

SPEAKING WITH CARE

102

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

CAREFUL SPEECH

A peddler once wandered through the markets near Tzipori announcing, "Who wishes to buy the remedy for life?" Rabbi Yanai heard the announcement from his home and called the peddler over so he could buy it. The man refused to come, saying, "It's not for you or your type." When Rabbi Yanai insisted, the man approached and opened a Tehillim to the *possuk*, "Who is the one who wants life? Hold your tongue from speaking bad." Rabbi Yanai affirmed his claim with the words of Shlomo Hamelech, "One who guards his mouth and tongue, protects himself from troubles."

(ויקרא רבה טז, ב)

Once, Rabbon Shimon ben Gamliel asked Tavi, his servant, "Go out to the marketplace and buy me a 'good' food." Tavi returned with a tongue of an animal. Rabbon Shimon then asked him to buy something 'bad.' Tavi returned, once again, with a tongue. In response to Rabbon Shimon's surprise, Tavi replied, "Both good and bad come from the tongue; when it is good, there is nothing better, and when it is bad, there is nothing worse."

(ילקוט שמעוני תהלים נב)

The king of Persia was once unwell, and his doctors prescribed the milk of a lioness. One man accepted the task, and taking with him ten goats, he went on the way. Nearing the lion's habitat, he stopped at a distance and sent a goat towards the lioness, which she quickly caught and devoured. The next day, he came a bit closer and gave her another goat. After ten days, he was able to approach pet the lioness, pet her and take some milk in peace.

On his trip returning home, while napping, he dreamt that his limbs were arguing with each other about who had been the most influential in acquiring the milk. The feet said, "Without us, you would not have gotten here," the hands claimed, "We took the milk," and the mind took the credit for the idea. The tongue then spoke up, "If I hadn't suggested the idea, it would never have happened." The other limbs laughed, "How do you dare compare yourself to us?! You're not an active limb like we are!" The tongue responded, "You will yet see that I control you."

Finally arriving at the palace, the man said to the king, "Your

majesty! Here is the milk of a dog." The king became furious and ordered that the man be hanged. As he was being led to the gallows, the limbs began to 'cry' and the tongue said, "I will save you and you will see that I am in charge." The man pleaded to be taken back to the king and he then told the king that truthfully, the milk had been taken from a lioness. This was checked out and he was subsequently freed. The limbs all surrendered to the tongue, "Now we see that 'life and death is dependent on the tongue.'"

(ילקוט שמעוני תהלים לד)

Hashem placed the tongue behind two walls, the teeth and the lips, so that one restrain from inappropriate speech. It is said that a person was created with two ears and one mouth, so that he knows to minimize his speech.

(ערכין טו ע"ב, ארחות צדיקים שער השתיקה)

After spending a year learning by the tzaddik Reb Mordechai of Neshchiz, Reb Naftali of Ropshitz was suddenly advised to return home. Reb Naftali pleaded to remain and was ignored, so he turned to the Rebbetzin. When she requested that Reb Naftali stay, Reb Mordechai agreed, but remarked, "I hope there will be no reason for regret."

A few days later, while Reb Mordechai was still in shul, a stranger came to his home. Reb Naftali, sensing the *aveiros* of the visitor, called out, "Get out of here! How dare you come to the Rebbe's home!" The stranger fled, but the tzaddik, sensing that something had happened, hurried home and asked who had come. Hearing the story, he ordered Reb Naftoli to hurry and bring the visitor back.

When the stranger arrived, Reb Mordechai welcomed him warmly and asked him why he had not come for so long. The man promised to come more often, and offered the tzaddik gifts from his farm, after which he took his leave.

Reb Mordechai then explained to his *talmid* the background of the event. The visitor had been close to the tzaddik and so he kept him away from sin, but since his visits have dwindled, he had gotten pulled down by many *aveiros*. He felt embarrassed to come to his Rebbe in this state and he continued to fall lower, until after a long while he decided to leave yiddishkeit completely. However, before doing so,

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he would visit Neshchiz one last time as a test: If he would be accepted warmly, he will know there's hope, and he will begin behaving like a proper Yid.

Reb Mordechai concluded, "I did not want all my my hard work and tefillos on behalf of this Yid to be endangered by your rash tongue, and that's why I had asked you to go home a few days prior."

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 388)

THE WISDOM OF SILENCE

Shlomo Hamelech said, "There is a time to speak and a time to be silent." Chazal say that one should speak words of Torah, but minimize in unnecessary chatter.

(קהלת ג,ז, חולין פט)

Rabbon Shimon ben Gamliel said, "All my days, I have been amongst *chachomim* and have found nothing more beneficial for a person than silence." Rebbi Akiva said, "A fence around wisdom is silence." This refers to unnecessary speech of worldly matters.

Chazal say that silence is good for the wise, how much more so this is true for others. The best remedy is silence, for a person will then be spared from many issues.

(אבות א,יז, ג,יג וברע"ב, פסחים צט ע"א)

In Eretz Yisroel they would say, "Speech is worth a *sela*, silence is worth two," implying that even purposeful speech should be limited.

(מגילה יח ע"א)

The Rambam divides a person's speech into five types: (1) Speaking as a *Mitzvah* – such as the learning of Torah, which is equal to all other *mitzvos*. (2) Forbidden speech – like falsehood, *lashon hara*, cursing others and unclean language. (3) Redundant speaking which brings neither benefit nor harm – such as discussing current events and the news. (4) Commendable talk – discussing the praise of good and the damaging effect of bad. - This includes praising the righteous and their doings so that others follow their ways, and degrading the sinners and their behavior so that they are despised in the eyes of all. This can also be done by relating a story or singing a song. (5) Permissible speech – that which is necessary for day to day living, for business and living. One should try to concentrate most of his speech on that which is a *mitzvah* and commendable, and minimize in the rest.

(פיהמ"ש לאבות א, יז)

The power of speech is an expression of the *Shechina* within the person and one must therefore try to use it for holiness. For this reason, the tongue is hidden in the mouth, just as a treasure is kept concealed and locked.

The Me'iri writes: Unnecessary speech is no different than the sounds made by animals.

(ראשית חכמה שער הקדושה פי"א, ס' התמיד להמאירי ע' ב)

After the passing of Rav Yehudah ben Shoshan in the upper Galil, he appeared in a dream to his talmid Rav Lapidos; his face shined like the sun and each hair in his beard like a blazing

torch. The talmid asked what he had done to merit such *kedusha*, and he replied that throughout his lifetime he had not spoken unnecessarily. A person's speech is similar to *malochim* and one should use it out for *kedusha*.

(ראשית חכמה שער האהבה פ"ו)

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev would explain the possuk, "One should not desecrate his word, whatever leaves his mouth he should fulfill," that one who guards his speech, everything he says will be fulfilled by Hashem.

(קדושת לוי פ' מטות)

The great chossid and mashpia Rashbatz would advise the chassidim who would fast, "Instead of fasting with your stomach, fast with your mouth!"

(לשמע אוזן ע' 222)

HOW TO SPEAK

Even when speaking about good things, one should speak in a refined manner. Amongst the descriptions of a refined person, Chazal list: He does not respond until the other person has finished speaking, he pauses to reflect before responding, he responds to the points in the order they were mentioned. One who does not act as such, though he may have many qualities, is considered an 'unfinished product' ("*Golem*").

One should only speak up when he feels that his words will be listened to. If someone is angry, one should not attempt to calm him until he calms down a little.

One should speak softly, not shout loudly or mumble to oneself.

(אבות ה,ז ובפיהמ"ש, רמב"ם הל' דעות פ"ה ה"ז)

While in exile, the Rebbe's father developed a close relationship with many of the local children. They would visit each day and he would tell them stories. When the news spread that Reb Levik had passed away, the boys came running into the house, and seeing the body covered with a sheet they began to scream, "It can't be! It can't be!" Rebbetzin Chana who had just lost her husband, quieted them, "Yidden don't shout..."

(עטרת מלכות ע' 287)

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