

# Shvilei Pinches

## Parshas Metzoro

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Parshas Metzoro 5771

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Shlomo HaMelech's Incredible Insight and Wisdom:

### "From the Cedar which Is in Lebanon Down to the Hyssop which Grows out of the Wall"

In parshas Metzoro, which we read this week, we learn about the offering which the metzoro brings on the day of his purification (Vayikra 14, 4): "וצוה הכהן ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהורות ועץ ארז ושני" "ולקח למטהר שתי צפרים חיות טהורות ועץ ארז ושני" —the Kohen shall command; and for the person being purified there shall be taken two live, pure birds, cedar wood, and a crimson tongue of wool, and hyssop. Rashi comments: "לפי שהנגעים באין על לשון הרע שהוא מעשה פטוטי דברים, לפיכך הוזקקו לטהרתו צפרים שמפטטין תמיד בצפצוף קול. ועץ ארז, לפי שהנגעים באין על גסות הרוח. ושני תולעת ואזוב, מה תקנתו ויתרפא, ישפיל עצמו—since afflictions of tzara'as come about because of malicious talk (lashon hora), which is an act of verbal twittering, therefore, birds were required for purification, since they twitter incessantly with a loud chirping sound. Cedar wood: Because afflictions come as a result of haughtiness. Crimson wool and hyssop: What is his remedy? He should lower himself of his arrogance like a worm and like a hyssop.

It is worth noting that the source for Rashi's comment concerning the cedar wood and hyssop—representing haughtiness and lowering oneself to a state of humility—comes from the wisest of all men. The following verses describe the incredible wisdom of Shlomo HaMelech, a"h, (Melochim I, 5, 9):

"ויתן אלקים חכמה לשלמה, ותבונה הרבה מאד, ורחב לב, כחול אשר על שפת הים, ותרב חכמת שלמה מחכמת כל בני קדם ומכל חכמת מצרים, ויחכם מכל האדם... ויהי שמו בכל הגוים סביב, וידבר שלשת אלפים משל ויהי שירו חמשה ואלף, וידבר על העצים מן הארז אשר בלבנון ועד האזוב אשר יוצא בקיר".

"G-d gave wisdom and considerable understanding to Shlomo, and breadth of heart as the sand which is upon the seashore. Shlomo's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than all men... his fame spread to all the nations around him. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. He spoke of the trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon down to the hyssop which grows out of the wall".

Pertaining to this wisdom, our blessed sages expound in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 19, 3):

"וידבר שלשת אלפים משל... שלשת אלפים משל על כל פסוק ופסוק, אלף וחמשה טעמים על כל משל ומשל, שיריו אין כתיב כאן אלא שירו, שירו של משל. וידבר על העצים, וכי אפשר לאדם לדבר על העצים, אלא אמר שלמה, מפני מה מצורע נטהר בגבוה שבגבוהים ובנמוך שבנמוכים בעץ ארז ובאזוב, על ידי שהגביה עצמו כארז לקה בצרעת, כיון שהשפיל עצמו כאזוב נתרפא על ידי אזוב".

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**"He spoke three thousand proverbs (analogies) on every single verse; he provided one thousand and five reasons for every proverb. He spoke of the trees—is it even possible to speak of the trees? Rather, Shlomo said: Why is the metzoro purified by the tallest and the lowliest, by the cedar tree and by the hyssop? Since he was haughty like the cedar, he was stricken with tzara'as; by lowering himself to the level of a hyssop, he was cured by the hyssop".**

After careful consideration, one can only be amazed. The Scriptures describe Shlomo's vast knowledge in terms of three thousand proverbs on each possuk and one thousand and five reasons provided for each proverb. Based on a figure of **5,845** verses in the Torah, we can calculate that Shlomo HaMelech provided billions of elucidations and reasons covering the entire Torah (**5,845 x 3,000 x 1,005 = 17,622,675,000**).

Despite this vast wealth of knowledge and this mind-boggling number of elucidations, it is astounding that the sole example Scriptures chooses to personify this incredible, superhuman wisdom is: **"וידבר על"** **"He spoke of the trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon down to the hyssop which grows out of the wall.** As we learned from the Midrash, this example pertains to the metzoro, who brings cedar wood and a hyssop on the day of his purification.

### **It Is Considered as if One Who Speaks Lashon Hora Violated All Five Books of the Torah**

Let us set our sights on high in order to decipher our sages' riddles. Concerning the Possuk in this week's parsha (Vayikra 14, 2): **"זאת תהיה תורת המצורע"**—**This shall be the law of the metzoro**, we find the following in the Midrash (V.R 16, 6):

**"אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי, חמש תורות כתובות במצורע, (א) זאת תורת נגע צרעת, (ב) זאת תהיה תורת המצורע, (ג) זאת תורת אשר בו נגע צרעת, (ד) זאת התורה לכל נגע הצרעת, (ה) זאת תורת הצרעת. זאת תהיה תורת המצורע - המוציא שם רע, ללמדך שכל האומר לשון הרע עובר על חמשה חומשי תורה, לפיכך משה מזהיר את ישראל, זאת תהיה תורת המצורע."**

**"We find the term "torah" employed five times with regards to the metzoro. The word "metzoro" can be interpreted as an abbreviated form of the words "motzi shem ra," one who speaks maliciously. Thus, we can deduce that anyone who speaks lashon Hora violates all five books of the Torah. Consequently, Moshe warns Yisroel: This shall be the law of the metzoro".**

The author of Akeidas Yitzchak (Shaar 62) clarifies the meaning of the Midrash. Upon examining each of the books of the Torah, each provides vital lessons concerning the grave sin of lashon Hora.

In Sefer Bereishis, we read about the primeval serpent's malicious words concerning the King of the Universe (Bereishis 3, 5): **"כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם כאלקים יודעי טוב ורע"**—**for G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad.** This incident resulted in the sentence of death being decreed on mankind. Additionally, we find (Bereishis 37, 2): **"ויבא יוסף את דבתם רעה אל אביהם"**—**and Yosef would bring evil**

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**reports about them to their father.** This episode of malicious speech led to our forefather's descent into Egypt.

In Sefer Shemos, we find that Datan and Aviram reported to PHorah that Moshe had killed the Egyptian. As a result, Moshe fled to Midian to escape PHorah's wrath and punishment.

In Sefer Vayikro, we learn about the laws of afflictions which come as a punishment for lashon Hora. In parshat Kedoshim (Vayikra 19, 16), as well, we find the admonition: **"לא תלך רכיל בעמך"**—**You shall not spread gossip among your people.**

In Sefer Bamidbor, we find that Miriam was stricken with tzara'as for speaking ill about Moshe. Also, the spies were punished for speaking unfavorable about Eretz Yisroel.

In Sefer Devorim, Moshe Rabeinu rebukes Yisroel (Devarim 1, 1): **"בין פארן ובין תופל"**—**between Paran and Tophel.** Targum Onkelos explains that this refers to the people's complaints about the mahn: **"דאטפלו על מנא"**. Additionally, HKB"H commanded them to proclaim from Har Eival (Devarim 27, 24): **"ארור מכה רעהו בסתר"**—**Accursed is one who strikes his fellow stealthily.** Chazal interpret this homiletically as a reference to lashon Hora.

The author of the Akeidah concludes: **"והנה הוא מבואר, שהמטה אזנו לשמוע אלו העניינים כולם אשר באלו החומשים, הוא מקיים את חמשתן, ואשר לא שת לבו אל דבריהם, הוא עובר על כולם, כמו שאמר רבי יהושע בן חנניאל – לוי שהמוציא שם רע הוא עובר על חמשה חומשי תורה"**—**"This is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's meaning when he states that one who speaks maliciously violates all five books of the Torah. If one heeds these lessons taught in the five books of the Torah, one fulfills all five of them; failing to do so, however, constitutes a violation of all five books"**.

We have learned, in fact, that each chumash stresses the gravity of speaking lashon Hora. The Midrash, however, states: **"שכל האומר לשון הרע עובר על חמשה חומשי תורה"**—that if one speaks lashon Hora, it is as if one has violated all five books of the Torah. Why, indeed, is lashon Hora considered such a severe transgression that it is considered as if one has violated the entire Torah?

### HKB"H Chose Yisroel Due to Their Extreme Humility

It is clear from the Gemarah and Midrashim that the foundation of the entire Torah and Yiddishkeit is the adherence to the attribute of humility and the avoidance of arrogance. Our sages point out that the very fact that HKB"H chose Yisroel over all the other nations demonstrates this point. For, Yisroel is the most humble of nations, whereas all other nations exhibit excessive pride and haughtiness. The Possuk in Devarim states (7, 7): **"לא מרובכם מכל העמים חשק ה' בכם ויבחר בכם כי אתם המעט מכל העמים"**—**Not because you are more numerous than all the peoples did Hashem desire you and choose you, for you are the fewest of all the peoples.** The Gemarah (Chullin 89.) elucidates this possuk as follows:

**"אמר להם הקב"ה לישראל, חושקני בכם שאפילו בשעה שאני משפיע לכם גדולה, אתם ממעטין עצמכם לפני, נתתי גדולה לאברהם, אמר לפני ואנכי עפר ואפר, למשה ואהרן, אמר ונחנו מה, לדוד, אמר ואנכי תולעת ולא איש. אבל עובדי כוכבים אינן כן, נתתי גדולה לנמרוד, אמר הבה נבנה לנו עיר, לפרעה, אמר מי ה', לסנחריב,**

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אמר מי בכל אלהי הארצות וגו', לנבוכדנצר, אמר אעלה על במתי עב, לחירם מלך צור, אמר מושב אלקים ישבתי בלב ימים."

"HKB" said to Yisroel: I desire you as My people, because even at a time when I bestow greatness upon you, you humble yourselves before Me. I granted greatness to Avraham, and he said before Me: "though I am but earth and ashes." I granted greatness to Moshe and Aharon, and they said: "for what are we?" I granted greatness to David, and he said: "but I am a worm and not a man." But with respect to idolaters, it is not so. I granted greatness to Nimrod, and he said: "Come, let us build ourselves a city." I granted greatness to Pharaoh, and he said: "Who is Hashem?" I granted greatness to Sancheriv, and he said: "Which among all the gods of the lands etc.?" I granted greatness to Nevuchadnetzar, and he said: "I will ascend over the tops of the clouds." I granted greatness to Chiram, King of Tyre, and he said: "I occupy the seat of G-d in the heart of the seas."

Based on this understanding, it is evident why HKB" chose to give us the Torah specifically through Moshe Rabeinu. After all, the Torah attests to the fact (Bamidbar 12, 3): **"והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל האדם"**—**Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth!** Similarly, the Torah was given specifically on Har Sinai, the lowest of mountains to emphasize the importance of humility—as we have learned in the Gemarah (Sotah 5.):

**"אמר רבי יוסף, לעולם ילמד אדם מדעת קונו, שהרי הקב"ה הניח כל הרים וגבעות והשרה שכינתו על הר סיני"**—**Rav Yosef said: A person should always learn from the sensibility of his Creator—for behold, when HKB" gave the Torah, He abandoned all the great mountains and hills and instead rested His Presence on Har Sinai.** Rashi comments that we are being taught to value modesty and humility from the fact that HKB" passed over greater and taller mountains, such as Tavor and Carmel, in order to give the Torah on the lowly Har Sinai.

Thus, we see that the attribute of humility is the foundation of the entire Torah. HKB" chose Yisroel from all the other nations due to their enormous humility. He gave us the Torah through Moshe Rabeinu and on Har Sinai also to emphasize that humility and modesty are the basis for the entire Torah and Yiddishkeit.

### **Humility Is the Root of the Entire Torah while Arrogance Is the Mother of All Sin**

Let us now add a point introduced by the great author of the Imrei Yosef in the name of the great Rabbi Shmelkeh of Nicholsberg, zy" a. He proves that not only is humility the foundation of the entire Torah, but arrogance is the mother of all sin. We learn in the Gemarah (Sotah 5.) that the Divine Presence only rests upon the humble and modest: **"שהרי הקב"ה הניח כל הרים וגבעות והשרה שכינתו על הר סיני"**—**for he set aside all of the other mountains and hills and rested His Presence upon Har Sinai.** Concerning those who are haughty, however, it states (ibid.): **"כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח, אמר הקב"ה, אין אני והוא"**—**any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit, HKB" said: I and he cannot dwell together in the world.**

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"יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו... (Kiddushin 30:): ... **A person's evil inclination threatens to overpower him every day and seeks to kill him . . . and if not for HKB"H's help, he would be unable to withstand him.** This teaches us that it is not humanly possible to overcome the evil inclination without divine intervention. Therefore, the haughty person, with whom HKB"H refuses to dwell, lacks the divine assistance necessary to withstand the evil inclination; as a consequence, he is susceptible to all transgressions. Similarly, we have learned in the Gemarah (Sotah 4:): **"כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח כאילו עובד עבודת כוכבים"**—**Any person who possesses a haughtiness of spirit is regarded as though he worships idols.** Due to the fact that he lacks HKB"H's assistance, he succumbs even to the severe transgression of idolatry.

This important concept is discussed in Rabeinu Yonah's Sha'arei Teshuvah (Shaar 1, 27): **"והטעם, מלבד כי הגאווה גורמת חטאים, המדה עצמה חטאת, כמו שנאמר (משלי טז ה) תועבת ה' כל גבה לב, ובעל הגאווה נמסר . . . כי אין עזר השם עמו אחרי אשר הוא תועבת השם."** Besides the fact that arrogance causes sins, the very attribute itself is a sin, as it says (Mishlei 16,5): **Every haughty heart is the abomination of Hashem.** The arrogant one falls prey to his evil inclination, because Hashem finds him to be an abomination and will not help him.

This explains full well why HKB"H emphasized His great love for the attribute of humility immediately with the giving of the Torah—by giving the Torah through Moshe Rabeinu, the humblest of men, and on Har Sinai, the lowest of mountains. He was conveying the message that without the attribute of humility, receiving the Torah serves no purpose; for without HKB"H's aid—resting His Presence upon one who is humble—one is incapable of observing and abiding by the Torah's commandments.

### The Beginning of the Torah Constitutes a Vital Lesson Concerning Humility

Now, let us present a precious gem concerning the topic of humility—which is one of the basic premises of the entire Torah and all of creation. We know that HKB"H began the Torah with the Possuk (Bereishis 1,1): **"בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ"**. Concerning this Possuk, we have learned in the Midrash (B.R. 1,12):

**"שמעון בן עזאי אומר (תהלים יח לו) וענותך תרבני, בשר ודם מזכיר שמו ואחר כך שבחו, פלן אגוסטולי, פלן פראטאטא, אבל הקב"ה אינו כן, אלא משברא צורכי עולמו אחר כך מזכיר שמו, בראשית ברא ואחר כך אלקים."**

"Shimon ben Azai cites the opening Possuk of the Torah as an indication of HKB"H's humility. In contrast to human beings who mention their names before their work and accomplishments, HKB"H first mentions his creation, **בראשית ברא**, and only afterwards His name, **"אלקים"**.

It is quite apparent that Shimon ben Azai is addressing the Midrash's question in Tanna D'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah (end of Chapter 31):

**"ומה נשתנה הבי"ת מכל הכ"ב אותיות, שבה ברא הקב"ה את עולמו, שנאמר בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים Why is the ואת הארץ, והלא אין ראוי לומר אלא אלקים ברא בראשית, ומה תלמוד לומר בראשית ברא אלקים."**

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Hebrew letter "Beis" different from the other twenty-two letters of the aleph-Beis with which HKB"H created His universe? Why did the Torah not begin **אלקים ברא בראשית**, beginning with the word "elokim" and the letter "aleph," rather than **בראשית ברא אלקים** with the letter "Beis"?

To which Shimon ben Azai answers that this is to demonstrate HKB"H's attribute of humility—first He mentioned His creation and then He mentioned His name, the opposite of what a human king would have done. So, this teaches us that HKB"H began the Torah and created the universe with the letter "Beis," and not with the letter "aleph," to emphasize the importance of the attribute of humility—which is the foundation of the entire Torah and all of creation.

It is worthwhile adding a tidbit from the Zohar Chadash (Bereishis 10:). The word "**בראשית**" can be understood as "**בית ראשית**"—the letter "Beis" comes first or the "bayit," the home, comes first. This allusion teaches us that a man must first build his house before marrying a woman. Additionally, as we have just illustrated, one's home should reflect the "Beis" of "Bereishis"—the attribute of humility demonstrated by HKB"H by beginning the Torah with the letter "Beis" instead of with the letter "aleph." For, the Divine Presence will only dwell in a home founded on humility.

### House Afflictions Reflect a Defect in the Letter "Beis" of "Bereishis"

I would like to suggest a novel approach to the issue of afflictions affecting the house, which is discussed in our parsha (Vayikra 14, 34): **כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען אשר אני נותן לכם לאחוזה, ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית**—"כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען אשר אני נותן לכם לאחוזה, ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית" **אֲרָץ אַחֻזְתְּכֶם**—When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I will place a tzara'as affliction upon a house in the land of your possession. In his own holy words, the Ibn Ezra comments: **וטעם כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען, כי זה נוהג בארץ לבדה, בעבור גודל מעלת הארץ, כי המקדש בתוכם**—"וטעם כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען, כי זה נוהג בארץ לבדה, בעבור גודל מעלת הארץ, כי המקדש בתוכם"—these afflictions only occur in Eretz Yisroel, due to its high level of sanctity; for the Sanctuary is there and His Glory is in the Sanctuary.

To understand his comment, let us examine the possuk (ibid. 49): **ולקח לחטא את הבית שתי צפרים ועץ**—"ולקח לחטא את הבית שתי צפרים ועץ" **אֲרָץ וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזּוֹב**—To purify the house, he shall take two birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop. From the purification requirements, it is apparent that afflictions of the house are also a form of punishment for being haughty like a tall cedar tree—thus, requiring that one lower oneself to the level of a hyssop. It is important to understand that the purpose of inhabiting Eretz Yisroel is so that HKB"H can rest His Divine Presence in the Beis HaMikdash. Seeing as, HKB"H only rests His Shechinah upon one who is humble, humility is a prerequisite for acquiring Eretz Yisroel, as it is written (Tehillim 37,11): **וענוים יירשו ארץ**—"וענוים יירשו ארץ"—But the humble shall inherit the land.

This, now, is the interpretation of the verse: **"כי תבואו אל ארץ כנען אשר אני נותן לכם לאחוזה"**—When you arrive in the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession—and you act with arrogance rather than modesty and humility; **"ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית ארץ אחוזתכם"**--and I will place a tzara'as affliction upon a house in the land of your possession—indicating that you are not worthy of the Divine Presence. Thus, we understand the Ibn Ezra's comment: **כי זה נוהג בארץ לבדה, בעבור גודל מעלת הארץ,**

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"כי המקדש בתוכם והכבוד בתוך המקדש"—these afflictions only occur in Eretz Yisroel, due to its high level of sanctity; for the Sanctuary is there and His Glory is in the Sanctuary. In other words, the Glory of the Shechinah dwells in the Beis HaMikdash only on the condition that the people of Yisroel conduct themselves with humility.

As we have learned, HKB”H began the Torah with the letter “Beis” of the word "בראשית" to teach us the importance of the attribute of humility. For this very reason, if one fails to behave in a humble manner, HKB”H visits afflictions on his house, his "בית", warning him that he has harmed the letter “Beis” of "בראשית"—which reflects humility. Therefore, the verse concludes: **ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית** "ונתתי נגע צרעת בבית" -- **and I will place a tzara'as affliction upon a house (בבית) in the land of your possession.** The Possuk specifically states "בבית", which can be translated either as “upon a house” or as “upon the letter ‘Beis’”—alluding to the damage and effect caused to the letter “Beis.”

**"ובא אשר לו הבית והגיד לכהן לאמר כנגע נראה לי בבית"**—**the one to whom the house belongs shall come and declare to the Kohen, saying: Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house**—the owner of the house must search his soul to identify and appreciate the harm that he has caused, and then he must proclaim: **"כנגע נראה לי בבית"** -- **Something like an affliction has appeared to me in the house.** He must confess that he has damaged the letter “Beis” of "בראשית" and, as a result, he has been punished with a house affliction. **ויצוה הכהן ופנו את הבית בטרם יבוא הכהן לראות את הנגע,** **"ויצוה הכהן ופנו את הבית בטרם יבוא הכהן לראות את הנגע,"** **ולא יטמא כל אשר בבית**—**The Kohen shall command; and they shall clear the house before the Kohen comes to look at the affliction, so that everything in the house should not become contaminated.** For, a house full of haughtiness contaminates the other people within it.

**"ואחר כן יבוא הכהן לראות את הבית, וראה את הנגע והנה הנגע בקירות הבית שקערורות ירקקות או אדמדמות ומראהן שפל מן הקיר"**—**and afterward shall the Kohen come to look at the house. He shall look at the affliction and behold!**—the affliction is in the walls of the house, depressed, deep greens or deep reds; and their appearance is lower than the wall—this is an undeniable sign that the ill effects of haughtiness are entrenched in the house. **"ויצא הכהן מן הבית"**—**The Kohen shall exit the house**—that was contaminated by the affliction due the presence of the negative attribute of haughtiness; and he shall approach **"אל פתח הבית"**—**the entrance of the house**—to teach the owner of the house a crucial lesson. HKB”H **"פתח"**—opened and began—the Torah with the letter “Beis”—**"הבית"** —to instill in us the message that a Jewish home must be founded on humility.

### The Conclusion of the Torah Also Provides a Vital Lesson Concerning Humility

Now, take note that HKB”H not only began the Torah with a vital lesson concerning the importance of humility, but He also concluded the Torah with a similar lesson. The Gemarah (Menachot 30.) rules according to Rav Ashi that when writing a sefer Torah, the final words **"לעיני כל ישראל"** must end in the middle of a line. The Megaleh Amukot on Vaetchanan (9) finds a symbolic meaning in this halachah. Ending the Torah in the middle of a line teaches a person that even if he has studied the entire Torah, he should rest assured that he is not nearly done—he has still only completed part of his journey.

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How beautifully the conclusion of the Torah connects with its beginning! The words "לעיני כל ישראל" end in the middle of a line to teach us humility and convey the message that there is still much work to be done. Where, however, do we find the strength not to fall prey to arrogance and not to become overly proud of our accomplishments—after all, completing the Torah is a worthy accomplishment? The answer lies in the beginning of the Torah. HKB”H opened the Torah with the words **בראשית ברא** "בראשית ברא" to emphasize the importance of the attribute of humility. As we are commanded to emulate his attributes and ways (Shabbat 133:): **"מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום"**—**just as He is generous and merciful, so too we must strive to be generous and merciful**—we, too, must act accordingly and exemplify humility.

We can now return to the Midrash quoted earlier: **ללמדך שכל האומר לשון חמש תורות כתובות במצורע... ללמדך שכל האומר לשון חמש תורה**—the term “Torah” appears five times in the passage of the metzoro; this conveys that one who speaks lashon Hora violates all five books of the Torah. Certainly, one who speaks lashon Hora is infected with the negative attribute of haughtiness. For, if he was modest and aware of his own lowliness, he would not have the audacity to speak ill of others. For this reason, the Torah instructed the metzoro to bring cedar wood—symbolizing haughtiness—and hyssop in order to correct this serious character flaw. Seeing as HKB”H began and concluded the five books of the Torah with a vital lesson concerning the attribute of humility—without which a person would lack HKB”H’s assistance to overcome his yetzer Hora—the truth of the midrashic statement is evident: **"שכל האומר לשון חמש תורה"**—one who speaks lashon Hora violates all five books of the Torah.

Let us add one more point gleaned from the writings of the Zera Kodesh (Chukat). The Hebrew word for wisdom is **חכמה**; its letters can be rearranged to spell **כח מ"ה**, the power and strength of **מ"ה**—which alludes to the attribute of humility. In Shemot (16, 7), Moshe and Aharon refer to themselves as: **"ונחנו מה—what are we?"** This statement exemplified their extreme humility. Based on our discussion above, we can propose that the goal of the holy Torah’s wisdom is to help a person purge himself of the negative attribute of haughtiness and bring himself to absolute devotion to Hashem. That is true **"chochmah," כח מ"ה**—possessing the humility to recognize the insignificance of our will in relation to Hashem’s will. This explains nicely the statement in the Gemarah (Pesachim 66:): **"כל המתיימר אם חכם הוא חכמתו מסתלקת ממנו"**—**anyone who shows haughtiness, if he is a wise man, his wisdom deserts him.**

#### The Essence of Shlomo’s Wisdom Is to Distance Oneself from Haughtiness and to Embrace Humility

Continuing along this path, let us now endeavor to make sense of our sages’ puzzling statement regarding Shlomo HaMelech. Concerning Shlomo HaMelech, it is written: **וידבר על העצים מן הארז אשר בלבנון ועד האזוב אשר יוצא בקיר"ה על ידי שהגביה**—**He spoke of the trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon down to the hyssop which grows out of the wall.** This description alludes to the fact that he explained the reason why HKB”H commanded the metzoro to bring cedar wood and hyssop as follows: **עצמו כארז לקה בצרעת, כיון שהשפיל עצמו כאזוב נתרפא על ידי אזוב"**—**Since he was haughty like the**



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cedar, he was stricken with tzara'as; by lowering himself to the level of a hyssop, he was cured by the hyssop. We have already expressed our astonishment at the fact that of all the possible examples of Shlomo HaMelech's great wisdom, the Scriptures singled out this particular one.

Apparently, our blessed sages wondered the very same thing. This led them to the understanding that this explanation concerning the trees represents a fundamental principle for all of his wisdom and insight.

As explained, **חכמה**, wisdom, stands for **כח מ"ה**—the power and value of humility. Through all of Shlomo HaMelech's billions of insights concerning the mitzvos, he revealed how they are all directed at teaching man one essential lesson: to distance himself from the cedar tree—symbolizing the negative attribute of haughtiness, the root of all sin—and to embrace the lowly hyssop—symbolizing humility, the source of all kedushah, sanctity.

At this point, it is worthwhile adding a gem found in Rabeinu Bachaye's introduction to the Torah. He explains that the Possuk: **"וידבר שלשת אלפים משל"**—**He spoke three thousand proverbs**—is referring to the three volumes of Tanach authored by Shlomo HaMelech:

**"ומצינו שמתוך חכמתו הגדולה שלמד מן התורה, חיבר שלושה ספרים והם משלי ושיר השירים וקהלת... וזה שאמר וידבר שלושת אלפים משל. ונראה לי כי אלפים משלשון לימוד החכמה, כענין שכתוב (איוב לג לג) ואאלפך. חכמה, ויהיה שלושת אלפים כאילו אמר שלושת חיבורים."** With all of the tremendous wisdom he learned from the Torah, he composed three books—Mishlei, Shir HaShirim and Koheles. The word for one thousand in Hebrew, **אלף**, also means to teach and impart wisdom. Thus, the Possuk: **"וידבר שלשת אלפים משל"**—can be interpreted to mean that he wrote three compositions meant to impart wisdom.

If we examine these three books attributed to Shlomo HaMelech, we find that every chapter is overflowing with the theme of the Almighty's greatness and man's lowliness. This is especially true of the Book of Koheles which opens and concludes with a portrayal of man's lowly and gloomy condition. Koheles begins (1, 1): **"דברי קהלת בן דוד מלך בירושלים, הבל הבלים אמר קהלת הבל הבלים הכל הבל, מה (1, 1):"** **"The words of Koheles son of David, king in Yerushalayim: Futility of futilities! – said Koheles—futility of futilities! All is futile! What profit does man have for all his labor which he toils beneath the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth endures forever.** In a similar vein, the book of Koheles ends (12, 14): **"כי את כל מעשה האלקים יביא במשפט על כל נעלם אם טוב ואם רע"**—**For G-d will judge every deed—even everything hidden—whether good or evil.**

This then is the meaning of the Possuk: **"וידבר שלשת אלפים משל"**—he composed three sefarim, Mishlei, Shir HaShirim and Koheles; the text proceeds to explain the essence of the wisdom in these sefarim: **"וידבר על העצים מן הארז אשר בלבנון ועד האזוב אשר יוצא בקיר"**—in other words, he proved from them that man's purpose is to learn a lesson from the cedar tree and the hyssop brought by the metzoro. Man must learn to distance himself from haughtiness—symbolized by the cedar tree—and to embrace the attribute of humility—symbolized by the hyssop.

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### "The Cedar which Is in Lebanon"

#### Refers to the Cedars of the Beis HaMikdash

We have been discussing the Possuk: **"וידבר על העצים מן הארז אשר בלבנון ועד האזוב אשר יוצא בקיר"**—**He spoke of the trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon down to the hyssop which grows out of the wall.** Based on the notes of Rabbi Fischel Sofer, z"l, citing his teacher, the Chasam Sofer, we can add a lovely twist to our interpretation of this Possuk. He writes that when the Possuk speaks of "the cedar which is in Lebanon" it is referring to the cedars used to build the Beis HaMikdash. Rashi (Devarim 3, 25) explains that Lebanon is another name for the Beis HaMikdash.

Let us follow the Chasam Sofer's lead to explain our Possuk based on the teachings of the Rambam (Beis HaBechirah 4, 1): **"בעת שבנה שלמה את הבית וידע שסופו ליחרב, בנה בו מקום לגנוז בו הארון למטה"** **במטמוניות עמוקות ועקלקלות"**. When Shlomo built the Beis HaMikdash, he knew that it was destined to be destroyed; so he built a concealed place to store the Aron in the depths of the structure.

Concerning the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, we find a frightening statement in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Yechezkel 28, Remez 367): **"חירם היה מתגאה על ידי ששלח ארזים לבית המקדש, אמר הקב"ה הריני מחריב את ביתי, שלא יהיה חירם מתגאה עלי, שנאמר (זכריה יא א) פתח לבנון דלתיך ותאכל אש בארזיך"**—Chiram was proud and haughty due to the fact that he contributed cedars to the construction of the Beis HaMikdash; HKB"H decreed that He would destroy the Beis HaMikdash, so that Chiram would not be haughty on His account.

This Midrash teaches us how distasteful the negative attribute of haughtiness is. Even though Shlomo HaMelech built the Beis HaMikdash with the utmost kedushah, nevertheless, since he was forced to accept cedars from Chiram, the King of Tyre—who displayed haughtiness—HKB"H destroyed the Beis HaMikdash; HKB"H was unwilling to tolerate cedar wood that possessed any taint of haughtiness.

The expression: **"אזוב אשר בקיר"**-- **the hyssop which grows out of the wall**—alludes to the inferiority of the generation. The Gemarah states (Moed Katan 25:): **"אם בארזים נפלה שלהבת מה יעשו אזובי קיר"**—**if upon cedar trees a flame has fallen, what shall the hyssops of the wall do?** Whereas the cedar tree represents the grandest of plants, the hyssop represents the lowliest of plants.

Thus, we can interpret the Possuk-- **"וידבר על העצים מן הארז אשר בלבנון ועד האזוב אשר יוצא בקיר"**—**He spoke of the trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon down to the hyssop which grows out of the wall** --as follows: he spoke repeatedly about the contemptible nature of haughtiness and the praiseworthiness of humility. He brought proof: **"מן הארז אשר בלבנון"**—from the cedar wood that he was forced to take from Chiram, the King of Tyre, to build the Beis HaMikdash. Because of his haughtiness over the fact that he had contributed to the Beis HaMikdash, the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed. As a consequence, we fell from the greatest of heights to the lowest of depths: **"ועד האזוב"** **אשר יוצא בקיר"**—down to the level of the lowly hyssop on the wall. This should teach us the vital lesson that HKB"H detests the haughty and arrogant and loves the lowly and humble.