah, " 'Elokim kedoshim hu (G'd is holy)... ' This verse may give credence to the heretics because it may give the impression that it is referring to two entities. The heretics ask Reb Simlai, 'If you claim that G'd is a single entity, then why does the verse refer to Him in the plural? It states 'kedushim (those that are holy) in the plural rather than stating 'kadosh (holy)' in the singular.' From this verse it is indicated that there are two separate entities. Reb Simlai answered them, 'There is no one more foolish and incoherent than you. If the verse had said, 'They are holy' then there would be basis for your claim and position. However the verse concludes, 'He' in the singular. If this is so then why does the verse use the term 'kedoshim (holy)' in the plural? Reb Brechya says, 'The word 'holy' is written in the plural because it is referring to the many

levels of holiness that G'd possesses. G'd is holy and exalted unto Himself in every aspect of holiness. All of His actions are holy. All of His speech is holy. All of His ways are holy. His approach is holy...His appearance is holy....Thus every aspect of His interaction with existence is holy. Therefore the verse uses the term 'kedoshim' in the plural to allude His Totality within the context of holiness."

The Midrash asks, "Why does G'd want the Jewish people to be holy? Because G'd said, 'I have attached you to My loins...' As it states in Yirmiyahu, 'Just as one's belt is attached to one's waist (to gird him) so too are the Jewish people attached to G'd.' G'd said to the Jewish people, 'I am not similar to the mortal king who does not permit his subjects to carry his name (which would be punishable by death)... However, you carry My Name. Every appellation to which I am referred, I have bestowed upon you.' For example, G'd is referred to as *Elokim*, so too does G'd refer to the Jewish people as *Elokim*. As it is stated in Psalms, 'I have said that you (the Jewish people) are Elokim.' G'd is referred to as *Chacham* (wise) and He refers to the Jewish people as *Chachamim*. G'd is referred to as *Dode* (Beloved) and He refers to the Jewish people as beloved... G'd is identified as *Chassid* (scrupulously pious) and He refers to His people as the scrupulously pious. G'd is referred to as *Kadosh* (holy) and He refers to the Jewish people as *Kadoshim* (holy). As it states, 'You shall be holy...' What is the significance of G'd identifying the Jewish people with His own appellations?

The Torah tells us that when G'd created Adam, He, "It is not good for man to be alone (a single being)..." Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that the reason G'd did not want Adam to be a single being on the terrestrial level because it would be said that just as there is one singular unique Being in heaven there is one singular unique being on earth. Therefore, there is a concern that they will begin to worship Adam since he reflects the uniqueness of the unity of G'd. Thus, G'd said, "I will create a helpmate to be with him" so that mankind could differentiate between man and G'd. Initially, G'd wanted the human being to fully reflect His Unity and Oneness. If Adam had not eaten of the Tree of Knowledge and retained the profile of G'd by reflecting all of His characteristics there was concern that he would be deified by mankind. G'd thus created a helpmate so that there should be two individuals who reflect G'd's characteristics to indicate that although there are multiple beings, ever in one of them reflect G'd. Meaning, the

multiple characteristics are reflected in One Being. Consequently, there is a representation of G'd on earth that dispels the misconception that the multiple characteristics emanate from multiple powers and deities.

The Jewish people, being chosen by G'd must reflect G'd's Unity and Oneness. As it states, "You are One and Your Name is One...Who is like Your people Israel, one people..." The Jewish people, accepting G'd as the omnipotent one and the All-Encompassing Being at Sinai, establish an understanding of G'd's Unity. This is the reason G'd bestowed upon them all the appellations of uniqueness by which He is depicted, upon the Jewish people. When the world perceives and sees the unity and uniqueness of the Jewish people, they will understand and appreciate the unity and oneness of G'd because they are His people who reflect their Maker. Because they are His chosen people they must maintain a holy posture to display every aspect of G'd as His representation on earth. Therefore there is a positive commandment, "**You shall be holy...**" for this purpose. What Adam was initially meant to accomplish by reflecting the multiple characteristics of G'd in His image and form, without the misconception that Adam is G'd, the Jewish people assumed their position in existence to reflect this fact.

4. The Spiritual Network, Comprised of Many Components

The Torah tells us that there is a positive commandment for a Jew to love his fellow as he loves himself. The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tell us that there were three gentiles who approached Shamai, the elder to be converted to Judaism. Each of them had a precondition for them to convert. Shamai, upon hearing their precondition, dismissed them and drove them out. They then went to Hillel, the elder who addressed all of their preconditions and subsequently, he converted them. One of the three gentiles who approached Hillel said, "I will only convert if you teach me the entire Torah while standing on one foot." Meaning he wanted Hillel to teach him the one principle that encompasses the entire Torah. Hillel responded to the gentile, "What you despise for yourself, to your fellow you shall not do, and the rest (of the Torah) is commentary on this principle. Now go and study the Torah."

The Midrash tells us a story of two people who were traveling together in a boat. One of them began to bore a hole under his seat. His fellow said to him, "What are you doing?" He responded, "Why does this matter

concern you? I am boring a hole under my seat not yours." His fellow replied, "Do you not understand, it does not matter under whose seat you bore the hole, it will cause the entire boat to sink thus drowning both of us!" This is the equivalent of the principle of loving one's fellow as one loves himself.

Ramak (Reb Moshe Cordeviro) in his work Tomer Dvorah explains the principle of "you shall love your fellow as you love yourself." He writes that all of the Jewish souls are part of one entity. Each individual soul is a component of this entity known as the Jewish people and each complements the other. All of the Jewish souls are connected and intertwined. When something positive is infused into this spiritual system of Jewish souls, then the entire entity is elevated. In contrast, if something negative is infused into the system (sin), it will be spiritually depleted. Therefore, a Jew must love his fellow because in essence, whatever he does to his fellow, he is in fact doing for himself (and all of the Jewish people). When one interacts with his fellow Jew, in a context in which the Torah prescribes one to interact, the entire spiritual system is elevated. If one does not, it will be depleted. If someone would know that something is harmful and detrimental to his own physicality or spirituality, he would not do it. Similarly, if one does something to his fellow, he is in essence doing it to himself. Thus the principle, "What you despise for yourself, do not do to your fellow."

There is a Torah obligation to rebuke one's fellow when his behavior is not in conformance with the Torah. It is to encourage him to what is proper and to refrain from doing something that is wrong. As the verse states, "**You shall surely rebuke your fellow.**" If one sees the child of another behaving in an unacceptable manner, he will not become pained and angered to discipline that child. However, if it were his own child behaving in a similar manner, he would reprimand and punish him as necessary because it is his child. Identically, there is an obligation to rebuke one's fellow and there is a principle that one must love his fellow as he loves himself. Just as he would refrain from doing a certain action because it would be detrimental to himself, the Jew should rebuke his fellow if he is doing something detrimental to himself.

Hillel told the gentile that in order for one to fully understand and appreciate what it means to love one's fellow, it is essential to engage in Torah study to understand what is permitted and not permitted. It is necessary to understand what is spiritually beneficial or destructive. Thus, one will be motivated to do what is right

and refrain from what is wrong. Just as for one to eat healthily, he must have some knowledge of nutrition, so too must one study the dictates of the Torah in order to understand what is positive or detrimental to one's spirituality. Engaging in Torah study does not only provide one with the understanding what is beneficial or detrimental, but rather there is something inherent in Torah study that spiritualizes and enlightens one to be able to appreciate what is truly good and truly evil. Torah study gives one a sense of clarity and illumination that allows him to be spiritualized and sense spirituality and be drawn to the good. If one's mind is imbued with Torah study and he is fully engaged in mitzvah performance, sensing the value of being a Jew in relationship to the Jewish people, will allow him to love his fellow as he loves himself.

5. *The Serious Consequences of One's Speech* (Tazria/Metzora)

The Torah dedicates two portions to all the laws of spiritual contamination that are associated with leprosy (tzaraas). Chofetz Chaim points out that although the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that if one becomes angry it is considered as if he is an idol worshipper, it is only an extrapolation from allusions in verses. In contrast, lashon harah (negative speech) and other prohibitions relating to one's speech are explicit negative commandments in the Torah. The Torah is specific regarding how one uses or misuses his power of speech and explains the tragic consequences if one were to misuse his power of speech. For example, if one speaks lashon harah, he will develop a lesion that the Kohen may pronounce as being contaminated. He will then need to go out of all the camps of Israel and remain in a solitary state until the repents and the Kohen pronounces him as being pure. It is possible that this person may never return to his family or be able to rejoin the Jewish people because of negative speech that he spoke. The average person cannot fathom the impact of his speech or the severity of misusing it.

The Gemara in Tractate Krisus tells us that a Kohen who is unstable (shote) has the ability to pronounce one with a lesion as being "contaminated." One can only become a leper through the pronouncement of the Kohen, even if the Kohen is unstable. We find throughout the Torah that the actions and words of one who is a "shote (unstable)" are not considered to be of any value because he is incompetent. However, regarding the pronouncement of the leper being contaminated, the words of the Kohen who is incompetent have value and can change one's status to being "contaminated." Rabbi Y.I. Rudderman z'tl

asks (Rosh HaYeshivah, Ner Israel, Baltimore) why is this the exception? Tosfos several interpretations of the Gemara. One interpretation is that when the Gemara uses the term "shote" it is referring to a Kohen who is uneducated and ignorant. He has no understanding whatsoever about the laws of leprosy. He does not have the capability to make the evaluation if a lesion is leprosy or not. However, he is able to go to a Torah sage who is proficient in these laws and ask him to make the evaluation. Once the Torah sage makes his evaluation the Kohen then pronounces the individual as being "contaminated" or "pure" although he does not have any understanding of the reason for his pronouncement. Another interpretation is that the Kohen "shote" is actually unstable.

Rabbi Y.I. Rudderman z'tl explains that when one speaks lashon harah he does not perceive his negative speech as being as serious or damaging as if he had taken physical action against his fellow. He dismisses the gravity of his transgression, "I only said a few words!" Chofetz Chaim writes that if one speaks lashon harah to another but the individual to whom he spoke does not listen to his evil words, nor does he accept anything that he said. Regardless of the fact that the lashon hara was not heard or accepted, and thus no damage resulted, the individual who spoke the lashon hara is culpable and needs to repent. He transgressed against G'd. Similarly, one becomes "contaminated" through the pronouncement of words from the Kohen. The Kohen need not understand the situation, competent, or be familiar with any of the laws of leprosy. He only needs to say the word "contaminated" and the individual assumes the status of a leper and needs to be sent out of all the camps. This reflects the power of speech.

Most people are conditioned to speak whatever is on their mind and they believe that they are doing the right thing by conveying their opinions about others, when in fact they are transgressing on a severe level. Chofetz Chaim writes that average people speak lashon hara because they believe that they are saying the truth and are thus not doing anything wrong. The Torah scholar may also speak lashon hara although he understands the laws that he is not permitted to share something negative even if it is not true, if it has no constructive value. How does the Torah scholar speak lashon hara if he understands the laws pertaining to its prohibition? One is permitted to speak negatively if one is truly evil "rasha." One is permitted to speak negatively regarding one who is a proven charlatan. It is even a mitzvah to expose such an individual. However, the process of making a true assessment about

another individual if he has a classification of the type of individual about whom it is permitted to speak negatively is extremely difficult and complex. The evil inclination could ensnare the Torah scholar to misjudge an individual. Chofetz Chaim explains that if one is in doubt about another, one must refrain from speaking negatively about them.

6. *The Atonement Process* (*Tazria/Metzora*)

The Torah states that after the leper recovers from his leprous state, **“The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.”** Rashi explains, “What is the symbolism of these items? Clean birds are brought because the individual initially became a leper because he “chirped” irresponsibly by speaking forbidden speech, *lashon harah*. Therefore, he will be purified through the bird that “chirps.” (Just as the chirping of the bird has no value, so too does the negative speech of an individual who speaks *lashon hara*). The cedar tree, which is something that is majestic, represents arrogance (one feels empowered to the point that he can say anything he chooses). The crimson thread (which is referred to as *tolaas shani* ‘the red worm’), represents a lowly creature. The hyssop is a low growing grass, which represents humility. The individual initially became a leper, because of his arrogant and haughty demeanor. What is the remedy to correct the transgression of haughty behavior? He must lower himself from his elevated state of haughtiness to the level of a lowly worm and low-lying grass. Only then will the leper be able recover from his spiritual deficiencies, which were an outgrowth of his lack of humility.”

Rabbeinu Bachya in his commentary at the beginning of the Portion of Vayikra explains that when one brings a sacrifice to atone for his sins, it entails three levels of involvement. When one brings the animal as a sin offering, there are three aspects of this atonement process: verbal confession (*vidui*), leaning on the animal (*smeecha*), and the burning of the innards of the animal (including the kidneys). The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim states, “If the sin offering was not predicated with repentance the sacrifice has no value. As it states in the verse, ‘The sacrifice of the evil is an abomination (*zevach reshaaim toivah*).’ Therefore, one must predicate the sin offering with repentance and verbal confession (*vidui*). Rabbeinu Bachya explains that when one sins, it involves three aspects of his being. Before the individual sins, he contemplates the wrong that he is about to transgress. In addition, there is some degree of verbalization, which is speech that is involved before one

sins. This is then followed by the actualization of the sin. Chazal tell us that the kidneys are organs that have relevance to one’s intellect. Therefore, in order to correct the sin of sinful contemplation, the kidneys of the animal must be burned as part of the sacrifice. The verbal confession is an atonement for the speech that preceded the sin and the leaning on the animal is to atone for the actual sin itself.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin in his work *Ruach Chaim* explains that a human being is comprised of three parts: the life source (*Nefesh*), spirit (*Ruach*), and soul (*Neshama*). All physical movement emanates from the *Nefesh* that is contained within the physical being. This life source is shared by all living creatures alike. *The Ruach* (spirit - which means wind) is the spirit that gives man the power of speech (ability of verbal expression). *The Neshama* is the essence of man that is spiritual, which is the basis for him to possess an intellect. When one sins, he must atone and correct and rehabilitate every aspect of his being. When one speaks *lashon hara*, he diminishes the “*ruach*” aspect of his being. He must therefore bring birds to correct the damage that he did to his “*ruach* (spirit).”

The power of speech is the discerning characteristic that differentiates the human being from all other living species. It is a verbal expression of one’s intellect. The Torah tells us at the time of Creation when G’d created man, the Torah states, **“Let us create Man in our image and form...G’d blew into Man’s (Adam) nostrils a Soul of Life, thus becoming a living being.”** Targum Onkeles (Aramaic translation) explains that the meaning of the words “a living being” is that man became “a speaking species.” We see from the Torah that man’s faculty of speech is a direct outgrowth of being infused with a spiritual element – the soul. When one speaks *lashon hara* he damages and putrefies the faculty that was endowed to him by G’d to assume the status of a human being whose purpose is to engage in Torah study and prayer. He must therefore correct the damage that he had brought about by speaking forbidden speech. By bringing birds of a kosher species that chirp, it will correct that deficiency.