



## H Ha Pa a M a

continues to detail the intricate laws of the skin, cloth, and house affliction, . While is often considered a punishment for evil speech in rabbinic literature, the Talmud relates six other possible causes, one of which is arrogance ( 16a). Psalms connects these two sins in one verse, He who slanders his friend in secret I will cut off; I cannot endure the haughty and proud man (Psalms 101:5). There is a conceptual similarity between slander and hubris. Evil speech is often an external manifestation of the internal trait of arrogance. People who are humble and internally self-confident, do not need to talk badly about others to lift their own egos.

The ritual process of purification reflects this moral message. One of the sacrifices offered by the priest on behalf of the metzora is an , a guilt offering. Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno explains that this type of offering atones for , a misuse of the sacred domain. Evil speech and haughtiness are both considered a misappropriation of the Holy. Often done in private, those who slander others presume that nobody else will hear or take note. This is a direct insult to God, ignoring Divine omniscience. As the Talmud comments, Whoever commits a transgression in private, it is as though he pushed away the feet of the Divine Presence ( 16a).

Arrogance is also an exploitation of the Divine. Sforno quotes a stark statement from the Talmud, Any person who has arrogance within him, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: He and I cannot

dwell together in the world ( 5a). In his commentary on the Sforno, Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz explains that someone who is arrogant misappropriates God's exclusive right to , majesty, which is related to , pride. Here again, he intrudes on God's domain. As the verse in Psalms contends, only God is King, He is clothed in majesty ( ) (Psalms 93:1).

Taking the Sforno's model of further, perhaps the misuse of the holy goes even deeper. Both evil speech and arrogance not only disregard God's presence, but they also diminish the fact that humans are created in God's image. The attempts to denigrate, degrade, and deprecate the holiness of his victim through the defamation. Moreover, these sins dismiss the holiness of body and soul endowed by God to the . He, like all of us, is tasked to use his power of speech for kind and sacred purposes. He is encouraged to cultivate his character, skills, and talents for redemptive acts. Misinterpreting these gifts as his own - My own power and the might of my own hand (Deut. 8:17) - and distorting them to defame others, is , a mishandling of Divine blessings.

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, in his identifies one more perversion of the sacred: misplaced humility. Rashi, quoting a , describes the symbolism of the purification process, which included cedar wood and hyssop. Cedar, the tallest of trees, was included because was a manifestation of the arrogant

personality. Hyssop, a shrub whose leaves are tiny, is used because the person necessarily lowered himself through the purification process. Rabbi Alter argues that it only makes sense to include symbolic objects in the purification process that reflect the aspirational goals of the process. Since the cedar represents haughtiness, why would it be singled out and have a place of prominence in the process of purification?

Rabbi Alter suggests that there are times that the cause of our sins is not arrogance but erroneous humility. The Talmud, after a dozen or so serious denigrations of arrogance, writes in the name of Rav, that a Torah scholar needs to embody at least a small measure of arrogance (Shabbat 5a). In Hasidic

texts, this nuanced notion is referred to as *holy*