

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha Metzora the Torah further describes the condition tzaraas, a skin disease which afflicted Jews who had violated the prohibitions against hurting other people with words. It was the job of the Kohain to determine the status of someone who appeared before him with the apparent symptoms of tzaraas. After examining the "patient" the Kohain made a verbal declaration as to the status of the person afflicted. From here, says the Dubner Magid, we see the power of words. Bad words caused the affliction, and, with a verbal declaration, the Kohain would establish that someone was pure or impure. (Vayikra 13,3)

Shlomo HaMelech states "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." (Mishlei - Proverbs 18,21) This verse is self-explanatory. The commentator Orchos Tzadikim comments on this verse by saying "There is no limit to the amount of mitzvahs one can do with their mouth." (Gate of Lashon HaRah 25) The following inspirational true story illustrates this concept.

Moishe is a professional who is married and is Boruch Hashem raising a fine religious family in a neighborhood whose streets are dotted by shuls and battei midrashim - Torah study halls. Moishe says, "Daf Yomi saved my life."

He explains: "As a yeshivah high-school student, I was not very successful in my Torah studies. I had trouble grasping some of the more difficult concepts and had difficulty retaining whatever I did manage to understand.

"One day, I was studying in the yeshivah's beis midrash and I thought of what seemed to be a good question on the Gemara which I was learning. I approached one of the older beis midrash students whom I knew well.

"When he heard my question, he could not help but smile. 'Moishe,' he said, 'that's a question that only an *am ha'aretz* (ignoramus) would ask. You had better start working harder at your learning, or that's exactly what you're going to grow up to be an *am ha'aretz*."

"His words cut through me like a knife. I assumed that his assessment of me as an *am ha'aretz* was correct, but he was wrong in thinking that I wasn't trying hard. I was, it just didn't come easy to me. I decided then and there that it was no use trying any more — I was doomed to failure.

"I graduated high school, left yeshivah, and rarely opened a sefer for many years. It was very painful to me when my children would ask me to help them with their learning and I could not.

"In 1982, the siyum (completion) of Daf Yomi generated great excitement worldwide. In my neighborhood, new shiurim (lectures) were beginning and some of my friends were joining up. I felt caught up in the excitement and decided to give it a shot. I began to attend a shiur and was amazed to discover that I understood it!

"To make a long story short, I now study the daf five times a day. I attend a shiur in the morning before work, listen to it again in the car on the way to work, then again on the way home from work. I then go to a second shiur on the same daf at night after work, and then I review it on my own. And guess what? Not only do I understand the Gemara, I even retain a lot of it. "Yes, Daf Yomi saved my life." (From Shabbos Stories Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, Parshas Metzora)

Thankfully, Moishe "rebounded" from the damaging remarks which had hurt him so much in his early years. He has managed to learn through the entire Talmud five times every seven and a half years! However, think about the black mark on the record of the person who had squelched Moishe's desire to learn for so many years. How many Moishes are there out there who never rebounded?

Recently, educators have "discovered" the theory of positive reinforcement. Instead of directly criticizing a child for misbehavior, for example, "You are so lazy, you never clean up your room," experts now recommend saying something such as: "You are usually so good about cleaning up your room, you are usually so tidy, let's see if you can continue to be so good at cleaning up your room, etc."

This theory is nothing new however. The wisest of all men Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) taught us the theory of positive reinforcement. The verse states: "Don't rebuke a scoffer, lest he come to hate you; rebuke a wise person, and he will love you." (Mishlei - Proverbs 9:8) The commentator Shlah (c. 1565 - 1630) explains this verse to mean: Don't rebuke someone by calling them a scoffer, because they will hate you; rather, if you want to accomplish something with the rebuke, use positive reinforcement; For example, "you are usually so good about cleaning up your room, etc."

By using our mouths for good, there is no limit, says the Orchos Tzadikim, to the mitzvahs that we can accomplish. The "power of death and life is in the tongue" says Mishlei. We can build and, heaven forbid, break others with our words. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**