

Parshas אמור. The Gemara in Yoma 69b discusses the historical moment when the members of the Sanhedrin davened for three days and three nights to destroy the **עבודה זרה** for **יצר הרע**. And they were successful. We also know the famous **מנשה מלך יהודה** with **מעשה**. People criticized him for being an **עובד זרה**, and he came in a dream and responded: “If you had been alive in my time, you would have picked up the hem of your garment and run faster than I did toward **עבודה זרה**.”

So there was a tremendous הרע יצר for עבודה זרה. However, that Wile E. Coyote הרע יצר got smart and he substituted the הרע יצר for עבודה זרה לשון הרע. And we are all נכשל more or less and almost everyone in the תזריע- of הרע לשון and its sidekick and buddy, רכילות. Rabbi Oelbaum, in his שיעור this year on -העבירה, discussed many deep aspects of הרע לשון. He emphasized the importance of learning the הלכות of מצורע, הרע לשון. He emphasized the importance of learning the הלכות of הרע לשון - the ספר חפץ חיים and the many other ספרים on the topic that are available today. But he said something critical: the root of הרע לשון lies in a flaw in our מדות. And he quoted a חובות הלבבות to illustrate this point.

In פרק י' of the חובות הלבבות, the חכמים ask, “What brought you to greatness? How did you become the leader and master of your generation?” He replied, “I never met a person in whom I didn’t see some מעלה greater than my own. If he was smarter than me, I would say, ‘He has more חכמה than I do.’ If I was smarter than him, I would say, ‘He has more יראת שמים than I have.’ If he was older than me, I would say, ‘What זכות - he has more מצות than I do.’ If he was younger than me, I would say, ‘How fortunate he is - he has fewer עבירות than I have.’” This חכם was always able to see the positive and the מעלה in every single person he met. Rabbi Oelbaum also brought down from R’ Elimelech of Lizhensk, which he said is actually a song, and the words are ותן בלבנו שנראה כל אחד מעלות פרשת אמור on אוצר פלאות התורה. This brings us to a very powerful story from the sefer חסרונם. That פרשה contains many הלכות about כהנים, and this particular story involves a כהן and highlights the importance of the מדה of seeing others’ מעלות - even if they seem less capable or intelligent than us. And perhaps they are, in fact, far greater.

There was a gadol from about 200 years ago whose name was the לבושי שרד. The לבושי שרד brigs down a מעשה that in the place where the לבושי שרד was a rav, there was a פרנס, the head of the community, who was the wealthiest man around, but a tremendous עם הארץ. And that happens all the time. The wealthiest man is not necessarily the smartest man. As we know, פרנסה comes from הקדוש ברוך הוא directly, not from our wily business instincts. He became the ראש of the קהל through his wealth, and he was a כהן. He was frequently fighting with his wife, constant arguments and bickering. The rav, the לבושי שרד, tried repeatedly to make שלום between them, but to no avail. The man would regularly come to the rav saying, “I want to give her a גט. I want to end this.” And the famous saying is brought down here is חכם עדיף מנביא. A wise person, and in this particular case, we’re talking about the aspect of שכל, can sometimes be better than a navi. The לבושי שרד said to the בעל, “You’re right. You really should give her a גט. You should be מגרש her. But right now you can’t. It’s impossible. Why? Because you’re a כהן and she is טמא. And since you have to hand her the גט, you can’t give it to her because she’s in טומאה. So hold off for a little while.” And that he did. And the עם הארץ accepted those words, and he went away and then they made up. They eventually made up. Same thing happened again and again and again. Each time he would come to the rav to ask him to help him write a גט for his wife to be מגרש her, the rav would put him off and say that she’s טמא and you can’t do it because you’re a כהן.

The שרד later in his life moved to ארץ ישראל and became a rav in צפת. And another person came in and took his place. I'll use the words that that the תורה uses: רב אחר אשר חשב עצמו כחכם בעיניו - He thought he was a genius, and that his predecessor was not that terribly smart. Soon enough, the עשיר came to the new rav saying, "I want to be מגרש my wife." And the rav replied, "Okay". And he sat him down and he was going to write him a גט. The עשיר asked him, "But how can you do that? It's impossible for me to be מגרש my wife because she's not טהור. She's טמא?" And this second rav,



whoever he was, started to laugh and make לצנות of the לבושי שרד. He performed the גירושין, and then wrote a long letter to the לבושי שרד in ארץ ישראל to knock off - it was like a קינדערשפיל - all of the things that the לבושי שרד had said to this עשיר, to this פרנס, and to denigrate him, probably not in a בכבודיק way. The לבושי שרד received this letter, turned it over and wrote the following on the back: אל תהי שוטה, איזהו - חכם הרואה את הנולד - Foolish man. Who is a חכם? Someone who can see ahead. And he sent back that letter.

Not too many days went by, and the ריוג of the עשיר dissipated and he wanted to marry his wife. He came to the rav and said, "I want to remarry my wife". The rav replied, "You can't. You're a כהן. A כהן cannot marry a גרושה." The עשיר became a bitter enemy of this rav, and he hounded him, so much so that the rav had to leave town. This happened because of his shortsightedness, his inability to see what would be the outcome of his actions. And for this is brought down in פרקי אבות, the ספר says, חכמים הזהרו בדבריהם - Think carefully what you do. You should not be מבזה or make fun of anyone, and you should certainly be very careful before an עמ הארץ. Treat everyone with respect.

It's incumbent upon us to take the moral lesson from this story. It's a wise suggestion: Whenever you meet someone, assume they are at least as smart as you, if not smarter. It's a life lesson that will serve you well and pay great dividends.

(Incidentally, the first half of פרשת אמור on אוצר פלאות התורה is full of stories and fascinating halachic discussions about כהנים. One question it raises: Can a כהן go to the קבר of יוחאי בר יוחאי? It's a very interesting קשיא. We ourselves had this question when we were in ארץ ישראל just a few days ago. Another one: Can כהנים enter the מערת המכפלה? He brings down that the מנחת אלעזר, the Munkatcher Rebbe came out. He comes out very strongly that כהנים should not go into the מערת המכפלה. And the famous Rebbe from Shiniver, R' Yechezkel Shraga himself writes in these words, "The Torah tells us כהנים have to be careful that they should not become טמא. It's my חיוב to tell everybody that people are being מיקל and letting כהנים into קברי צדיקים. It's a big mistake. ואין להם על מה לסמוך להקל באיסור דאורייתא חס ושלום. So, all of the הלכות about כהנים are all very clearly delineated in פרשת אמור, and the sefer has a large section on them. If you're a כהן, I think it'll be worth your while to sit down with this sefer and look it through, it's really quite enlightening.)

