

LASHON HARA - MINDLESS CHATTER

Background

In the time of the *Bais HaMikdash* (which should speedily be rebuilt), if a person spoke *lashon harah*, he contracted *tzaraas*. While the outer manifestation of it was a type of skin condition, he had entered a stage of *tumah*, which forced him to be removed from normal life. He had to leave the encampment of the Jews and remain separated from the rest of the nation until he was purified.

To become purified from this state, a *metzora* had to go through a complex, three-part process. After the *Kohain* looked at his *neggah* and saw that it had healed, the first part would begin. The *Kohain* was commanded to take two live kosher birds, a piece of cedar wood, and hyssop (a branch from a particular bush), and then tie them together with a string of purple wool, and dip them all into blood from the first bird.

Rashi explains the birds are a correction and atonement for his sin. Since birds are constantly chirping, and *lashon harah* is an act of chirping, it is only appropriate that they be part of the process.

Questions

This Rashi is difficult to understand. *Lashon harah* isn't innocent chirping. The Rambam defines *lashon harah* as "words that hurt; words that damage." These are words that ruin people's reputations, careers, and marriages. The reason the Torah forbids *lashon harah* is precisely because it is so damaging. In what way can it be compared to the chattering of birds, which is just a mindless, thoughtless reflex?

ספר ויקרא פרק יד

ד וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח
לְמִטְהַר שְׁתֵּי צִפֹּרִים חַיִּוֹת
טְהוֹרוֹת וְעֵץ אֶרֶז וְשֵׁנִי
תוֹלַעַת וְאֵזֵב

And command the Kohain, and he should take for the one becoming purified two live kosher birds, cedar wood, purple wool, and hyssop.

רש"י על ויקרא פרק יד פסוק ד

טהורות - פרט לעוף
טמא לפי שהנגעים באין
על לשון הרע (חולין
קמ ערכין טו) שהוא
מעשה פטופטי דברים
לפיכך הוזקקו לטהרתו
צפרים שמפטפטין תמיד
בצפצוף קול

Kosher - *To the exclusion of non-kosher birds. Tzaraas comes to a person because he spoke lashon harah, which is an act of babbling. Therefore, to purify him, we are commanded to offer birds, which constantly prattle.*