

5-10-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Acharei Mot / Kedoshim* (after the death, holy ones)
Double Torah Portion: Leviticus 16:1 – 20:27
Haftarah: Ezekiel 20:2-20, 22:1-16
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Eph 4:1-3

Biblical Dispute Resolution 7 – Injurious Words

Central question: What are injurious words, and how are we to avoid them?

Today we are in another double portion of Torah. The first is parasha, *Acharei Mot* which means “after the death.” It takes its name from the fifth and sixth words in the original Hebrew, and the seventh through ninth words in English. The second parasha is *Kedoshim*, which means “holy ones.” It takes its name from the fourteenth word of the passage in the original Hebrew, and the twenty-fifth word in the English.

The first of the double parashiot begins with an address by G-d to Moses after the death of Aaron’s sons because they had approached G-d improperly and presumptuously.

Lev 16:1-2

16 Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the Lord and died. 2 And the Lord said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי 16:1
 And spake the Lord unto Moses after the death of the two sons of
 1696 3068 413 4872 310 4194 9999 8147 1121

אֶהְרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי-יְהוָה וַיָּמָתוּ׃
 Aaron, when they offered before the Lord, and died;
 175 7126 6440 3068 4191

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְאֵל- 2
 And said the Lord unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother,
 559 3068 413 4872 1696 413 175 251 408

יָבֹא בְּכָל-עַתָּה אֶל-הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶל-פְּנֵי
 he come at all times into the holy place within the veil before
 935 3605 6256 413 6944 9999 1004 6532 413 6440

הַכִּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בִּעָנָן
 the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that not: he die for in the cloud
 3727 834 9999 5921 727 3808 4191 3588 6051

אֶרְאֶה עַל-הַכִּפֹּרֶת׃
 I will appear upon the mercy seat.
 7200 5921 3727

I would like to address a very interesting passage in the second parasha, which we find applied during the time of Yeshua when He was walking among us as a man.

Lev 19:9-10

9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 'Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

In this way, G-d was developing a plan for taking care of the poor. The corners of the fields would not be harvested, the poor would come to glean from them, and they would also have to do some work in order to eat, but the gracious bounty G-d gave to the landowner would also be given to the poor. Just how much of the corner was left for the poor was a decision that each landowner would need to make, and the size of the unharvested corners would demonstrate the heart of the landowner for the poor.

Sadly, in America, people have overruled G-d's plan. The greediness of landowners compels them to harvest the entire field and leave nothing for the poor, and "welfare plans" created by politicians are funded by money taken from those who have it, and it is given to those who don't. Of course, in the middle, the government worker administering this program takes the larger share of the money for himself, so that the poor get much less than even what was forcibly taken from the landowners.

It should be evident that G-d's ways are better... but it seems that mankind is always disregarding G-d's plans for his own.

In the time of Yeshua, there were still some greedy landowners who harvested the corners of their fields and deprived the poor of the produce. Yeshua was one of the poor who went into a corner of an orchard.

Matt 21:18-20

18 Now in the morning, when He returned to the city, He became hungry. 19 And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.

Yeshua was not angry at the fig tree. It was just being a fig tree. But He was angry at the landowner who had harvested it in a way to violate Torah. The owner had deprived the poor of the meager figs from this tree, and Yeshua repaid that greediness by cursing the tree so that it withered – and He deprived the landowner of many years of produce that he was otherwise expecting to get from that tree.

With that small excursion into the Torah portion, let's now resume our studies on how not to speak to one another.

Mean Words - *Onaas Devarim*

The Hebrew concept of *onaas devarim* means “injurious words.” This category includes the use of unnecessarily harsh, angry, or insensitive words.

Some people who hear such words might react by the accusation by saying, “That was mean!”

These kinds of hurtful words are characterized by not only the words chosen, but also how those words were spoken. Mean words are often described as being “over the top.” This is because most recognize that better words should have been chosen, or the delivery of those words

should have been gentler, or both. Those who use mean words speak them not merely to convey information, but also to injure someone.

Political debates seem to be fertile fields for mean words. and when one of the participants delivers a “zinger” which inflicts great harm on his opponent, it is not only cheered by supporters, but repeated for years as a highlight of the debate. In political debates, someone is always declared the “winner.” It is no wonder that political debates have no record of success in bringing people together in unity.

However, in a productive conversation, guided by Scriptural precepts, both parties win, and unity is often restored. I will help you see how to have productive conversations – as opposed to arguments – a bit later in this series.

Avoiding mean words requires the speaker to consider the sensitivities of the hearer, and craft his words and their delivery to avoid hurting feelings when possible. Mean words interfere with healing conversations which would otherwise lead to reconciliation and unity. They drive people apart, and often start a verbal “war.”

What constitutes “mean words” is difficult to quantify. In truth, it becomes more a matter of the heart than a matter of sentence construction and delivery.

There is a serious problem associated with this particular version of *loshan hara*. That is the issue of defining precisely what caused the offense.

When one person speaks the truth, even with the most pure heart, another person can find an offense, and would declare that the speaker’s words were true, but their delivery was “mean.” I have heard it said regarding such a person, “What you said was true, but *how you said it* was offensive.”

When that happens, there seems to be no safe haven for the speaker. The one hearing will not be able to say what precisely was “mean” about the words spoken, but will still insist that the speaker was “mean.” The offense remains in the hearer, but the hearer can’t (or won’t) give any example to the speaker so that he might understand what he did wrong, and take corrective action.

Let me give you an example from a situation I am aware of in a church. A person is in a Sunday School class in a prominent church in town.

When the main teacher is absent, this person is given the responsibility of bringing a teaching, because he has shown himself to be a Biblical scholar. We will call this person Mr. Smith. The regular teacher was absent, and asked Mr. Smith to teach the lesson. The regular teacher had been teaching on Martin Luther, so Mr. Smith decided to continue that theme.

Mr. Smith taught on how the Reformation failed, and the one thing that made it fail was when Martin Luther was confronted at the Council of Trent by his hypocrisy. He said, “Scripture alone” but the Archbishop pointed out that Luther worshipped on Sunday (and not the Sabbath) – which has no Scriptural support whatsoever.

Mr. Smith established conclusively, through various documents and records, that the Catholic Church itself changed the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday. Smith challenged the class, “Now that you know the truth, what will you do about it?” That seems to have been the “final straw” for some in the class.

Some in the class had taken offense to Mr. Smith’s comments regarding the defects in some of the class’s favorite translations, but this teaching on the Sabbath seemed to be the breaking point.

But here is where things went awry. Nobody in the group who took an offense to the speaker's teaching approached him to even tell him there had been an offense. Smith was unaware of any offense at all. The offended ones simply harbored the offense in their hearts and allowed it to fester there. From the reports I have, murmuring against Smith began in the class.

Rather than come to speak with Smith, some went to the class leader and complained about him and his teaching. Then the class leader determined together with the class teacher that Smith should be banned from teaching again. Neither the class leader nor the teacher came to Smith to inform him of what had happened behind his back.

The class leader listened to the back-biting of the people. He didn't insist they come to Smith to resolve the offense face-to-face. Neither the class leader nor the teacher told Smith that he would not be invited again to teach the class.

Neither the class leader nor the class teacher directed the offended class members to go to Smith to work this out scripturally. Neither one showed how the class members had themselves engaged in sin in their actions against Smith behind his back.

Did Smith use “mean words” in his class? That question remains unresolved to this day. No person has yet come to Smith to confront him with sinful words.

Knowing what you already know regarding the various sins we have been discussing in this series, can you name and count the sins being committed by the members of the class, the class leader, and the teacher?

The offended people in the class told the class leader to come to talk to Smith to get Smith to change. Smith met with the class leader.

At that meeting the class leader acknowledged that Smith had not sinned, and that his teachings were clearly true. But the class leader kept saying that it was “how Smith said them” that caused the offense.

Smith asked the class leader to give an example of how those words were said, so that Smith could identify with some certainty what he had said that caused an offense. The class leader could not. The class leader urged Smith to be “gentler” and Smith acknowledged that he could always be gentler. The class leader advised Smith to simply come to the class, be quiet during class, and never say anything that might offend anyone.

The class leader acknowledged that the people in the class who had complained to him had not dealt with the situation well. When Smith suggested that their actions were also sinful, and they should also take some responsibility, the class leader reacted with disgust and anger that the advice to Smith to be “gentler” had not taken hold.

As the meeting concluded, Smith had some ideas of how he could be more gentle with the other class members, but was still uncertain regarding how precisely he should change so as to “fit in” better and remain a relatively invisible class member from that point forward.

Part of the problem in this example is that the people in the class who are back-biting Smith are confusing sinful conduct with personal sensitivities.

If there is a matter of sin involved, then the offended one must be able to put his finger upon the verse (or verses) in the Bible which clearly define that sin before going to the person to make the accusation.

Matt 18:15-16

15 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private;
if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Lev 19:17-18

17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.

But what if the matter is one of personal preference, and not sin?

Prov 10:12

12 Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.

John 13:34-35

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Rom 12:10

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;

1 Cor 13:4-6

4 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

Eph 4:1-3

4 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

If the matter is one of personal preference – one should simply “get over it” and not internalize it so as to allow it to fester into a spiritual sore.

Scripture can help us align the heart so that mean words are more easily avoided. The following verses provide a basis for the prohibition of mean words, and offer some guidance for governing our speech. And, of course, it all begins with the heart.

Leviticus 25:17.

You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:18.

18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Galatians 5:19–21

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn

you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 4:25-32

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

James 1:19-20

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

As you can see, there is much to say about “mean words.” And this level of *loshan hara* is the most difficult to quantify or define.

Here is where the idea of speaking the truth *in love* must be lived-out with a bit of fear and trembling.