

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
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*Parshas Tazria-Metzora*  
 April 18, 2007

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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**B"H**

## **Parshas Tazria-Metzora**

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**  
**Dean**

### **1. The Objective of Life**

The Portion begins with the laws pertaining to a woman who conceives and gives birth to a male. King David writes in Tehilim (Psalms), "Later and earlier You formed me..." The Midrash explains regarding this verse from Tehilim, "Later" refers to the fact that the human being was the last to be created in the order of creation. "Earlier" is referring to the fact that the human being was the first and only creature to be held culpable for his actions because he possesses free choice. If one succeeds because he fulfilled his objective in life by investing himself in spirituality, "they will say to him- You preceded all existence." Why is this so? It states in the verse (in the Portion of Bereishis), "The Spirit of G'd was hovering over the waters..." This refers to the soul (*neshama*), which was created before existence. However if one follows the path of materialism and is oblivious to his spirituality, "they will say to him – the flea preceded you in creation."

If one were to share this Midrash with any rational individual he would have difficulty comprehending the profundity of this message and seemingly, rightfully so. It is true that the flea may have preceded the human being in creation; however, the human species is more advanced in every aspect of his existence. Intellectually, creatively, and experientially, the human being far surpasses this insignificant creature, the flea.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains in his introduction to the Portion of Shimini, that the fact that man was introduced into creation only after it was completed is an indication that he is the most special. It is analogous to a builder constructing an elaborate home; only after the structure is fully completed and livable will he summon its residents. Thus, since all existence preceded man, it is an indication that it was created only for his sake. If so, it is understood that the flea was created before man. How then do we understand the words of King David?

Chazal tell us that the average person when he passes away has not even fulfilled half of his life's material desires and aspirations. As much as the individual persevered to fulfill his material desires, he will not succeed in accomplishing half of them. It is one's strong desire for material that drives and motivates him to pursue his aspirations despite the fact that he may not attain them at all. If one were able to extricate himself from his need to satisfy his desire, he would be able to objectively assess and understand the futility of the pursuit of a life that is singularly based on the material.

All existence was created to accommodate one's spiritual development. This is indicated by the fact that the creation of the Soul (*neshama*) preceded physical existence. However, regarding Man's relevance to purpose (which is the perfection of his spirituality), he was only introduced to creation when it was in a state of completion. However if one does not relate or understand his objective in existence, by pursuing the material, his level of accomplishment is even less than the flea that was created before him. The flea has minimal needs and functions fully as it is meant to do; thus, he achieves his purpose within material existence fully. However, the human who does not address his potential and lives as the intellectual animal – devoid of spirituality- he is culpable for his failing. His accomplishment is thus less than the flea that had preceded him.

The Midrash tells us that the human being has endless needs– whether it is on a developmental level or caring for his delicate requirements. He must be continuously assisted in attaining his sustenance and other personal amenities. An animal has no such difficulties. The human on the other hand was created to address his spiritual potential despite his physical context. Thus, it is in his best interest to invest his life in the pursuit of spirituality and not materialism.

## 2. Torah- Understanding the Blueprint for Existence

Rashi, at the beginning of the Portion of Tazria, cites the words of Reb Simlaee, “Just as the creation of man followed the creation of the domesticated, undomesticated animals, and the birds, so too the laws pertaining to these species (dietary laws) precede the laws pertaining to man.” What is the profundity of Reb Simlaee’s statement? The observation of Reb Simlaee is seemingly obvious.

The Midrash in the Portion of Bereishis states, “He Gazed into the Torah and Created the world.” The Torah itself is the blueprint for all existence. Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that the appellation “Torah,” which was chosen by G’d Himself to identify it, conveys to us its inherent purpose and value. This is “l’horos,” which means to give us direction in life. The Torah is not for the sake of intellectual pursuit; but rather, for understanding how one must invest his life in spirituality through its study and the observance of its mitzvos. If the Torah is a book of laws, which gives the Jew direction on how to lead his life, then what is its relevance to being the “blueprint” of Creation?

On the eve of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan (Pesach), the Torah requires one to consume matzah, which is made with one of the five grains (wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and buckwheat). The grain that qualifies for the making of matzah must be susceptible to the leavening process; therefore, its chemical composition must have this nature. Only five grains qualify for the making of matzah. In order for the mitzvos of the Torah to be relevant and fulfilled, creation had to be tailored specifically to accommodate all the positive and Negative Commandments. Kosher species of animals must have hides because the Torah tells us that the only material that qualifies to be fashioned into tefillin is the hide of a kosher species. This is meaning of the words of Chazal - “He Gazed into the Torah and Created the world.” Every aspect of creation only exists because it has some degree of relevance to the fulfillment of the Torah.

The Torah tells us that there is a Negative Commandment that one is not permitted to add or detract from the Torah. There is nothing lacking or superfluous in the Torah. It is perfect in every respect. Since existence was created only to be the setting for the fulfillment of the Torah, then it must be that there is nothing superfluous in creation.

The order of Creation signifies that all existence was created to accommodate man who was the last to be brought into existence. In order for man to fulfill his purpose, he needed to be introduced into a world that had all the elements that he required to fulfill his purpose. The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that G’d created birds with multicolored plumage and food with many tastes to accommodate the needs of man. Man could not function on an optimal level if the entire world was of uniform appearance and all his sustenance had the same taste. The purpose of this variety is not to accommodate man’s physical needs, but rather to create a setting for him to maximize on his potential as a spiritual being - who exists within a physical context. Just as the context of existence is only to accommodate the Torah, in a spiritual sense, so too the context of man is not for his physicality but rather to accommodate his spiritual needs.

Reb Simlaee is communicating to us the understanding that just as all species which preceded man, have relevance to existence only within the context of the laws which pertain to them (which is the Torah itself, so too, the relevance of man to existence is not his physicality but rather the laws which pertain to him.

Rashi explains that until the creation of the human being, the appellation that is chosen for G’d is Elokim, which connotes the Attribute of Justice. However after the creation of man, the Torah refers to G’d as Hashem Elokim, which is the coalescing of the Attribute of Justice with the Attribute of Mercy because G’d saw that the world could not continue to exist within the context of Justice (because man is prone to fail). What relevance does the Attribute of Justice have to the creation of the world? As we had explained earlier, the Torah itself is perfect – there is nothing superfluous in it. It is exact and precise. Since the Torah is the blueprint for existence, the process of creation had to come about in the most exacting and precise manner- Attribute of Justice. This further demonstrates that the world was created in a state of perfection only to accommodate the Torah, which is perfect and complete. Material existence is only to accommodate our spiritual development.

## 3. The Eternal Blessing of G’d

The verse in Tehillim states, “He (G’d) does not associate Himself with *ra* (negative/evil).” The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that there is nothing negative that is associated with G’d. Ramchal explains that evil

does not emanate from G'd. Rather, evil only exists because of G'd withdrawing Himself. The vacuum that remains is *ra*.

The Midrash states, "The Name of G'd is not associated with anything which is *ra*. He only associates His Name with something that is good (*tov*). As we find when G'd Created "light" and "darkness," He associated His Name with "light" and not with "darkness." As the verse states, "And G'd called light "day" and darkness "night." (The Name of G'd is not associated with night – which has an ominous connotation). Additionally when G'd Created Adam and Chava the Torah states, "G'd blessed them." However, when G'd cursed them after they sinned, His Name is not mentioned. Our Rabbis tell us that there are three exceptions in which the Name of G'd is associated with something that appears to be negative. The first is the *meisis* (the seducer), as the Torah tells us regarding the snake who seduced Chava and convinced her to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. The second is one who does not abide by the words of the Chachamim (Rabbis); As King Solomon states in Mishlei (Proverbs), "The one who breaches the fence (words of the Chachamim) should be bitten by a snake." Finally, the Name of G'd is associated in the negative with the one who puts his faith in man, a mere mortal and blood, and not in G'd. As it states, "G'd said, 'cursed is the one who relies on man...'" These are the three instances where G'd associates His Name in a negative context.

Rambam states that one of the criteria for determining a true prophet of G'd is that he must accurately forecast the future. If the prophet forecasts that a blessing is to come about and it does not, then it is confirmed that he is a false prophet. However, if the prophecy was regarding something negative that was to take place and it does not, it is not an indication that he is a false prophet. This is because G'd's mercy may have changed the course of events and did not allow the negative to transpire. However, regarding something positive, if in fact something good was meant to occur and a prophet expressed it, G'd will not retract from that prophecy.

When G'd associates His Name with something then it is not retractable because just as He is eternal and limitless so too anything associated with His Name must come to be. Thus, if His Name is associated with a curse, it could be retracted. G'd does not associate His Name with a curse because there is always a possibility that the Attribute of Mercy would intercede and overturn it based

on the possibility of the subject doing teshuvah (repentance).

G'd's Name is associated with something negative in three exceptions. These are examples of situations that should not be allowed to exist. For example, the *meisis* (the seducer) does not have any positive or redeeming qualities. G'd cannot tolerate the seducer – as we find regarding the snake in the Garden of Eden. Additionally, G'd's Name is associated with cursing the one who does not abide by the fences of the Chachamim. Rabbeinu Yonah in his work *Shaarei Teshuvah* (Gates of Repentance) cites the words of Chazal, "The words of the Chachamim are even more beloved than the wine of the Torah (to G'd)."

The underlying purpose of the mitzvos in the Torah is to bring one to a level of *yiras shamayim* (fear of heaven). As Rabbeinu Yonah states, "All mitzvos are the equivalent of appetizers (*parparos*) to *yiras shamayim*." The Chachamim legislated fences to protect one from inadvertently transgressing the Torah prohibition. Thus, if one abides and adheres to the Rabbinic fence, it is even a greater expression of fear of heaven. The laws themselves, which are the words of G'd, are less of a demonstration of *yiras shamayim* because they are G'd's dictate. However to avoid transgressing something that is not G'd's dictate, but out of a concern that one "may" transgress the Will of G'd – is a greater demonstration of *yiras shamayim*. If it were not for the fences established by the Chachamim, the Jew over time would inevitably violate the Torah law itself. Thus, the Torah would be negated and nullified. Therefore if one does not abide by the fences legislated by the Chachamim, he is undermining the eternity of Torah. The Name of G'd is associated with cursing this individual because he is deserving of a curse that cannot be retracted because he is attempting to undermine the eternal Torah.

Similarly, one who places his faith in man, the mere mortal, and not in G'd, is undermining and denying the eternal Omnipotence of G'd. He is denying the eternal source of blessing, which is G'd Himself. Thus, the curse that comes upon him is one that is not retractable.

Despite the fact that G'd does not associate His Name with *ra*, the Mishna in Tractate Berachos tells us that just as one must acknowledge G'd for the good, he must acknowledge Him for the bad. Just as one recites the Shehecheyanu Blessing when good fortune comes upon him, one recites the "Dayan Ha'Emmes – Blessed is the True Judge" when tragedy befalls him. The fact that G'd does not associate His Name with *ra* is from His point

of view. However, from our perspective we need to acknowledge that everything that comes from G'd is for the best and it is in our best interest. Thus, the Name of G'd, in this context of recognizing its value, is in essence good.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah gives an example of one who initially curses G'd when difficulties befall him and then blesses Him after he discovers that the seeming difficulty was in fact the greatest blessing of his life. A person was about to embark on his yearly purchasing trip which was vital for his livelihood. However, on the way to the port, his cart became disabled. He initially was enraged with G'd and cursed Him because he was going to miss the departure of the boat and consequently he would not have a livelihood for the upcoming year. Later he is informed that the boat he intended to board sank in the ocean. Upon receiving this information, he blessed G'd for his good fortune that his cart became disabled – which caused him to miss the doomed voyage.

The essence of whatever comes upon us in life is good, despite the fact that the situation may initially appear to us as negative. If one recognizes that whatever he experiences in life (for the good or for the bad), despite his lack of understanding, is ultimately in his best interest, then his life is experienced as “blessing.” However, if one cannot acknowledge that the negative is also for his good, then it is truly *ra*.

#### 4. The Pitfall of One's Ego

The Torah states, **“This shall be the law of the metzora (leper) on the day of his purification: He shall be brought to the Kohen. ...the Kohen shall look, and behold! – the tzaraas (leprosy) affliction had been healed from the metzora. The Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, clean birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop.”** What is the symbolism of the species that are needed for the purification of the metzora?

Rashi explains that since the metzora initially contracted tzaraas (leprosy) because he “chirped/chattered” like the bird, by speaking words of no value which were in fact negative (*lashon hara*), he must take birds on the day of his purification (which also chirp). Rashi explains further that one becomes a leper because of his arrogance. When one is arrogant and self-centered, he feels that he is entitled to express himself in a manner that

he chooses without any consideration for his fellow. Since he does not value his fellow, he speaks negatively about him (*lashon hara*). Thus, the leper on the day of his purification must take wood from a cedar tree, which stands tall, and towers above other trees – just as the individual believed that he towered above his fellow. Additionally, the leper must take the hyssop, which is a lowly lying grass. The hyssop symbolizes lowliness and humility –which is a quality needed the leper to recover from his leprous state. Similarly, the metzora must take a crimson thread, which is referred to as “*tolaas shani*” which literally means “a red worm.” This is a lowly creature. The leper takes these species in order to atone for his failing for not being humble.

Kli Yakar explains that the meaning of “the day of his purification” is the day that the metzora comes to the recognition of his spiritual failing. This is the beginning of the process that ultimately will allow the Kohen to come to examine him. Until that moment, he is steeped in his failing, which is haughtiness. It is only when he does teshuvah (repents) that he can recover. As all the Commentators explain, the tzaraas (leprosy) that is mentioned in the Torah is not a degenerative physical ailment. It is a condition that comes about because of a specific spiritual failing, namely - *lashon hara* (negative speech). Chofetz Chaim explains that *lashon hara* emanates from one's self-centered arrogance.

The Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us that G'd says that the world is not large enough to accommodate Him and the one who is arrogant. Thus, G'd withdraws from that individual. The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that one of the individuals that G'd cannot tolerate is the poor man who is arrogant. At least one could understand the basis for the arrogance of the wealthy man. However, what is the source of arrogance in the needy individual? Why is arrogance considered so contrary to G'd's existence?

The Torah tells us (at the beginning of the Book of Shemos) that Moshe had said to Pharaoh in the Name of G'd, “To what point are you refusing to be humbled (*lei aanos*)...” Rashi explains that the word “*lei aanos*” is derived from the word “*aanie*” – poor man. Just as the poor man is humble because he recognizes his neediness, so too, Pharaoh needed to recognize that G'd is the dominant force and that he is only a beneficiary of His goodness.

Arrogance interferes with one's ability to process and understand the world for what it is. The world exists because of G'd's Kindness and He is the source of all

goodness. The haughty individual does not recognize this. Even when he performs G'd's mitzvos, he does so for his own benefit and not for the sake of G'd. One who serves G'd solely for the sake of reward does so only because of self-interest. The Gemara tells us that the value of performing a mitzvah or good deed without having the proper intent (shelo l'shmah) is that it has the potential to bring about the performance of a mitzvah with the proper intent (l'shmah) – which is for the sake of G'd.

Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, despite G'd's commandment not to do so, only because of his own ego. As it is stated, "Man was created as a singular unit." This could be misunderstood to mean that man is unique and special because of his own abilities and thus be self-serving. With this perspective, one could justify speaking in any manner that he so chooses – despite the negative consequence to his fellow. The Gemara tells us that if one speaks lashon hara, he will contract tzaraas (leprosy), which can only be remedied through teshuvah and no other human means. This teshuvah process clearly confirms to the individual that the only way he can progress in life is if G'd Will's it to be.

When Yaakov our Patriarch had fled from his brother Esav to Lavan, he prayed that G'd should protect him. The Midrash tells us that he had prayed to be protected from adultery, murder, idolatry, and lashon hara. How could one's concern for being subject to speaking lashon hara be within the same classification as the concern for violating the three Cardinal Sins (adultery, murder, and idolatry)? When one speaks negatively about another without any concern about the consequences, he can only do so if he does not value the essence of the other individual's existence. The devaluation of another is rooted in one's arrogance. If one comes to the point of devaluating an individual through lashon hara it can ultimately come lead to something more serious. Because if one does not value the other person's existence – as is indicated by his negative verbal expression – he may not value him to the point of even considering taking his life or committing adultery with his wife. Similarly, the negative characteristic of arrogance may ultimately cause one to choose to become a pagan because paganism is self-serving. Lashon hara, an expression of one's arrogance, is the first step in the direction, which can ultimately cause one to violate the three Cardinal Sins. Yaakov understood the root of all evil – ego/arrogance and thus prayed that G'd should protect him from adultery, murder, idolatry, and lashon hara.

## 5. The Human Being – a Composite of Physical and Spiritual

The Torah tells us that the Kohen is the only person qualified for evaluating lesions and determining whether they are leprous or not. The pronouncement of the Kohen of either "*tamei* - contaminated" or "*tahor*-pure" determines the status of that individual. If the Kohen pronounces the person as contaminated then he is classified as a leper and must be sent out of all the camps of Israel. He must remain there in a solitary state and is not permitted to interact with other individuals. In order for the leper to be reinstated into the camp of Israel, the lesion must heal and only then can the Kohen pronounce him as "pure" to be reinstated. The Gemara tells us that the cause of *tzaras* (leprosy) is *lashon hara* (evil speech).

The Commentators explain that the leprosy discussed in the Torah is not the degenerative disease that we know as leprosy, but rather it is a lesion of a particular color that develops on the skin. The leprosy discussed in the Torah no longer exists. It is interesting to note that the Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos* states, "There is no death without sin." Meaning, spiritual deficiencies manifest themselves in the degeneration of one's physical well-being. This is true regarding every sin except for *lashon hara*, which does not cause a breakdown of the physical but only a discoloration of the skin. When the *tzaras* lesion develops it is a confirmation from G'd that this person has failed in the area of *lashon hara*. Why should the sin of *lashon hara* manifest itself differently than other spiritual failings?

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that at the end of time the animals of the forest will put the snake on trial. They will say in an accusatory manner to the snake, "The lion tramples its prey and devours it to satisfy its hunger. The bear kills its prey and takes it back to its den to devour it. Each creature kills and devours its prey to satisfy its hunger and maintain its existence; however, you (the snake) bite your victim and slither away without necessarily consuming it. What benefit do you have from victimizing your victim?" The snake responds, "Why should I be more culpable than man who speaks *lashon hara*?" The person who speaks *lashon hara* also victimizes his victim without having any physical benefit. The snake continues by saying, "Why should I be vilified more than the human being? Why is my failing greater than his?" Why is the need to satisfy one's desire to speak *lashon hara* any less than a need to want to satisfy his physical desire?

A human being is a composite of the physical and the spiritual. The body represents the animal. All the animalistic drives emanate from the physicality of the human being. The soul (*neshama*) is the spirituality of the human being. The *neshama* has no interest in anything unless it has some relevance to spirituality. Therefore, when one fails spiritually and sins, it is attributed to the physicality of the person – not the spirituality. The claim the animals of the forest against the snake was that its need is not found within the animal makeup. The animal drive has relevance only to satisfy a physical need – not some other level of satisfaction. Thus, the snake's desire to bite its victim and slither off without having any physical benefit is an anathema. It is something that is intrinsically evil. We can understand the snake's response to be, "I am no more culpable than the human being who speaks *lashon hara*, which does not emanate from his physicality, because it is something that has no relevance to the animal."

Since *lashon hara* does not emanate from the physical (animalistic) need, its consequences do not manifest themselves in a typically physical nature. Thus, the lesion is not something that is degenerative, but rather it is only an indicator that there is a serious spiritual deficiency. The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that Torah itself can be either a "Potion of Life" or a "Potion of Death". If one studies the Torah for its own sake (*l'shma*) it is a life potion. On the other hand if one studies the Torah not for its own sake (as *Tosfos* explains with an evil or sinister intent to undermine another), then it is a death potion. Torah studied with the sinister intent has a commonality with *lashon hara*. Just as *lashon hara* does not emanate from the physical but rather from something inherently evil in the person, identically Torah studied with a sinister intent is unrelated to the physical but emanates from the same evil within the person.

If one would recognize his own failings, he would not speak negatively about another individual. The only reason one does speak *lashon hara* is because he does not appreciate and understand to what degree he himself is flawed. As a spiritual being, a person does focus on the positive aspects of another. When one speaks *lashon hara* it impacts most seriously on his spirituality as we explained because of where it emanates from – he must be sent out of all the camps. He only returns and is reinstated when he reflects and introspects regarding his failings.

## 6. The Consequence of Recognizing One's Failing

The Torah states regarding the person who develops a lesion resembling that of leprosy, "**The Kohen must see him...**" Sforno explains in his commentary that the contaminated or pure status of the *mitzora* can only come about through the pronouncement of the Kohen. The qualification of the Kohen is based on a verse in *Malachi*, "The lips of the Kohen are the keepers of the *daas* (wisdom/Torah)." After the Kohen pronounces the individual as *tamei* (contaminated), he instructs the leper how to introspect and reflect on his behavior because *tzaras* (leprosy) only comes about because of a spiritual failing. The Kohen instructs him to pray that his *teshuvah* (repentance) should be received by G'd and the Kohen will pray on his behalf as well. The Talmud tells us that *tzaras* is a "*Mizbeach kapara* – an altar of atonement." The state of leprosy sensitizes the person to appreciate his failing and make the proper corrections. When the individual is pronounced a leper, he is sent outside of all the camps.

After the person is pronounced to be a leper and is sent out of all the camps, the Torah states, "**And the person with tzaras in whom there is the affliction – his garments shall be torn, the hair on his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cloak himself up to his lips; he is to call out "Contaminated! Contaminated!"**" Rashi explains that he must conduct himself as one who is in a state of mourning. The leper becomes a pariah and is not permitted to return to the camp until his recovery. This entire process is to cause the leper to appreciate the wrong that he has done and to allow him to atone for it.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLashon* (Guarding One's Tongue), that when Moshe was engaged in dialogue with G'd at the burning bush, he had said regarding the Jewish people, "They will not listen to me. They will not believe me." G'd said to Moshe to throw his staff on the ground and it became a snake. Then Moshe was told to put his hand onto his chest area and it became leprous. The symbolism of the snake and the leprosy was to communicate to Moshe that firstly he assumed the posture of the snake by speaking *lashon hara* against the Jewish people. Secondly, his hand becoming leprous demonstrated that *tzaras* is the consequence of speaking *lashon hara*.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that G'd said to Moshe to take hold of the tail of the snake, and Moshe did so immediately. When Moshe took hold of its tail, the snake

reverted into a staff. Usually taking hold of the tail of a snake leaves one more susceptible for being bitten; however, Moshe took hold of the tail without hesitation. Moshe did so because he fully appreciated and understood that he had sinned by speaking *lashon hara*, thus he wished to atone immediately. Because he fully recognized his failing he was not bitten by the snake, rather it reverted back to a staff – indicating that he had been atoned. The Chofetz Chaim concludes based on this that recognition and admission of one's spiritual failing is in itself a basis for atonement.

We find this also to be the case regarding the brothers of Yosef. The Torah tells us that Yosef's brothers realized that their difficulties in Egypt were not due to the accusations of the Viceroy of Egypt but to G'd meting out Justice for their past spiritual failing. Initially when they had sold their brother Yosef into slavery they were convinced that they had acted correctly. However, their difficulties in Egypt caused them to realize their misconception. This realization was their atonement.

The way one silences prosecution (from satan) is to acknowledge one's guilt. If the prosecutor is prosecuting and one admits his own guilt, the prosecutor has no reason to prosecute any longer. Judgment comes about because of prosecution.

The Rabbis legislated that whenever (G'd forbid) tragedies come upon a Jew, he must say the blessing of, "*Baruch Dayan HaEmes* – Blessed is the True Judge!" One must understand that his difficulties are not because of physical matters, economic conditions, or anything other than G'd's Judgment because of his own spiritual failing. When one declares "*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*," he is acknowledging that Judgment of G'd is truthful and is thereby admitting his failing. If a person truly internalized this fact he would silence prosecution against him and be atoned. This is similar to the leper introspecting and thus recognizing his failing through the instruction of the Kohen. The Rabbis understood the value of acknowledging this reality. Therefore, they enacted the recitation of "*Baruch Dayan HaEmes*."

Thus, if one experiences difficulties, the sooner he acknowledges and recognizes the basis for his problem, the sooner he will recover. It is the recognition of the problem that initiates the rehabilitation.

## 7. The Discerning Element Between a Torah Scholar and a Torah Sage

The Gemara tells us that Rebbe Akiva had 24,000 students (talmidim) who were the Torah sages of that generation. During the period between Pesach and Shavuos, all 24,000 passed away. There is a discussion among the commentators as to when the students began dying and when they stopped. Everyone agrees that they perished over a 33-day period. The Gemara tells us that after they had passed away the world was considered desolate. Other than Rebbe Akiva, there were no more Torah sages.

The Gemara explains that the reason all the students of Rebbe Akiva passed away in such a short period was that "They did not conduct themselves with proper respect towards one another." The students of Rebbe Akiva were the most advanced Torah sages of that generation. Thus, it is not possible to even consider that they were disrespectful to one another. In addition, had Rebbe Akiva noticed any inappropriate behavior among his students he would have rebuked them. Evidently, the failing must have been so subtle that even Rebbe Akiva was not able to detect it. How do we understand the Gemara's statement that the students of Rebbe Akiva passed away because they did not respect one another?

The students of Rebbe Akiva were most certainly respectful to one another. However, there is a subtle aspect to which they were not sensitive. All of the students had a special dimension of Torah scholarship; however, there were slight shades of differences between each of them. When one accords respect to a Torah sage it must be appropriate to the individual's level of Torah. The Torah Sages neither addressed or acknowledged the subtle differences of greatness between them, and thus ignored these distinctions. They treated each other with the same level of respect, which was not sufficient. They should have accorded one another the appropriate level of respect commensurate with each individual's greatness. Why were the students of Rebbe Akiva held to such a standard of liability for a seemingly minor infraction?

Reb Aaron Kotler z'tl explains that the students of Rebbe Akiva were the sages who were responsible for the transmission of Torah to the future generations. They had the responsibility of communicating to the Jewish people what Torah is and is not. However, if they did not have the sensitivity to evaluate the nuances between their different levels of Torah and act accordingly, then they were not



qualified for this awesome task. Since they did not recognize the subtleties between themselves, it was an indication that they did not have the necessary level of discernment to transmit Torah with the accuracy that was necessary. Their passing had nothing to do with their level of Torah knowledge, rather it was because they did not qualify to be the transmitters of Torah. Had they not passed away, the Torah that they would have communicated would have been deficient.

One could be a Torah scholar and possess an enormous amount of knowledge, but he may not necessarily qualify as a Gadol b'Torah (Torah Sage). A Torah sage is another dimension of person. He has the sensitivity and ability to weigh and evaluate all situations and see the far-reaching consequences that will evolve into the future. He can perceive with clarity how his decisions will impact on the Jewish people. This is the difference between a Torah scholar and a Torah Sage.

#### **YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE**

##### **Monday Through Friday**

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos (Maharal)
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar – Nefesh HaChaim
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna - Rabbi Rovner
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi
2:00pm	Mincha

##### **Special Weekday Classes**

###### ***Monday***

- 11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Taanis**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street
- 12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**  
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue  
Between E.51<sup>st</sup> and E.52<sup>st</sup>

###### ***Tuesday***

- 12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

###### ***Wednesday***

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Taanis**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street
- 1:00—2:00 pm **Daas Tevunos**  
Location: Yad Avraham

###### ***Thursday***

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Taanis** Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL)