

Metzora

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The laws of purification from *tzora'as* seemingly have little to do with *Shabbos HaGadol*. True, Moshe himself became a *metzora* on *Har Sinai* when he spoke badly about the Jewish people:

“... *his hand was leprous like snow*” (*Shemos* 4:7): It is usual for *tzora'as* to be white [as it says:] “*If it will be a white blemish*” (*Vayikra* 13:4). With this sign He (God) also hinted to him (Moshe) that he spoke slanderously when he said, “*They will not believe me.*” It is for this reason that He afflicted him with *tzora'as*, just as Miriam was for speaking slanderously. (*Rashi*)

But that seems to have been more incidental to the story, not a central part of it, right? Maybe not. On a *Pshat* level perhaps, and that is the level *Rashi* speaks on. On a deeper level, actually not.

After all, *Pesach* is *peh sach*, the *mouth that spoke*. Pharaoh is *peh ra*, the *evil mouth*. Moshe complained about having *uncircumcised lips*, which he felt made him unfit to redeem the nation. The Jewish people finally escaped the Egyptian people at *Pi HaChiros*, the *mouth of the freedom*. That's a lot of mouths in the redemption story.

Maybe it has something to do with this:

Berurya came and found a student learning Torah in a whisper rather than out loud. She smacked him and said to him: “Isn't it written: ‘*Ordered in all things and secure*’ (II *Shmuel* 23:5), that is, if [Torah is] ‘ordered’ in your 248 limbs, it will be secure (i.e., not forgotten), and if not, it will not be secure.” (*Eiruvin* 53b)

It's true. Everyone who has learned anything knows that there is something different about letting your mouth speak and your ears hear what your eyes are seeing. It's as if the information resonates more with the person, and affects more parts of them, somehow making what was learned a more memorable experience.

But even if a person jumps and down and acts out what they are learning, which definitely helps a person to be more connected to the information, there is something unique about speech itself. This is especially so since the *Gemora* says God only made a *bris* with the Jewish people because of *Torah Sh'b'al Peh*, the Oral Law (*Gittin* 60b). According to the *Arizal*, learning the Oral Law is transformative:

A person who only performs *mitzvos* merits [access to] the [level of soul called] *Nefesh*, which corresponds to [the level] called *Asiyah*, but not more. . . [But] a *Nefesh* without *Ruach* . . . hasn't any light or intelligence to understand. If they make an additional effort to learn Torah, learning, thinking about, and constantly teaching Oral Law, learning it for its own sake (*lishmah*), then they will merit [access to] the [level of soul called] *Ruach*, from [the level of] *Yetzirah* . . . Then their *Nefesh* will be filled with the spirit of wisdom, and their *Nefesh* will ascend from *Asiyah* to *Yetzirah*. (*Sba'ar HaGilgulim*, Introduction 18)

The answer to the question comes from a short but profound *Targum Onkeles*:

God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils a living soul, and the man became a living spirit. (Bereishis 2:7)

A living spirit: A speaking spirit. (Onkeles)

Until God gave man a soul he was just a *golem*, a lifeless body. But after receiving a soul, man not only became a *living* being, he became a *speaking* being. Speech may use the body, but it is a function of the soul. Hence, the *Zobar* says:

From a person's mouth you can tell what they are. (*Zobar, Balak* 193b)

Refined speech is what life is all about:

Rebi Elazar said: "Every man was created to toil, as it says, '*Because man was made to toil*' (*Iyov* 5:7). I do not know if this means to toil through speech or actual labor, but once it says, '*A toiling soul toils for him, for his mouth compels him*' (*Misblei* 16:26), I know that a person was created to toil with his mouth. I do not know if this means to toil in [oral] Torah or just in mundane conversation. However, once it says, '*This Torah should not leave your mouth*' (*Yehoshua* 1: 8), I know that man was created to toil in Torah [speech].'" (*Sanbedrin* 99b)

Talk? It should never be cheap, but the song of the soul and a ticket to freedom.

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