



The Power of Speech

By David Ratzersdorfer (27)

This week's Parashah, Parashat Tazria, deals with Tzara'at at length. The Torah explains what Tzara'at looks like, how to deal with it, and more. Interestingly, it does not say what causes Tzara'at. The Rabbis however, discuss the ways in which one gets Tzara'at. Among other things, the main cause is speaking Lashon Hara, or slander, about someone else. The question is, what is so terrible about Lashon Hara that it causes one to get such a severe punishment? Tzara'at can cause money loss, embarrassment, and a week alone outside the camp. Simply, Lashon Hara is so bad because it can harm people in terrible ways. For example, if someone tells his friend that a certain person, let's say Moshe, once did something bad, it can come back to bite him in unimaginable ways. If Moshe applies for a job and the person interviewing him heard this Lashon Hara, he may not get the job. Or if a woman Moshe is dating heard it, she may not want to marry him. This is why Lashon Hara has such a severe punishment, in order to prevent one from telling Lashon Hara that can harm others.

That is true, but it goes much deeper than that. The Pasuk in Breishit (2:7) states: "וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגַפְשׁ" תְּהִיָּה. "And Hashem blew into his nose the Neshama of life, and the man became a גַּפְשׁ תְּהִיָּה." Onkelos translates תְּהִיָּה as רוח ממללא - a speaking spirit. This teaches that the Neshama is what gives a person the ability to speak. Since the Neshama and speech are fundamentally connected, when one sins through speech, by speaking Lashon Hara, the soul is greatly damaged, and therefore, the punishment is so harsh

There is a story in the Midrash that demonstrates this point beautifully. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel once asked

Tavi, his servant, to buy him "good food" from the market. Tavi returned with a tongue. Then, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked him to buy "bad food". Once again, Tavi came back with a tongue. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel asked Tavi how a tongue can be both good and bad, and Tavi, who was known for his wisdom, responded: If it is good, it is very good, and if it is bad, it is very bad. One has the ability to speak great things. To be kind, to give compliments, to teach Torah, and more. But, Chas V'Shalom, one can also use his speech for evil, which, as Tavi said, is terrible. Additionally, the Pasuk in Mishlei (18:21) says: "מָוֶת וְחַיִּים בְּיַד-לְשׁוֹן" - "Death and life is in the hand of the tongue." One can make someone "live" with his words, by being kind to them, but also "kill" someone through evil speech.

As one can see, speech is very strong, and can be used in both good and bad ways. May we all have the Zechut to use our speech for the right things and be careful not to speak Lashon Hara, using Parashat Tazria to be mechazek us in this matter.

Don't Judge

By Micah Cyrlunik (24)

Lashon Hara is one of the most accessible and easily justifiable Issurim in the Torah. Every person encounters countless Lashon Hara opportunities each day, and has various strategies to overcome these challenges. Some extreme *machmirim* have taken up the practice of doing a routine Taanis Dibur (refraining from speech for an extended period of time).

Rav Daniel Kalish, however, strongly opposes this solution, and even goes so far as to say that it *doesn't address the core issue of Lashon Hara!* How could this

be—by not talking, you alleviate every possible opportunity for Lashon Hara!

In discussing the process for establishing Tzara'az with a Kohen, the Torah says “וראה הכהן אחרי הכבס את הנגע והנה לא” “And if, after the affected article has been washed, the priest sees that the affection has not changed color and that it has not spread, it is impure.” (VaYikra 13:55). The Pshat of this Pasuk is that once the Kohen sees that the צרעת hasn't changed, he deems it טמא.

Rabbi Bernstein, in his sefer, offers an alternative perspective: הפך הנגע את עינו means that the צרעת has not yet influenced his עיניים - the way he perceives people. Only once he works on that could he truly be healed from Tzara'at.

Rabbi Kalish suggests that this is the core of Lashon Hara. In order to truly alleviate every Lashon Hara opportunity, we must look at our family and peers without judgment, not avoid speaking at all.

The Great OU Quinoa Policy Part II

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Items Defined as Kitniyot

Much debate has raged about which items to include in the minhag of kitniyot, with the outcome usually emerging in the stringent direction. Four issues are generally explored regarding this issue. Is the item defined as kitniyot (legumes, such as beans and lentils), or is it at least similar to kitniyot (see Rambam, Hilchot Kilayim 1:8-9)? Can the item be ground into flour in the same manner as grain? Was the item historically included in the custom of kitniyot? Does the item grow near grain fields (see Mishnah Berurah 453:13)?

Historically, the Semak (thirteenth century) mentions rice, beans, lentils, chickpeas, sesame, and mustard. The Chok Yaakov (453:1) and Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 453:3) include corn as kitniyot, most likely because it is ground into flour. While these foods have undoubtedly been included in the minhag of kitniyot, there are other foods whose status as kitniyot is more controversial.

Potatoes

Although surprising, some authorities include potatoes in the minhag of kitniyot, as they are ground into flour and can be

confused with grain flour. The Chayei Adam mentions that some German Jewish communities include potatoes in the category of kitniyot. However, he notes that in 5531 (1771), rabbis permitted their use on Pesach due to famine (see Nishmat Adam 20).

This ruling is not accepted (see Aruch Hashulchan, O.C. 453:5). Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe, O.C. 3:63) explains that since kitniyot were prohibited as a custom and not through rabbinical legislation, Rav Moshe asserts that we only define something as kitniyot if there is a custom to regard it as kitniyot. The early Ashkenazic rabbis did not forbid anything that could be ground into flour; rather, they forbade eating certain products. Thus, although there is a logical reason to include potatoes in the category of kitniyot, they were not historically included. Perhaps, Rav Moshe suggests, the great need for them kept them from being prohibited; perhaps the list of kitniyot was kept shorter because the reasons for banning any kitniyot are debated. Whatever the reason, Rav Moshe rules that we only must avoid products customarily avoided on Pesach.

Peanuts

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (Mikraei Kodesh 2:105) and Rav David Tzvi Hoffman (Teshuvot Melameid Leho'il 1:88) note the Jerusalem custom to regard peanuts as kitniyot. However, Rav Moshe arrives at the same conclusion regarding peanuts that he reached regarding potatoes:

Peanuts were not regarded as kitniyot in many places. Thus, in an area where there does not exist a minhag to forbid peanuts, they should not be prohibited, for regarding these matters, one should not be excessively strict, as the Chok Yaakov writes [453:9]. Peanuts are forbidden for those whose minhag is to avoid them, although even they may be lenient in cases of doubt. One may give kashrut certification to peanut oil with no chametz, and those who do not follow the strict minhag may partake of it.

Rav Moshe recorded in this responsum (written in 1966) the accepted practice of kashrut agencies. However, today, major kashrut organizations have changed, and they treat peanuts, and even peanut oil, as kitniyot (<https://oukosher.org/passover/guidelines/food-items/kitniyot-list/>). Once again, the general practice of being very strict about kashrut on Pesach has taken hold with kitniyot despite the rulings of such eminent authorities as Rav Feinstein.

Soybeans

Rav Yehudah Pris cites Rav Dov Lior as permitting soybeans for Pesach consumption (Techumin 13:176-178). Rav Pris explains that Rav Moshe's reasoning regarding peanuts applies equally to soybeans, as they were not known to the earlier generations that adopted the minhag prohibiting kitniyot. Despite the

analogy to Rav Moshe's Teshuva, the kashrut organizations view soybeans as kitniyot.

Quinoa

The OU explains the reason for its policy change regarding quinoa¹:

Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of OU Kosher, announced today that quinoa, the grain-like seed grown in South America, is Kosher for Passover when processed with special OU Passover supervision and bearing the OU-P symbol. His statement is as follows: "It is only recently that quinoa has become popular outside of its high-altitude growing area in the Andean mountain region of South America. Known for its nutritional qualities, it has been referred to as a "superfood." Due to conflicting reports regarding growing conditions and final usage of this new world, gluten-free pseudo-cereal plant, OU Kosher was hesitant to conclusively declare it Kosher for Passover and non-kitniyot. Following extensive research and on-site investigation of cross-contamination issues by OU Kosher personnel at all quinoa growing areas including: Puno, Cuzco, Arequipa, Ayacucho, Junin and Chiclayo in Peru; and Alto la Paz and Chayapata in Bolivia; as well as the collection, washing and milling stations of quinoa, OU Kosher is pleased to announce that, for the first time, it is recommending quinoa for Passover, when processed with special OU Passover supervision and bearing the OU-P symbol.

Rav Shoshan Ghoori describes his experiences as OU Kosher's representative investigating quinoa processing in South America²:

Since quinoa is a prized product both for export and for local consumption, it is generally grown in large fields that are focused on just quinoa. He added that as quinoa's popularity and prices rise, this point is even stronger. He has found that the traditional use of quinoa is not the same as the use of grains. It is not generally made into breads or other similar grain type foods by the Andean communities, but rather is an all around 'super food' used for soups, and teas etc., just like maca, canihua and kiwicha. After visiting approximately fifteen quinoa processing plants he has yet to have found one (not a gathering nor a washing station) that produces or mixes problematic grains (that could be an issue for chometz or kitniyos) in the same plant as quinoa.

The Star-K reaches a similar conclusion:

¹ http://www.ou.org/news/quinoa_kosher_for_passover_/.

² https://ohr.edu/5390#_edn27.

It was determined that quinoa is Kosher l'Pesach. It is not related to millet, rice or the chameishes minei dagan, five types of grain products. Quinoa is a member of the amaranth family. STAR-K tested quinoa to see if it would rise. The result was sirchan, as termed by Chazal, which means the quinoa decayed and did not rise. Furthermore, quinoa's growth does not resemble kitniyos and, as cited in Igros Moshe O.C. (3:63), we do not consider additional products beyond what was originally established. However, recent investigations have found that there is a possibility that quinoa grows in proximity to certain grains and/or is processed in facilities that compromise Kosher for Passover status. Therefore, quinoa may be used on Pesach only with reliable Kosher for Passover approval.

Conclusion

It is surprising to discover a consensus among the major American kashrut organizations permitting quinoa for Ashkenazim on Pesach, especially since two major American Poskim³, Rav Yisroel Belsky and Rav Mordechai Willig⁴, rule strictly (and significant reason to forbid it remain⁵). Moreover, a lenient consensus has not emerged regarding kitniyot oil, kitniyot shenishtanu, peanuts, and soybeans. Accordingly, although those who follow the lenient view may continue to do so, room to be strict remains.

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³ Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv and Rav Asher Weiss also do not approve quinoa for Ashkenazic Pesach use (https://ohr.edu/5390#_edn27).

⁴ Rav Asher Bush reports that the Vaad HaRabbanim of Riverdale does not recommend quinoa for Ashkenazim.

⁵ As noted, the Star-K concludes "there is a possibility that quinoa grows in proximity to certain grains and/or is processed in facilities that compromise Kosher for Passover status."