

THE POWER OF WORDS

101

לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

MAKING WONDERS

Chazal say that even the *bracha* of an ordinary person should not be considered insignificant, for two great Yidden, Dovid Hamelech and Daniel, were *bentched* by ordinary people and the *bracha* came to fruition. When Dovid Hamelech purchased the land for the Beis Hamikdash from the goyishe farmer, the farmer *bentched* him that the plague inflicting the Yidden should stop, and his *bracha* was fulfilled. Similarly, Daniel was *bentched* by the king Daryavesh that Hashem protect him from lions in the den, and so it came to be.

(מגילה טו ע"א)

Once, the Chassidim of the tzaddik Reb Mendel Horodoker, among them the Alter Rebbe, sat together and *chazzered* the torah that they had recently heard from their Rebbe. After reviewing it numerous times, they began speaking about matters in *kedusha*, and one participant brought out some *mashkeh*.

A chossid present, who had been suffering from a sickness for which the doctors had not found a cure, began to cry and asked those present to *bentch* him with a *refuah shleima*. Some of the others began mocking him, "Do we have the power to give a *bracha*?" Some even rebuked him for believing in simpletons like them, for *brachos* are only in the power of tzaddikim. Without relenting, the chossid continued to plead, and broke out crying from the depths of his heart. Seeing that he wasn't letting up and thinking there was nothing they could do, they began singing *nigunim*, in hope that this would calm and quiet him.

"Sha!" the Alter Rebbe called out. The *nigunim* stopped abruptly, and the crying chossid quieted. "My brothers and friends, have you forgotten the message that came down from *shamayim* to the *Chevraya Kadisha* ('holy group' - the students) of the Maggid: 'That which a *farbrengen* can accomplish, even Malach Michoel cannot accomplish.'" The Alter Rebbe explained that when Hashem sees the Yidden *bentch* each other with love, He fulfills their requests immediately. The chassidim were aroused and with brotherly love they *bentched* their fellow chossid with a *refuah shleima*.

(אג"ק מוהר"י צ"ח ג ע' תי"ב)

In the city of Lieple, there lived a well-to-do chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, who would learn chassidus in depth, daven at great length and would be among the first attendants at all chassidishe *farbrengens*. At one point, however, the chossid reconsidered the hours he spent at *farbrengens*. "These *farbrengens* do not allow me to learn chassidus in depth," he mused to himself. He decided to continue contributing towards the expenses of the *farbrengens*, but rather than attend, to stay home and learn chassidus.

As time passed, one misfortune after another befell the chossid. His business declined, his *shalom bayis* was disturbed, and members of his family fell ill with different sicknesses. The chossid realized that these were not mere coincidences and went to seek the Tzemach Tzedek's

council. Pouring out his troubled heart to the Rebbe, he wondered why he was encountering so much hardship. "Tell me about your daily conduct," the Rebbe said.

The chossid described his everyday behavior, mentioning among others things, his decision to forgo the *farbrengens* in order to use the time more efficiently for learning. "That is the reason for all your difficulties," said the Rebbe. "Participating in a Chassidishe *farbrengen* is very beneficial. When chassidim gather together, say *L'chaim*, and wish one another *L'chaim tovim ul'shalom*, they are in essence, showering vital *brachos* upon each other. *L'chaim*, life, contains the *bracha* for physical health, *tovim*, goodness, implies richness, and *ul'shalom*, peace, indicates harmony in the home. By avoiding the *farbrengen*, you are forgoing these *brachos*."

(רשימות דברים ח"א ע' קל"ח, וע"ש להנוסח 'לחיים ולברכה')

THE MISFORTUNE OF NEGATIVITY

Chazal say that "a covenant has been made with the lips", that the speech of a person has the power to make things happen. A person should not predict something bad, for then he is giving power to the Satan.

The torah forbids cursing another Yid. One reason being, that the speech of a person has a lofty source, and therefore, has the power to affect even outside occurrences. This is strengthened by the level of greatness of the one speaking.

Once, the *Amora* Shmuel went to comfort his brother Pinchas who had lost a child. Seeing that his fingernails had grown long, Shmuel encouraged him to trim them. Pinchas responded, "If you would lose a family member, would you still belittle this act of mourning?" Soon after, Shmuel lost a family member, and when Pinchas came to visit, Shmuel said with frustration, "Do you not realize the power of words?!"

(מועד קטן יח ע"א, ס' החינוך מוצה רלא)

Yehudah, the son of Rabbi Chiyah and son-in-law of Rabbi Yannai, would learn all week in yeshivah, returning home on Friday night. As he approached his home, a pillar of fire could be seen leading. One week, he was so engrossed in his learning that he delayed, so his father-in-law said in jest, "Who knows if he is still alive?" His words had an effect and the son-in-law passed away.

(כתובות סב ע"ב)

A young bochur from Apta, the son of an honest workman, received his draft notification, conscripting him to the Polish army. On Friday afternoon, the tzaddik Reb Avraham Yehoshua Heschel (the 'Ohev Yisroel') stopped on his way out of the bathhouse and entreated the Yidden standing around to help the bochur find a way out of his perilous predicament.

They were all convinced, until one man spoke up, "Why put all the effort to pay for his liberation? What difference will it make if so and so's son will join the army? Will this town cease to be a town?" This was enough to cool the interest of all the others.

Lma'an Yishme'u

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Taken aback, the tzaddik turned around and re-entered the bathhouse, while the speaker headed home. On his way, the man who had spoken out was gored by an ox, and had to be carried home due to his critical wounds. His family, overhearing what had transpired, hurried to speak with the Rebbe.

They met him as he was exiting the bathhouse, and he stopped to assure them, "I had not intended to punish, nor had I davened for such. However, when the man had rhetorically questioned, 'Will the town be a town without this bochur,' I couldn't help wondering if the town would still be a town if this man was missing. I tried not to think along these lines, but it was Hashem's will."

A short time later, due to his lethal wounds, this citizen was in fact missing from the town.

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 413)

It is *askened* in *Shulchan Aruch* that one must be very careful with what they say. One should not jokingly comment about a living person, "If he would be alive, he surely would be here already," for this can *ch"v* cause them harm. One should not tell a child that a dog or cat "will come to take them," for this can *ch"v* bring upon the child bad forces with those names, which can harm their body or *nesama*.

(שו"ע אדה"ז הל' שמירת הגוף והנפש סי"ב)

Even when reciting a *possuk* or *mishna* which includes a negative statement, one should change the wording so it does not imply a curse.

Rav Kahana sat before Rav Yehudah and recited the words of the *mishna*, "Hashem should smite you." Rav Yehudah instructed him, "Say 'smite him' instead, and do not curse me."

(שבועות לו ע"א)

POWERFUL WORDS

Once, while in the Baal Shem Tov's shul in Mezhibuzh, someone had an argument with another and shouted that he would tear the other fellow to pieces like a fish. The Baal Shem Tov told his *talmidim* to hold hands, and to stand near him with their eyes closed. Then, he placed his holy hands on the shoulders of the two *talmidim* standing next to him. Suddenly, the *talmidim* began shouting in great terror, for they saw this fellow actually tearing apart the other man.

(היום יום כ"ט תשרי)

In the city of Posen, Reb Boruch Batlan (the Alter Rebbe's great grandfather) lived as a tenant of the goldsmith Avigdor Tuvia and his wife Gittel. Avigdor Tuvia and his wife, though they gave much *tzedaka* and helped many, were not fine people; he played cards, drank and used bad language, and his wife also spoke in an unrefined way and would curse when angered. People would tremble from her curses, for they were known to materialize.

In the year תמ"ב, Avigdor Tuvia and his wife passed away, without children. Neighboring residents began hearing wild screams and drunken laughter coming out of the apartment the couple had lived in. Jumping and dancing feet would shake the house. Reb Boruch and family moved to another area, because they were unable to fall asleep at night.

On his next visit to his Rebbe Reb Yoel, the Baal Shem of Zamostch, he told him about the haunted house in Posen and about its past residents Avigdor Tuvia and Gittel. Reb Yoel Baal Shem said that the only way to drive the *sheidim* from the house, was to turn it into a *Beis Medrash*." The Baal Shem then gave clear directives: Ten of the Baal Shem's *talmidim* should fast the following Sunday, *lein Vayechal*, and spend the following night learning Torah. The next morning, five *Sifrei Torah* wrapped in *taleisim*, should be carried, each by two *talmidim*, and they should march from the shul to the goldsmith's house. At the door, they should call out to the *sheidim*, telling them to leave the house and make way for the Torah. They should then go inside and say certain *kapitlach Tehillim*. *Minyanim* should be held there three times a day, and *shuirim* for young and old should be organized. "Then everything will be in order," concluded Reb Yoel Baal Shem.

Meanwhile, the Mayor of Posen came one evening to see for himself. When he heard the sounds of screaming, yelling, clapping of hands, he hurried to ask the bishop for a special prayer to remove the *sheidim* from the town. The bishop called together his priests, and they walked in a procession, carrying their *tzlamim*, until they reached the house where they sprinkled water on the walls and closed their eyes, mumbling a prayer. The apartment was on the first floor and had four windows facing the street, where the priests were standing. Suddenly, the windows flung open and terrible faces popped out, so frightening that some priests fainted and many of the onlookers fled in terror.

That Sunday, the *talmidim* did as the Baal Shem had instructed. Hundreds of men and women, both Yidden and goyim crowded outside, waiting to see what would happen. Unafraid, the *talmidim*, called out three times for the *sheidim* to leave, and when the noises from the house did not stop, they broke down the door and entered. At that moment, every window pane was shattered, as the weirdest collection of creatures flew out, escaping for their lives.

For six weeks, everything went smoothly, but then sounds were heard once again, this time coming from the cellar. The neighbors, who had been enjoying the relief, were horrified to once again hear loud barks and noises, giving them no peace by day or night. One tenant, a dealer in furs, was a *misnaged* to the Baal Shem, and denied the miracle, so when the *sheidim* returned, he was delighted. When the neighbors suggested inviting the Baal Shem himself to resolve the matter, he was furious and declared he would fight to prevent this. One day, a customer came to see some fur skins, so the dealer sent his son down to cellar with the customer. As soon as they moved to open the cellar door, it flew open on its own, and out jumped the most frightening creature they had ever seen. The customer went white, and the son became crazy, and they both ran screaming into the street, eventually fainting from fright. When they came to, the son had to be tied with rope to keep him under control. Now, even the *misnaged* did not object to have the Baal Shem come and get rid of the *sheidim*.

The Baal Shem traveled to Posen and arranged the *Beis Din* for a *Din Torah* with the *sheidim*. The newly established *Beis Medrash* in the apartment was prepared, with a special area sectioned off by *mechitzos*, and the Baal Shem called out for the *sheidim* to appear, warning them not to hurt anyone. As soon as the *sheidim* made their presence felt, the Baal Shem began, "I have called you to a *Din Torah*, for you have exceeded the limits Hashem has set, by coming among humans." Strange incomprehensible sounds were heard. At the instructions of the Baal Shem, the head of the *Beis Din* stood up and decreed that one of the *sheidim* be able to speak clearly. "We have every right to come here," the *sheid* countered. "We were created by the curses of Avigdor Tuvia and his wife, Gittel, so we are the inheritors, and their house rightfully belongs to us. We left the apartment only because the light of the *Sifrei Torah* were too much for us to handle." The *sheidim* began to crow and squeak loudly, terrifying all those present. The Baal Shem called out loudly, "I command you, in the name of Hashem, that you be silent immediately and remain hidden from human eyes. You are to listen to the *psak* of the *Beis Din*." The shul became perfectly silent and they disappeared. The *Beis Din* immediately *askened* that they had no right to the inheritance, and they were never heard from again.

(ספר הזכרונות לאדהר"צ ח"ב ע' 106)

לע"נ מרת פייגעל בת ר' משה ארי' לייב ע"ה
נדבת בנה הרה"ח ר' ישראל שי' שמוטקין
לרגל היארצייט י"ד סיון

לזכות ר' ישעי' הלוי וחי' מושקא שיחיו הורוויץ לרגל חתונתם
לזכות הילד חיים ישראל יוסף שיחי רימלער
שיגדלוהו הוריו לתורה, לחופה ולמעשים טובים