

## SPEAKING WITH CARE (2)

### WATCHING OUR WORDS

When the tzaddik Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa was instructed by his Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin, to journey to a small town, he asked some chassidim to join him, and they set out without knowing the purpose of their trip. When it was time to eat, Reb Simcha and the chassidim were informed by their host that they were going to be served *fleishigs*. Whereupon, they began questioning how the food was prepared, delving into many *halachic* details. Suddenly, they were interrupted by a beggar, warming himself near the fireplace, "You are so careful with what goes into your mouths, but you don't inspect what comes out – your words!"

When Reb Simcha Bunim heard this, he understood why his Rebbe had sent him, and promptly set out on his journey home.

(סיפורי חסידים זיון תורה ע' 95)

The tzaddik Reb Nachman of Breslav once said, "In our youth we learn to speak, and as we age we learn to keep silent. That's the problem! We learn to speak before we learn how to keep silent..."

(טללי תשובה ע' 219)

The Rebbe explains that besides refraining from speaking negatively, one should use his speech for good things. In fact, by increasing positive talk, one automatically comes to refrain from bad speech. This is the way of Chassidus, to chase away the bad by increasing in good.

(התועדויות תשמ"ח ח"ד ע' 92)

In תש"י, the chossid Reb Volf Greenglass compiled a short booklet of basic *halachos* in daily life which are unknown or overlooked by some. In a letter, the Rebbe suggests including some *halachos* about guarding one's speech, for he has heard that some people are not careful about this.

(אג"ק ח"ג ע' שנה)

The chossid Reb Zev Vilenker said about himself, "The Alter Rebbe's look affected me that I should never speak without thinking." Indeed throughout his entire life, whenever he could suffice with a motion or hint, he would abstain from speaking.

(אג"ק הרי"צ ח"א ע' עדר)

Reb Avrohom, the maggid of Trisk, once said, "You alone do not need to speak, for thought would suffice; you only speak for the benefit of your friend. Stop and think for a moment: perhaps your friend is not interested in this 'favor' of yours" ...

(טללי תשובה ע' 219)

One must be careful to keep his word. If one says undertakes to do something, he must keep it, even if he did not 'promise' to do so. Therefore one should always add that they will do something "*bli neder*" (without a promise).

(שו"ע יו"ד סי' רג)

### GOOD SPEECH

When speaking, one should speak in a 'clean' language, using positive expressions instead of negative ones. When Hashem told Noach to bring the animals into the *teivah*, He told him to include pairs of animals 'that are not pure', instead of simply saying, 'the *tamei* animals.'

There were two *talmidim* who were once learning a difficult subject in front of the *Amora* Rav. Afterwards, one *talmid* commented, "This learning has made me like a tired *davar acher* (pig)," The other used the term, "A tired goat." Rav did not speak to the first *talmid* anymore.

A similar incident occurred with a *kohen* in the *Beis Hamikdash* who described his portion of the *lechem hapanim* as, "The size of a lizard's tail." They investigated and found out that this *kohen* was *possul*.

(פסחים ג ע"א וע"ב)

The Rebbe was especially careful with his words, using words such as 'opposite of good', 'opposite of life' etc. When the Rebbe would quote words of Chazal which were of a negative nature, the Rebbe would only hint to them, not wanting to spell it out. The Rebbe suggested that in *lashon hakodesh*, hospitals should not be referred to as a home of the sick, but rather a home of healing, emphasizing the positive. The exception to this, is when a lesson is being taught, for then things must be spelled out clearly without room for doubt.

(תו"מ תשמ"ז ח"ב ע' 37, לקו"ש ח"י ע' 26)

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## CLEAN SPEECH

Chazal caution that one should speak in a clean manner. Due to unclean speech, many tragedies may come upon the Yidden and *tefilos* may go unanswered.

(שבת לג ע"א)

Chazal compare a worthy person who speaks coarsely, to a palace with a dirty and smelly tannery in it, causing all passersby to exclaim, "How gorgeous is this palace! How unfortunate it is that a tannery has been set in it." If one gains respect by the 'bad smell', how much more respect he would gain if he would emit a 'beautiful perfume'.

(מס' דרך ארץ בן עזאי פ"א ה"ג)

For many years, the chossid and *shadar* (traveling shliach of the Rebbe) Reb Leib Hoffman lived in Vitebsk. During *yechidus*, a chossid told the Rebbe Maharash that he does not go to hear Reb Leib *chazzering* chassidus. The Rebbe advised him to go listen to Reb Leib, "Since he has a clean mouth."

(רשימו"ד חדש ע' 260)

One summer day in תשל"א, some bochurim were speaking near the Rebbe's room and one bochur used inappropriate language. When the Rebbe heard this, his face paled.

At the next *farbrengen*, the Rebbe raised the subject and spoke about it with much pain. The Rebbe appeared very serious and he looked intently at the bochurim, pleading that he should not have to mention the subject again.

"Though in general these matters are not discussed, but once in a while, they must be mentioned. The negative effects of unclean speech are far reaching and an objection must be made. Though it is not my job, since I heard it, I must say something. Surely, future *farbrengens* will be reserved for matters of Torah and *yiras shamayim*."

(דעם רבי'נס קינדער ע' קצט)

The Rebbe also said that improper speech can have negative effects on one's *avodas Hashem* and improving it will help one overcome certain struggles.

(תו"מ ח"י ע' 68, אג"ק ח"ט ע' רעג)

## POSITIVE SPEECH

As he was walking, a great Rov passed a dead dog which produced a horrible stench. One of his *talmidim* commented, "How bad is its smell!" The Rov replied, "How white are its teeth!" and his *talmidim* felt embarrassed for having spoken negatively. He taught them a lesson that one should not speak negatively, even concerning a dead dog, and certainly not about a living person.

(חובות הלבבות שער הכניעה פ"ו)

Chazal say that even when one must mention something negative, he should begin with the positive. When the Torah discusses the non-*kosher* animals it begins with those which have one *kosher* sign, mentioning that aspect first.

Dovid Hamelech began Tehillim with praise for those who refrain from following bad ways, as opposed to starting with

speaking negatively about those who do.

(ב"ר פל"ב, ירושלמי מגילה פ"ג ה"ז, ילקוט שמעוני תהלים א)

One should also conclude on a good note. In those *seforim* of Nach which end with something negative, the second to last *possuk* is repeated in order to end on a positive note. When the Rebbe spoke of something negative, he would always conclude with good, or at least add, "*Umesaymim b'tov*" (and we conclude with positivity).

(ברכות לא ע"א, התוועדויות תשד"מ ח"ב ע' 632)

At a *yechidus* with the supporters of *Tomchei Temimim*, one of those present mentioned the deficiencies of a certain city, to which the Rebbe responded, "In discussing a deficiency, there are two approaches: one can specify the problem, or one can highlight the positive, and the problem will be understood on its own. For example, if a person is missing his left hand *ch"v*, one can state that this person's hand is missing, or one can speak about how much this person accomplishes with his right hand, from which it is understood that his other hand is missing. This is the way one should speak."

(תו"מ חכ"ד ע' 198)

One should not bear bad tidings, as Shlomo Hamelech writes, "The bearer of bad news is a fool." Therefore, it is paskened in *Shulchan Aruch* that there is no advantage in telling relatives about the passing of their family member, except to sons who need to recite *kaddish*.

When Hasach was told by Mordechai of the decree which befell the Yidden, he did not return to Ester to bring her this news.

Rav Kahana fell ill and the *chachomim* sent Rav Yehoshua to check how he was doing. When he arrived, he discovered that Rav Kahana had passed away. Rav Yehoshua tore his clothes, and then turned them backward, so the *chachomim* would not notice immediately. Upon his return, they noticed that he had been crying and asked if Rav Kahana had passed away. Rav Kahana replied, "I didn't say anything, for the *possuk* says that one should not bear bad tidings."

(מגילה טו ע"א, יו"ד סי' תב סי"ב, פסחים ג ע"ב)

In the Rebbe's Hagadah was expanded to include the Rebbe's *sichos* and letters about Pesach. When the printed Hagadah was presented to the Rebbe, he noted that the final words of the sefer (in a concluding note) were "the pain of the child". At the Rebbe's instructions, a rubber stamp with the words "*I'shana haba'a biyerushalayim*" was prepared, and all the sefarim were duly stamped, to finish on a positive note.

(מפי הרב יהודה לייב שלי שפירא)

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