

BEING EARNEST

THE NEED FOR EARNESTNESS

Shlomo Hamelech writes, "An arrogant sinner is a scoffer," for he will constantly scoff others and ignore rebuke.

Leitzonus (mockery) is a negative trait and is forbidden. Rabbeinu Yona explains that a 'letz' is one who is forever involved in idle talk, mocks others, and ridicules what they do and say. This negative trait comes from a lack of *yiras shamayim* and from *prikas ol*.

(משלי כא, כד וברש"י ומצודות, פי' רבינו יונה)

Chazal say that one *leitzonus* can undo the effect of a hundred reproofs. The tzaddik Reb Mendel Rimanover would say, "With *leitzonus* one can rebuff anything." He once pointed out the window, towards the sky and said, "One can even deny that it is the sky."

(ראה דרך חיים טג, תפלה למשה פי' ויצא)

Every generation has *leitzonim*. During the time of Dovid Hamelech, scoffers would stand by his windows and taunt him, "Dovid, when will the *Beis Hamikdosh* be built? When are we going to the house of Hashem?" Dovid Hamelech would say that although these people have come to anger him, he rejoices that they talk about the *Beis Hamikdosh*.

(ירושלמי ברכות, פ"ב ה"א)

Korach, using *leitzonus*, attempted to gain the Yidden's support against Moshe Rabbeinu. Gathering a crowd, he spun a story:

"In my neighborhood, there was a widow who lived with her two daughters and owned a field. When she wanted to plow, Moshe Rabbeinu warned her not to plow with an ox and donkey together, and when the earth was ready to be planted, he came to tell her not to plant *kilayim*. When the harvesting season arrived, the widow was instructed to put aside *leket*, *Shikcha* and *Pe'ia*, and after the produce was processed into flour, Moshe Rabbeinu reminded her to give *t'ruma* and *maaser*, which she did.

"To ease her burden, the widow decided to sell the field and buy two lambs, hoping to be able to enjoy the profits of their wool. When the lambs gave birth, Aharon Hakohen came to

ask for the firstborn, saying that this is what Hashem has instructed. The time came to shear the animals, and Aharon was back, asking for the wool that was shorn first.

"Completely frustrated, the widow cried out, 'I have no more energy for this man! I will just *shecht* the lambs and eat them.' Once the animals were *shechted*, Aharon asked for certain parts of the animals. On hearing this, the widow moaned, 'Even now that I've *shechted* the lambs, I have no peace. I give them up to Hashem (*cherem*).'" Aharon said, 'Now it is all mine, for Hashem said that all *cherem* belongs to me.' He took the animals and left the widow crying with her two daughters." This is how Korach ridiculed everything holy.

(ילקוט שמעוני פ' קרח)

In a letter to his chassidim, the Alter Rebbe sharply rebuked them for ridiculing others who were unlike them. He describes the negative effects of *leitzonus* which can bring suffering and death R"L, and that whenever in doubt, one should be stringent.

(אג"ק אדה"ז ע' כפג)

The Mitteler Rebbe writes that although *leitzonus* is not an actual *aveira*, it is worse than that. When one commits an *aveira* because his *yetzer harah* wins him over or even due to a lack of belief that Hashem is watching, it is likely that he will do *teshuva*. However, a person who takes everything lightly, will not easily do *teshuva*. Although he may not have evil intentions, it is the complete opposite of fearing Hashem, and he therefore is unable to see the *Shechinah* or accept reproof.

(דרך חיים ט', ג)

In yechidus, the Rebbe advised a bochur who suffered from *leitzonus* to learn the *sefer* "Derech Chaim" from the Mitteler Rebbe and to engage himself in the *avoda* of davening.

(היכל מנחם ח"ב ע' ריז)

Chazal say that there is one type of *leitzonus* which is good: the mockery of *avodah zarah* and other negative things.

Eliyahu Hanovi and the false *nevi'im* of the *baal* gathered on Har HaCarmel to see which *mizbe'ach* would light on fire,

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thus proving that their way of life is the correct one. The false *nev'im* called out to their *avodah zarah*, asking that their *mizbe'ach* be lit, but nothing happened. Eliyohu Hanovi poked fun at them, saying, "Cry out loudly! Maybe he is conversing or sitting in the bathroom; perhaps he is sleeping and you will wake him up..."

(ע"ז מ"ו ע"א, [צדקת הצדיק אות רס], מלכים א יח, ופרש"י)

THE OUTCOME OF SCORN

Chazal say that scoffers are amongst those who do not merit to see the *Shechinah*. Rabbi Elozor said: "Whoever mocks, suffering will come upon him." Rava would plead with some of the *chachomim* not to scorn so they be spared affliction. Regarding one who speaks this way, Rav Katina said that his sustenance is lessened, and Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish said that he will fall in *gehinom*.

(סנהדרין קג ע"א, עבודה זרה יח ע"א)

A short time after Rabbi Yeissa arrived in Eretz Yisroel, as he was on his way to the bathhouse in Tveria, a *letz* approached him and slapped his neck. "I strengthened your neck," the man sneered, "but you will still need to set it right when you go into the bath." Rabbi Yeissa walked away and entered the bath.

The *letz* proceeded to a nearby courthouse, where a Judge was condemning a man for murder, and observed the procedure with a smirk on his face. When the Judge asked the thief who had been his accomplice, the thief pointed his finger at the smirking man. The *letz* was taken away and tortured, until he admitted to the murder.

When the two men were being led to be hanged, they encountered Rabbi Yeissa leaving the bathhouse. Seeing Rabbi Yeissa, the *letz* complained about his current state, to which Rabbi Yeissa replied, "I am not accountable for your death. You have brought it upon yourself through your *leitzonus*. Don't you know what the Navi says, 'Do not mock another, lest your suffering increase'?"

(ירושלמי ברכות פ"ב ה"ח)

Reb Yaakov, the grandson of the *tzaddik* Reb Aharon Strasheller, a great *talmid* of the Alter Rebbe, once came to a city and davened with great *hislahavus* and many motions, as he usually did. Seeing this, an observer chuckled to himself, and from that moment on, he was stricken with laughing attacks, laughing for hours without let-up, until he felt that he was going to pass out. He went to doctors, but they were unable to find a cure and could not fathom from where such a sickness came. Once, this man commented to his father that it had all begun after he had laughed at Reb Yaakov. The father rushed to the *tzaddik*, and with tears in his eyes, begged forgiveness for his son and asked that this sickness be taken away. Reb Yaakov responded, "I also find it amusing..." and the man was healed from his laughing attacks.

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"ג ע' 235)

When the Maharin (Reb Yisroel Noach), the Tzemach

Tzeddek's son, would travel through cities in Russia, the local Yidden would come to receive his *brachos*. Once, a Yid who was adverse to chassidim wanted to make a mockery of the Maharin, so although he already had a number of children, he presented himself as a childless man and requested a *bracha*. The Maharin responded, "Oy! It's truly not good to leave this world without children..." Unfortunately, all this man's children died during his lifetime. The man would later cry, "For that one *leitzonus*, I lost all my children..."

(ימי חב"ד ע' 155)

When the *tzaddik* Reb Mottel of Chernobyl would receive women for *brachos*, he would have his *tallis* drawn over his head. Once, as he arrived in a town, two men thought to play a trick on him. They took a *goyishe* woman, dressed her up as a *yiddishe* woman, and had her approach the *tzaddik*. Reb Mottel immediately sensed what had been done and exclaimed, "*Kmoihem yihyu oiseihem*", the makers should be like them, referring to those who make *avoda zara*. Not long after, the two men abandoned Yiddishkeit *R"L*.

(לשמע אוזן ע' 221)

DEALING WITH MOCKERS

Rabbi Akiva would say: "Do not spend time among *leitzim*, so that you not learn from their ways."

Rabbeinu Hakadosh instructed his children: "Do not live in the city of Shechantziv, for its is inhabited with *leitzim*, and you might learn from their ways."

(אבות דרבי נתן פרק כ"ו, פסחים ק"ב)

The Rambam writes: One who is interested in cultivating proper behavior, should keep away and not speak to *leitzim*. For the scoffers and wicked begin with foolish talk, eventually coming to speak derogatively about *tzaddikim*. This leads them to speak about the *nev'im* and find fault in their words, and in the end they come to speak against Hashem himself.

(רמב"ם הל' טומאת צרעת בסופו)

Many times, the Rebbe mentioned the need to ignore scoffers. The Rebbe pointed out that the first *se'if* of the first *siman* of the first *sefer* of *Shulchan Aruch* says, "*Al yeivosh mipnei hamal'igim*", do not be embarrassed of scoffers, for this is the foundation of keeping the entire *Shulchan Aruch*.

(אג"ק ח"ו ע' שמו)

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