



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א
נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
שיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד
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Parashat Bo

The Power of Man's Speech

The *parasha* states (13:9), "And it [- *tefillin*] should be for you a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes, so that Hashem's Torah should be in your mouth; for with a strong hand did Hashem take you out of Egypt." The *pasuk* then states (ibid.16), "And it should be a sign on your arm and an ornament between your eyes; for with the strength of the hand did Hashem take us out of Egypt."

Question:

We must understand, how do *tefillin* being "a sign on your arm" enable that "Hashem's Torah should be in your mouth?"

The World View

The world generally does not value the power of speech nor its effects. They do not lend it enough significance. People feel that since speech is not an action performed manually, therefore it need not be viewed as being overly important. Therefore, man speaks haphazardly, and does not think enough about what he is saying. Many times a person can lie and promise things but not fulfill his word. There is no meaning or worth to the word that he gave his fellow, so long as he did not perform an action. Only special people with sterling reputations keep their word, until it becomes well known that by such and such a person "a word is a word." We are not speaking only about speaking the truth or lies, insulting or praising one's fellow. For with these things it is readily understood that there is an immediate impact upon the other person. Even though there are admittedly those who *do* think about what they say, however, regarding regular, everyday speech, man generally doesn't view it as being very important. Indeed, we have been witness on many instances where there is a slip of the tongue that causes a great storm to erupt; words that were spoken without thought. For example, most recently, the words of the editor of one of the prominent German weeklies have become publicized. He said that the only way to overcome the problem of Trump as president is by means of assassination, *rachmana liztlan*. How pathetic is such a statement; all the more so, to speak it publicly to the media. What a lack of responsibility it displays to ignore the effects that such a pitiful statement could have. However, our holy Torah teaches us just how important man's speech actually is, and man's ability to affect the world with his speech. Speech is not a meaningless matter that one should make light of. Rather, with his power of speech, man effects extraordinary changes and does unimaginable things. We are not merely referring to the speech of the *tzaddik*, about whom we are taught decrees and Hashem fulfills his decree. Rather, we are talking about each and every Jew, no matter what level he is on – his words have incredible power. Therefore man is required to think about what he says and to value it greatly. He must weigh each word that leaves his mouth on a scale, as we will explain.

The Secret of Speech According to the *Nefesh HaChayim*

We will begin by bringing the important words of R' Chayim of Volozhin in *Nefesh HaChayim* (*shaar* 1:13). He explains that the power of speech is greater than that of action. He substantiates this by quoting the *pasuk* (*Amos* 4:13) which states, "For behold, He forms mountains and creates winds; He recounts to a person what is his conversation." R' Chayim warns that in this lowly world, man does not perceive the building that takes place or the destruction, *chas ve'shalom*, above in the spiritual words with each and every word that he says. He may think to say, "What is speech and a minor conversation considered already, that it should affect anything in the world?" However, says R' Chayim, we should know for certain that every word and even light conversation, whatever he speaks with his lips – does not get lost and is not meaningless. Negative speech, *chas ve'shalom*, builds firmaments and worlds of falsehood that are on the side of the forces of evil. This causes the destruction of the spiritual worlds of holiness. Additionally, our Sages state (*Eirchin* 15a), "Greater is what is said by the mouth than from a deed performed ..." They have also said (*Sanhedrin* 92a), "One who changes his voice is as if he worshipped idolatry." This is the intention of the aforementioned *pasuk* in *Amos*, "He recounts to a person



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what is his conversation." In other words, when man stands in judgment before Hashem and must give an accounting of his deeds, Hashem will reveal to him the secret of what his conversation caused up above in the spiritual worlds. So says R' Chayim. [Also see Rabbeinu Bachaya's opening words to *Parashat Vayigash* where he discusses the power of speech.]

Explanation of the *Pasuk* in *Amos*

From the aforementioned *pasuk* in *Amos*, we see just how great the power of speech truly is. The *pasuk* stated, "For behold, He forms mountains and creates winds; He recounts to a person what is his conversation." We perceive mountains as being strong, high, and heavy. The wind, on the other hand, we perceive as being weightless; it is so light that we cannot even hold it with our hands. Even so, there are winds strong enough to break mountains and dislodge rocks. We see from here, then, what spirituality is. Whatever is more spiritual is more powerful. When the *pasuk* states, "He recounts to a person what is his conversation," it teaches us the power of man's speech. In other words, with his speech, which the *Targum* renders, a "*ruach mimalalah*, a wind that speaks," man can break mountains and dislodge rocks.

The Holiness of *Tefillin* and How to Merit Having Hashem's Torah in Our Mouths

Our *parashah* discusses one of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah – wearing *tefillin*. The reason the Torah gives for this mitzvah is in order to remember leaving Egypt. One of the necessary conditions for the *tefillin* being kosher is that when the parchment is prepared, it must be done *le'shem kedushat tefillin*, for the sake of the holiness of *tefillin*. Similarly, the *tefillin* must be written *le'shem kedushat tefillin*. If this condition is not fulfilled, even if the necessary words have been written, the *tefillin* are unfit for use. One does not fulfill any mitzvah with them and the blessing recited on them is a blessing in vain. This is despite the fact that they have been beautifully written, exactly like every other pair of *tefillin* – they are *passul*, unfit for use. This is true even though this is invisible to man's eye, and he cannot differentiate between these *tefillin* and *tefillin* that were written *le'shem kedushat tefillin*. Nevertheless, since this is a statement that the *sofer* must articulate when he is writing the *tefillin* – even though it is not noticeable on the *tefillin* themselves – it is absolutely necessary and it affects the holiness of the *tefillin* and its *kashrut*. Without it, the *tefillin* have no worth. From here we see how great man's ability to effect with his mouth is. He can transform the skin of an animal into something holy and pure. If not for the power vested in man's mouth, the *tefillin* would have remained mere animal skin. Man's words have the power to make revolutionary changes both for the good and bad, *chas ve'shalom*. This power affects everything – he can turn mundane things into spiritual ones and sanctify his soul with them. After having stated this, it is no wonder that through performing the mitzvah of *tefillin*, man merits having Hashem's Torah in his mouth. This is because when an individual puts on *tefillin* that were written with holiness, according to the *halacha*, they have the power to influence him and place a love for the Torah in his heart.

Each Jew, No Matter His Level, Affects Revolutionary Changes with His Mouth

According to what has been stated, we can see that not only great *tzaddikim* have the power to transform things both for good and the opposite. Rather, every Jew, no matter what level he is on – Hashem gave him the ability to change things with his mouth, even in our times. For example, a man says to a woman, "You are betrothed to me," and she is now permitted to him and forbidden to the rest of the world. This is despite the fact that a moment before, she was permitted to everyone. This is the power of speech. Similarly, one who consecrates an item turns the item into holiness, and it is now forbidden to derive benefit from it. Or, for example, someone who takes a vow to forbid a certain item to himself; it turns the item into something forbidden. On the other hand, a gentile's speech is not vested with power. If he betrothed a woman, she is not betrothed (see *Yevamot* 16b). So too, if a gentile takes a vow, it is not valid. Nor is an item he consecrated considered consecrated. This teaches you that as far as a Jew is concerned, Hashem has placed power in his words to transform even mundane items into holy ones. This applies to all items as well; a Jew has the ability to bestow them with holiness.

One Who Eats at a Table and Does Not Speak Words of Torah



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Now we can understand Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's statement in *Pirkei Avot* (3:3), "Rebbi Shimon said: If three people ate at one table and did not speak *divrei Torah*, it is like they ate from offerings to dead idols. This is as it states (*Yeshaya* 28), 'For all tables are full of vomit and waste ...'. However, if three ate at one table and said *divrei Torah*, it is like they ate from the table of Hashem, blessed is He, as it states (*Yechezkel* 41), 'This is the table that is before Hashem.'"

We must understand what it meant that by speaking *divrei Torah* the table it is considered a table of Hashem, but a table without *divrei Torah* is considered a table of vomit and waste. The explanation is as follows: When an individual speaks *divrei Torah* at the table, it sanctifies his food and it is transformed into a *korban* before Hashem. However, without *divrei Torah*, when man eats only for physical pleasure without vesting it with an aspect of Divine service, his food will ultimately be transformed into waste. Already from the time that he is eating, we know that his table is full of waste.

Story About R' Elimelech of Lizhensk

The *sefer Maaseihem Shel Tzaddikim* relates a story about Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. When Rabbi Elazar was young, he was a very wild boy. He was already close to the age of bar-mitzvah but was not acting maturely. It was related to his father, who responded, "Wait and see what will be after the bar-mitzvah." Rabbi Elimelech invited a tailor to his home and told him that he wished to order a suit for the bar-mitzvah boy. His only condition was that he be present at every stage of the of the suit's preparation. He also requested from the tailor that when he was sewing the suit, he should have intention that the suit should be for the honor of Hashem. And indeed, when the tailor began to cut the fabric, he said that he was doing it for the honor of Hashem. When he started sewing the shoulders of the suit, Rabbi Elimelech told him to say that he is sewing the shoulders so that Rabbi Elazar should move his shoulders only for the honor of Hashem. When he started the sleeves, Rabbi Elimelech told him to say that he is sewing the sleeves so that Rabbi Elazar would lift his hands only for the honor of Hashem. He said this for every part of the suit, until it was made totally for the honor of Hashem. When the day of the bar-mitzvah arrived, and the boy wore the suit, holiness immediately rested upon him, and a new spirit entered him. From that moment on, he rose in spirituality until he became a *gadol be'Yisrael*.

Words of Mussar

We have learned how the power of man's speech is so great that it can affect both the higher and lower worlds. This as we have seen in present times, how each slip of the tongue can cause hatred and strife. On the other hand, it can also cause the opposite, by speaking words that benefit another and influence for the good. However, apart from the outer, external layer of speech, speech also has the inner power to transform the skin of an animal into holiness, which we stand before and kiss, like a *sefer Torah*, for example. All of its holiness is dependent upon man's mouth. So, too, does the mouth have an effect on the higher, spiritual worlds, as the *Nefesh Hachayim* stated. Therefore, man's mouth has the ability to sanctify all of his actions, property, and food that he eats as well. Therefore, anyone who wishes to merit himself and his children, to raise them to Torah observance and Heavenly fear, should try to say that each deed he performs either for himself or his children is to honor Hashem and in order to carry out His Will. So too, does this apply to the mother. When she cooks each meal, she should say that she is doing it for the honor of Hashem, so that her children should eat and thereby have strength to perform His Will. The same thing applies to the clothes that man wears, the utensils he uses, and the actions he performs – all are influenced by man's mouth.

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,
Rav Mordechai Malka