

Why Do Good People Suffer?

While this talk does not focus on answering the magnitude of the question, it definitely gleans some comforting insight upon the matter.

INTRODUCTION ONE: *The Title 'Adam'*

"In describing the unique qualities of humankind, four terms are used: Adam refers to the quality of mind and intellect; ish to the quality of heart and emotion; enosh, weakness in either intellect or emotion or both; geveir, who overcomes inner weakness and removes obstacles and hindrances to the attainment of an intellectual or emotional quality. I.e. geveir works upon enosh to elevate him to the plane of ish or adam." -HaYom Yom; Elul 4

INTRODUCTION TWO: *Evil Tongue (Lashon Horah): Maimonides; Laws of De'ot* (-7:3**)*

"Our Sages said, 'There are three sins for which retribution is exacted from a person in this world and, [for which] he is [nonetheless,] denied a portion in the world to come: idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and murder. Lashon horah is equivalent to all of them.'"

"Our Sages also said, 'Anyone who speaks lashon horah is like one who denies G-d as [implied by Psalms 12:5]: 'Those who said, 'With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own. Who is L-rd over us?'"

"In addition, they said, 'Lashon horah kills three [people], the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken. The one who listens to it [suffers] more than the one who speaks it.'"

*De'ot are the laws concerning man's behaviors being appropriate.

** Its Chapter 7 is focused on the behavior between man and his fellow.

INTRODUCTION THREE: *Evil Tongue (Lashon Horah): Maimonides; Laws of Impurity of Tzara'as (-16:10)*

"tzara'as is not a natural occurrence. Instead it is a sign and a wonder prevalent among the Jewish people to warn them against lashon hora. When a person speaks lashon hora, the walls of his house change color... If he persists... the leather implements in his house... If he persists... the clothes he wears change color... his skin undergoes changes and he develops tzara'as. This causes him to be isolated and for it to be made known that he must remain alone so that he will not be involved in the talk of the wicked which is folly and lashon hora."

"The Torah warns about this, stating (-Deuteronomy 24:8-9), 'Take care with regard to a tzara'as blemish.... Remember what G-d your L-rd did to Miriam.' Now, this is what the Torah is implying: Contemplate what happened to the prophetess Miriam. She spoke against her brother. She was older than he was; she had raised him; and she had endangered herself to save him from the sea. She did not speak pejoratively of him; she merely erred in equating him with the other prophets. Moses did not object to any of this, as it is stated (-Numbers 12:3), 'And the man Moses was exceedingly humble.' Nevertheless, she was immediately punished with tzara'as. Certainly, an inference can be made with regard to the wicked and foolish men who speak extensively about great and wondrous matters."

"This is the path followed by the gathering of wicked fools: In the beginning, they speak excessively about empty matters, as it is stated (-Ecclesiastes 5:2), 'The talk of a fool is characterized by a multitude of words.' As a result of this, they come to speak negatively of the righteous, as it is stated (-Psalms 31:19), 'May the lying lips be silenced; those which speak falsehood about a righteous man.' As a consequence, they will become accustomed to speaking against the prophets and casting aspersions on their words, as it is stated (-Chronicles II 36:16), 'They would abuse the messengers of G-d, scorn His words, and mock His prophets.' And this would lead them to deny G-d's existence entirely, as it is stated (-Kings II 17:9), 'And the children of Israel spoke in secret things that were not true against G-d, their L-rd.'"

"In this vein, it is stated (-Psalms 73:9), 'They set their mouths against Heaven and their tongues strut on earth.' What caused them to 'set their mouths against Heaven?' Their tongues which previously were given free reign on earth. This is the Talk of the Wicked that is caused by loitering on the street-corners, frequenting the assemblies of commoners, and spending time at the parties of drunkards."

"In contrast, the speech of proper Jewish people only concerns words of Torah and wisdom. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, assists them and grants them merit because of it, as it is stated (-Malachi 3:16), 'Then those who fear G-d conversed, each person with his fellow and G-d listened and paid heed. And a book of remembrance was composed before Him for those who fear G-d and contemplate His name.'"

INTRODUCTION FOUR: *Tzara'as: Alter Rebbe; Likkutei Torah (-Tazria, 22b):*

"When an 'Adam' will have in his skin...." The term 'Adam' means someone on very great level, since it refers to someone who is attained completion in all aspects... Now, this 'Adam' who has corrected and fixed up his actions and all of the higher levels of his soul, it's possible that "in the skin of his flesh," which is his lowest aspect, there is still an aspect of unholiness and something unwanted, that was not yet fully removed, and this produces 'signs' (of white discoloration) in his physical flesh, however, these symptoms appear and disappear in a supernatural manner, and these 'signs' are the spiritual ailment of Tzara'as, which are not created from the commonly found imbalance of bodily fluids or infections. As the Maimonides writes... This is why the mitzvah of Tzara'as is not practiced in our current times which are after the Destruction of the Holy Temple... A person can only receive tzara'as because of that in his spiritual service of G-d he has

already corrected all his actions, and has separated the bad from the good in all of his aspects, and only the negative aspect which is on the edges of his 'garments' weren't yet fully refined, this is why those negative aspects come out in his skin. ***"

***The *Alshich* explains (-Tazria, beginning) that the wicked which are "primarily of impurity," and therefore sin does not leave such a noticeable mark upon, "his skin," being that (-Zevachim 110a), "a substance in contact with the same type of substance does not interpose." -Hence, the impure tzara'as blemish will not be noticeable upon his impure skin.

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The *Alter Rebbe* has answered the known *kabbalistic* question upon the verse, of how can it be that an 'Adam', referring only to, "someone on very great level," is the only one that the verse declares possible for, "will have in his skin...", that specifically because the tzara'as only appears for those who have no internal evil (pleasure, will, paradigms, nor emotions), but only external evil (impulses within their 'garments': thought, speech, or action). However, for those who still have internal evil, the evil will not cause tzara'as on their external skin. And with this, the *Alter Rebbe* also explains, "why the mitzvah of Tzara'as is not practiced in our times," as he quotes, "the Maimonides writes...."

Question: Our sages teach us (-See INTRODUCTION TWO) that the sin for which tzara'as appears, *Lashon Horah*, is so deep, that it is equivalent to the only three sins upon which we are commanded, "Die, but do not transgress"! Hence, how can this be said -by the *Alter Rebbe*-- upon an 'Adam,' someone on very great level... and only the negative aspect which is on the edges of his 'garments' weren't yet fully refined"?! Moreover, in the very law of Maimonides quoted by the *Alter Rebbe*, Maimonides states, "And this would lead them to deny G-d's existence entirely!" How then, can this be speaking of an, 'Adam' level individual?!

To understand this, let us look deeper into what Maimonides states further in this law (-*Impurity of Tzara'as* 15:10 -See INTRODUCTION THREE): *Certainly, an inference can be made (from Miriam) with regard to the wicked and foolish men who speak extensively about great and wondrous matters. This is the path followed by the gathering of wicked fools: In the beginning, they speak excessively about empty matters... As a result of this, they come to speak negatively of the righteous... As a consequence, they will become accustomed to speaking against the prophets and casting aspersions on their words... And this would lead them to deny G-d's existence entirely... This is the Talk of the Wicked that is caused by loitering on the street-corners, frequenting the assemblies of commoners, and spending time at the parties of drunkards. In contrast, the speech of proper Jewish people only concerns words of Torah and wisdom. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, assists them and grants them merit...."*

Questions: (i) These are the laws of tzara'as, not of *Lashon Horah*, hence, why the sudden longevity about the "Talk of the Wicked," which belongs in the laws of *De'ot*, which discusses the laws of appropriate behavior? Our laws only connect with *Lashon Horah*, in that tzara'as is its punishment. (ii) If Maimonides *did* want to express the gravity of the sin *Lashon Horah*, then why not bring the words that he uses in the laws of *De'ot*, in which he writes, "Anyone who speaks lashon horah is like one who denies G-d," while here he writes only, "As a result of this... And this would lead them to..."?

Explanation: Maimonides is teaching us the essence of what *Lashon Horah* is, in order that we understand why its punishment is tzara'as. *Lashon Horah* has two elements within it:

- (i) Speaking Lashon Horah, which comes from *bad traits* of the speaker, such as *jealousy* and *hatred*, and causes damage to the one spoken of. Thus, here we are speaking of (a) damage caused to another, and (b) bad traits of the speaker. Thus, this aspect of *Loshan Horah* is discussed in (a) the *Laws of De'ot*, and (b) in its *Chapter Seven*, which focuses on the interrelationship between man and his fellow.
- (ii) The very *Loshan Horah in itself*, meaning not of the traits of the person, nor of the damage it does to others. This aspect of *Loshan Horah* is that speaking *Loshan Horah*, even unintentionally, the speaking itself draws the speaker into evil. The depths behind this concept is that even though the faculty of speech is but an external garment of one's soul (used but to externally express oneself to another), nevertheless, the garment of speech is connected to the essence of the soul of the person. So much so, that the *title* of the human species is, "M'daber - A Speaker". Therefore, when a person speaks *Loshan Horah*, the speaking of evil, in itself, draws the person himself (essence of his *soul*) progressively more into evil. This aspect of *Lashon Horah* is what Maimonides is discussing in the laws of *Impurity of Tzara'as*.

This is why, in the *Laws of Impurity of Tzara'as*, Maimonides is elaborating on the, "Talk of the Wicked." And in doing so, Maimonides takes us through its progressiveness into evil: (1) *Wicked and foolish men who speak extensively about great and wondrous matters*: The speech itself is still not impermissible. Then Maimonides articulates *The path followed by the gathering of wicked fools*: (2) *In the beginning, they speak excessively about empty matters*: The speech itself is still not of bad traits. However, this speech draws the person into evil [(3) *As a result of this, they come to speak negatively of the righteous...* (4) *As a consequence, they will become accustomed to speaking against the prophets and casting aspersions on their words...*, and (5) *And this would lead them to deny G-d's existence entirely*]. And this is the essence of *Lashon Horah*, that it is of the, "Talk of the Wicked," who are not careful, and are defective in their speech.

With this we will understand the seemingly misplaced wording of Maimonides, "his skin undergoes changes and he develops tzara'as. This causes him to be isolated and for it to be made known that he must remain alone so that he will not be involved in the talk of the wicked which is folly and *lashon hora*." Of what issue is "talk of the wicked," and "folly" involved here, if tzara'as is a punishment for only *Lashon Horah*? However, now it is clear to us that Maimonides sees the *Lashon Horah* aspect that is punished by tzara'as, not as an issue of 'bad traits' or of 'harming another,' but specifically of *Lashon Horah* being of the *progressive nature* of 'Talk of the Wicked,' in its drawing the soul of the person into evil.

Likewise, we now understand why Maimonides elaborates on how tzara'as' being connected with *Lashon Horah* is learned from Miriam: "Remember what G-d your L-rd did to Miriam." Now, this is what the Torah is implying: Contemplate what happened to

the prophetess Miriam... She had raised him; and she had endangered herself to save him from the sea. She did not speak pejoratively of him; she merely erred... Moses did not object to any of this." In other words, there are no *bad traits* of Miriam involved, nor was there any *damage done* to Moses, and, "Nevertheless, she was immediately punished with *tzara'as*." Hence, Maimonides' proof that we are speaking only of the, "essence of *Lashon Horah*," and its drawing the essence of a person into evil.

Additionally, we now understand why Maimonides elaborates on the progressiveness of the *tzara'as* punishment: "When a person speaks *lashon hora*, the walls of his house change color. -The house is *external*, just as the first stage of *Talk of the Wicked* is completely external: "speak extensively about great and wondrous matters." Then Maimonides continues with explaining that "If he persists," then the *tzara'as* progresses to becoming closer and closer to the person, until it ends upon his skin; "the leather implements in his house... If he persists... the clothes he wears change color... his skin undergoes changes and he develops *tzara'as*." However, once the evil penetrates to the inside, then there is no *tzara'as*, as explained (in INTRODUCTION FOUR): "A person can only receive *tzara'as*... and only the negative aspect which is on the edges of his 'garments' weren't yet fully refined."

Question Answered: We now see that the *Alter Rebbe's* teaching of *tzara'as* comes only upon the person who is complete in his self-refinement of evil, other than that of, "on the edges of his 'garments'," is actually not in contradiction at all with Maimonides' explanation of the aspect of *Lashon Horah* --which lay not in the speakers *bad traits* of *harming another*, but rather,-- in the forewarning of the "*speech itself*" (and its progressiveness), which (the faculty of speech) is an external concept (albeit its being connected with, and has influence upon, the essence of one's soul).

In light of all of the above, we can understand why the correction and the purification of *tzara'as* is specifically through a *kohain*. For seemingly, being that we are speaking of a person who can, and actually has, corrected his entire *interior* dimension of self, how is it that he can not, on his own, correct his *exterior* dimension?! The explanation to this is, that a person who is complete is yet liable to fail in speaking *Lashon Horah*, even though he already refined his interior, being that it is possible that he has a hidden evil rooted deep within himself, which did not express itself openly. And we are taught that *hidden evil* reveals itself in one's speech, as explained earlier, that the *external* faculty of speech is connected with the *essence* of a person. Thus, the *hidden evil* rooted deeply within him can reveal itself in an external speech, which is not necessarily evil, as was the case with Miriam. For the one who is *complete*, and has refined his entire *interior* does not come to speak evil words.

Thus, the correction of *Lashon Horah* is through correcting one's evil that is *hidden* within his soul. Therefore, the correction must be done through a *kohain*, who is the embodiment of "*Higher Kindness*," which is the strength necessary to purify *hidden* evil. Hence, we need the *speech* of the *kohain* to declare, "*You are pure!*," for through the *kohain's speech*, the exceedingly "*Higher Light*" is drawn down, which then corrects the *hidden* evil, to the point that the person becomes completely pure.