



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,  
ישיבה קטנה ארחות יהודה, ביהמ"ד גבוה לרבנים ודיינים "לקח טוב" קופת "מפעל החסד" אלעד  
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## Parashat Matot

### Man's Spiritual Level is Determined By His Speech And His Success Depends Upon It

#### Questions:

- 1 – The *parashah* states [30:3], "A man who takes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to forbid something to himself, he shall not desecrate his word (*lo yichal devar*); according to whatever comes out of his mouth shall he do." It would appear that the words *lo yichal devar*, "he shall not desecrate his word," are superfluous. Rather, it would have sufficed to simply write, "A man who takes a vow ... according to all that comes out of his mouth shall he do." Why was it necessary to write "he shall not desecrate his word?"
- 2 – Furthermore, the *pasuk* seems to be repetitive, for "he shall not desecrate his word" essentially has the same meaning as "according to whatever comes out of his mouth shall he do."

#### Speech

Man's superiority over the other elements of creation lies in his status as a *medaber*, one who speaks. This is as it states in relation to the creation of the first man [Bereishit 2:7], "*Vayipach be'apav nishmat chayim*, And He blew into his nostrils a living spirit." On the words *nishmat chayim*, Onkelos renders, *le'ruach mimalilah*, "a spirit of speech." This is an extraordinary phenomenon which is unsurpassed, for animals possess the same physical makeup of the mouth and throat that a man has. They also have voices. But, nevertheless, they do not have the power of speech. [Besides for the donkey of Bilam, which our Sages in *Masechet Avot* teach was created at twilight during the creation of the world, in order to reproach Bilam.] Yet man can pronounce letters and sentences, and by doing so, express his wisdom, guidance, and views. He can relate his thoughts, values, and love for another. He can even use his speech to express negative things Heaven forbid, such as anger, slander, and *lashon hara*. Now recognize what a miracle occurs each time man wishes to speak either good or bad. Shlomo Hamelech, in his wisdom, has stated that man's spiritual level can be measured by his speech. This is as the *pasuk* states in *Mishlei* [27:21], "A man according to his praises." In *Shaarei Teshuvah* [shaar 3], Rabbeinu Yonah explains that man's level can be determined by that which he praises. If he praises good deeds, Torah scholars, and *tzaddikim*, you can discern that he is a good man, and that there is a root of righteousness inside him. For it is impossible for him to constantly praise good deeds and individuals, and on the other hand, belittle sin and those who commit them, unless he himself detests evil and chooses good. Even if it is possible that he has committed sins in private, nevertheless, because of the righteous root inside him, he will eventually return to the proper path. However, someone who praises detestable deeds or praises the wicked, is entirely wicked and desecrates the service of Hashem. You see therefore that the measuring stick of man is according to whether his speech is good or bad. Much to our dismay, all strife and conflicts are a product of man's speech. This is both in the home and in society – it is all dependent on his speech. This is as Shlomo Hamelech stated in *Mishlei* [18:21], "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." The reality is that with his power of speech, man can elevate or denigrate. There are those who mistakenly think that they do not know how to utilize the power of speech in order to learn, teach, forgive, or shower love upon one's spouse and children. The same applies to a *rav* and a teacher with his students. Many times, with one good word that warms the heart, a tremendously positive change can occur in a student. The opposite is true as well, Heaven forbid. In this way, one fulfills the dictum of Shlomo Hamelech in *Mishlei* [25:15], "A soft tongue breaks strong fury." By doing so, he can draw hearts closer to our Father in Heaven. However, one whose mouth spews forth expressions of anger over each and every thing, distances others, and they do not wish to be in his presence. He even loses the companionship of his household, and wrecks the harmony between him and his spouse. We see therefore, that life and death, and even happiness, wealth, education, and success, are all dependent on man's speech.



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### Why Does it State, "You Shall Not Desecrate Your Word?"

According to the above, we can now understand the expression of the *pasuk*. The Torah wishes to teach us that there is a requirement beyond simply fulfilling that which he says. It also wishes to teach us that the secret to success, life and death, happiness and sadness, peace and strife, education, and communication is all dependent on his speech. The more he knows how to sanctify his words and to purify them so that they should be totally refined and noble, as it states, "you shall not desecrate your word," to that degree will he merit that "whatever comes out of his mouth shall he do," in other words, he will act accordingly, and is guaranteed success, blessing, marital harmony, and happiness.

### During the Period of *Bein Hamitzarim* One Must be Twice as Careful

It is known that the Arizal wrote that the number of hours of *Bein Hamitzarim* are divided into two parts. The first part consists of the 13 days in the month of Tammuz which amount to a total of 312 hours. This number corresponds to the *pasuk*, "And he took from them captives [שבי]." שבי has the numerical value of 312, alluding to the fact that Esav has taken the hours of this month into "captivity." The second part are the nine days of the month of Av. These days are more even more serious, and we are accustomed to show signs of mourning by not cutting our hair, laundering our clothes, nor eating meat, etc. The total amount of hours in these days are 216. If one subtracts the four afternoon hours of Tisha B'Av (since during these hours the glimmer of redemption begins to flicker) he is left with 212 hours, the numerical value of which corresponds to the word *dibur*, speech. From this we learn an important lesson: These are difficult days when the *Middat Hadin* is strong. They are times that have seen very harsh decrees generation after generation, dating back to the episode of the spies in the desert who sinned with their speech. They spoke negatively about Eretz Yisrael and aroused the Jews to rebel against Hashem, who ultimately raised their voices and cried needlessly. From then it was decreed that since the Jews cried needlessly, so too, would Hashem give them a reason to cry each subsequent generation. Since the source of these decrees is because of a sin with speech, the number of hours in the month allude to *dibur*, speech. Therefore, man must be extra careful during this period – and indeed, he should warn others – not to stumble with his speech and not to desecrate it. For this is the key to rectifying this period. To the extent that we guard our tongues, to that degree we will merit annulling harsh decrees and ushering in the redemption speedily.

### Story About the Chafetz Chayim, Cited in the *Sefer Siach Yosef*

The grandson of R' Aharon Neuwirth zt"l told me about a story that happened with his grandfather. His grandfather related, "Every so often, I used to travel to the Chafetz Chayim in order to ask his advice regarding matters pertaining to my rabbinical post in Germany. One time, before I returned to my congregation in Germany, I asked the Chafetz Chayim what to speak about this coming Shabbat, in order to spiritually strengthen the congregation. At that time, the Chafetz Chayim was about 83 years old. He was lying in bed out of sheer weakness. Suddenly, he instructed me to draw close to him, and he asked me to open his mouth. I was frightened; I didn't understand what he meant. To open the mouth of the Chafetz Chayim? Is anyone willing to enter the mouth of a lion? But the Chafetz Chayim instructed me a second time to open his mouth. Out of fear, I opened his holy mouth and discovered two rows of healthy, white teeth, like those of a young man. I stood there in shock, and then the Chafetz Chayim requested, "Please count the number of teeth that I have in my mouth." And indeed, with fear, I did as he requested, and counted 32 teeth, not one missing or blemished. At that point, the Chafetz Chayim took my hand and said with a smile, "I guarded the mouth that Hashem gave me, and Hashem guarded my mouth." He then added, "This is what you should tell your congregation: 'I saw a very elderly man and all of his teeth were intact. This is all because he guarded his mouth from *lashon hara* and other forms of speech.'"

### The Power of a Good Word

When R' Isser Zalman Meltzer, who would eventually become the Rosh Yeshiva of Eitz Chayim, arrived in Eretz Yisrael, he went to visit R' Reuven Bengis, the *rav* of Yerushalayim. During their conversation, R' Isser Zalman



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thanked R' Bengis and told R' Bengis that his spiritual level is entirely in his merit. This is the story behind R' Isser Zalman's thanks: In their youth, the two of them had learned in the yeshiva of the Netziv in Volozhin. When R' Isser Zalman arrived at the yeshiva the first time, upon entering, he noticed the stark contrast between *his* appearance and that of the other *bachurim*. He was dressed poorly, with tattered clothing, and out of embarrassment, decided that he would return home the following day. The Netziv discerned the feelings of the troubled, new *bachur*, approached his table and asked him a question in a Torah topic. He answered, and the Netziv lauded his response with much praise. The following day, R' Bengis, who was also a student at in the yeshiva, approached R' Isser Zalman and once again told him just how much the Netziv was astounded by his answers. Thanks to those words of encouragement, R' Isser Zalman remained in the yeshiva and ascended to Torah greatness.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rav Mordechai Malka