

This week's translation is dedicated in honor of my wife, Devorah, who continuously teaches our children (and me) the true path of *emuna* in everyday life.

פרשת תזריע - מצורע

Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's
"Ohr Ha'Emunah"

זֹאת תְּהִי־הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצַנֵּעַ בַּיּוֹם טְהַרְתּוּ וְהוֹבֵא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: (יד, ב)

The Medrash tells us that all is dependant on the tongue (one's speech). If a person uses his tongue/speech to engage in learning Torah, he earns life because the Torah is life, as the *pasuk* says, "It [the Torah] is a tree of life for those who uphold it" (Mishlay 3:18). If one uses his tongue/speech for evil speech like slander, he forfeits his life because slander is worse than murder. One who murders ends one life - one who slanders ends three: his own, the listener's and the one about whom he speaks.

שִׁמְרֵם פִּי וְלִשְׁוֹנוֹ שִׁמְרֵם מִצָּרוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ: (כא, כג)

Words contain tremendous power, both for good and for evil.

Blessings are a good example. How great is the joy of a Jew who receives a blessing from *atzaddik*? How much *emuna* is revealed within a Jew when he receives such a *bracha*? He is confident in its achievement. A young American Rabbi told an amazing story regarding the Chofetz Chaim, how his holy *brachos* were fulfilled many years after his passing. One day a young man was admitted to the hospital critically injured in an accident. After identifying him via the contents of his wallet, they called his sister who lived nearby. From amidst her sobbing she told the chaplain that they had an elderly father who lived in a nursing home. They quickly arranged to have the elderly father brought to the hospital to be at his son's bedside. The patient remained in a coma yet the father appeared to be unmoved. Even after the doctors explained that his son had only a few hours to live, the father appeared unconcerned and unemotional. Even more shocking to the doctors and the chaplain was the father's declaration that he was returning to the nursing home and he was confident that his son would have a full recovery. Concerned that the father might have not understood the severity of the situation or was possibly not completely lucid, they tried explaining the situation again. The father clarified his reaction and his confidence: When he had been a young man, he had lived in Radin, the Chofetz Chaim's hometown. When the Chofetz Chaim was in the process of publishing the *Mishna Berura*, he organized a group of laymen to learn with so as to observe whether his writings were readily comprehensible. The insights of this elderly father were particularly pleasing to the Chofetz Chaim and so he blessed him with two blessings: (i) that he should live a long life, and (2) that none of his children should die in his lifetime. Therefore, this elderly man knew with absolute clarity that his son would recover. As such, there was no reason for him not to go home and come back tomorrow. To the amazement of the doctors, the next morning, the young man opened his eyes. Two weeks later he was out of bed and eventually he had a full and complete recovery.

Even amongst ourselves we should never disparage another's *bracha*. Chazal warn us to never treat the *bracha* of a simple person lightly because we never know where salvation may come from. Whenever a person blesses his friend he should think, "I know that my I am not worthy of my blessings coming to fruition, I only bless because maybe I will find a moment of good will from Hashem who listens to the prayers of everyone." (*Pele Yoetz*)

The blessings of the *kohanim* are so significant and we must be very diligent with regards to them. When the Torah commands the *kohanim* to bless the Jewish people its says, "so shall you bless the

Children of Israel, say to them." What is meant by "say to them?" It means that the *kohanim* are to instruct the Jewish people to concentrate on receiving the blessings, that they should stand facing the *kohanim* quietly and focus their hearts on accepting the blessings, as they would the word of Hashem. Therefore, one must be very careful and one who turns towards mundane conversation is not just denigrating the blessings - his sin is very great, aside from the fact that the blessings will not apply to him. (R' Akiva Eiger)

We see the great product of the blessings that the elders gave to Boaz. They blessed him that Hashem should make Rus like Rochel and Leah and she merited spawning the Davidic dynasty. When Esav discovered that Yaakov had taken his father's blessings, he shed tears because he understood the loss of a *tzaddik's brachos*. We still suffer from those tears. The Chofetz Chaim had the custom of telling those who came to him for *brachos*, "while you are coming to me to ask me to ask Hashem for something, ask Him yourself directly."

Words have great power. A good word, a nice idea that you tell someone else, plays melodically in his head for many days, it is not quickly forgotten. If it is written and he can review it repeatedly, it does good for the soul. A good word can save a life. There are many stories of people who had given up entirely, they gave up on life and someone gave them a bit of encouragement, some interesting thought at a critical moment and this led them to choose life. An inspiring word to someone who needs it can galvanize him to new heights. By contrast, when a person is down, it is very easy to bury him completely with disheartening words.

Words have tremendous power. They have the power to transform something completely permissible into something absolutely forbidden in a few seconds, by way of a vow. Vows are really wondrous because by way of vows we see the real power than man has with his words to create new *mitzvos* for himself that Hashem did not command. If he forbids something to himself, it is as if the Torah forbade it. The use of a vow is itself peculiar. If a person can overcome his evil inclination, what need does he have for a vow and if he cannot overcome the evil inclination, what use is there in taking a vow? From the fact that it does indeed work we see the power of words - by taking a vow, the person receives exceptional strength to overcome and succeed.

Words have tremendous power. When? When they are precise, when they are not exaggerated, when they are true. When you seek something from Hashem and you plead for it, it must be precise. If it is an approximation, then you will receive approximately what you need. For words to have an effect, internally, in the soul, they must be precise. A person gains much joy from attempting to explain something to Hashem and has difficulty doing so and he suddenly finds a way to describe it in a clear cut fashion. If a person has difficulty expressing himself and finally is able to explain it to Hashem, he feels that he has cleared his path to Hashem.

Words have tremendous power. A person speaks to Hashem from his heart, with simplicity, simple words, in his own words, like he is talking to a good friend. He tells Him what's bothering him. He asks for help. He thanks Hashem. He begs forgiveness. He is whispering into the only ear in existence that never tires.

Happiness, love, vivacity, satisfaction in life are only possible when we walk with Hashem, hand in hand. We need merely open our mouths and begin speaking to Hashem and there is already joy in the heart. We see Hashem's compassion with every step we take and we are happy. We are amazed by all of the miracles that Hashem performs for us and we cannot thank Him enough. We do *teshuvah* and Hashem

forgives us for everything, for we are raised up to a place that has no room for sin and sin cannot grasp us there. We increase discussions of *emuna* and *bitachon* and that pierces the heart and we know: everything will be transformed for the good, from now on the outcome will be sweet, there is no despair in the world, the end will be good. We are forbidden from uttering words that lack *emuna*, that lack hope - because **words have tremendous power, for good and for evil.**

This week's *parsha* deals with afflictions. The affliction of *tzaraas* besets a person for the sin of slander and defamation. No other limb can cause as much damage as the tongue. Every forbidden word creates a prosecutor and in one hour a person can speak hundreds of words of slander and talebearing. Conversely, if a person acts properly, his speech is his source of satisfaction and success. (Shmiras Halashon, Part 2, Chapter 9).

Any intelligent person will be diligent in fighting the battle with this difficult impulse. We risk losing everything if we slander others and tell tales. How much holiness can be in force in our learning and *davening* when they are said with a mouth that moments before were speaking *loshon hora*? The Zohar says that one who guards his mouth and tongue merits actual *ruach hakodesh*.

Loshon hora and *rechilus* is extremely dangerous. A certain 93 year old Jew told that in 1929 the Lubavitcher Rebbe (the Rebbe Rayatz) visited his parents home in Rosh Pina. Before leaving them, the Rebbe blessed them with long life and health. His uncle died at the age of 96, his grandfather dies at the age of 92 and his grandmother even older and other relatives too. He testified that he still feels good and Hashem should continue to grant him life. He said that the key to longevity (in addition to the *tzaddik's bracha*) was the *pasuk*:

שֹׁמֵר פִּי וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ שֹׁמֵר מִצְרוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ - he who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from trouble.

When a person says and improper word - it comes at a price. We need to remember this our entire lives. We need to remember that when someone disparages another - all of the speaker's merits are transferred to his subject and all of his subject's sins are transferred to him.

Once upon a time we had a warning system. Before a person was afflicted with *tzaraas* on his body, it attacked his house, and if that didn't help, it affected his clothing. Today we do not receive such blatant reminders from Heaven. R' Refael of Hamburg would request of any visitors that they not speak of news of anyone else while in his home. A person must avoid frivolous gatherings in order to protect himself from the sins of slander, talebearing, frivolity, embarrassing others and many other similar sins.

The Vilna Gaon warned his wife and daughters not to go to *shul* on Shabbos so as not to falter in the serious sin of *loshon hora*. He said that it was difficult to prevent committing this sin in large gatherings. It would be better for them to *daven* at home.

The *gemara* tells the story of Rabban Gamliel who told his slave, Tavi, to purchase something good for him from the marketplace. Tavi returned with a tongue. He then told him to return and purchase something bad. Again, tavi returned with a tongue. Rabban Gamliel asked Tavi to explain how he could bring the exact same item as something "good" and as something "bad." Tavi answered that the tongue produces great good and great evil. When it creates good, it is the greatest good of all and when it produces bad, there is no greater evil. That is why Chazal say that "life and death are in the hand of the tongue."

Words have tremendous power. More so songs. A melody has the ability to pull the heart. When a

melody is holy it awakens the spirit to serve Hashem. When a person sings a song of longing and yearning, a song of passion for Hashem, he can reach real peace of mind.

Words have tremendous power. More so, songs. Silence, even more. A person must recognize that speech is the most precious thing and therefore the mouth requires protection by way of silence -just as someone who has silver, gold and pearls hides them in an inner room in a special vessel. (Shmiras Halashon). Silence guards speech. Silence intensifies speech. When a Jew has a heart full of love and yearning for his Creator and he lifts his head upwards and he longs and yearns without words, the silence intensifies what the heart feels and finally the mouth opens. What emerges from the mouth are not words, they are burning embers.

Our entire lives we are being educated, until the very last day. We must learn to to keep the mouth pure. We must learn never to speak about another person. We must flee this bitter and impetuous sin of *loshon hora*. True, the path is long, but a trip of years must also begin with a small step. How precious are the Ramban's words, "think the words before letting them out of your mouth." If we begin, we will arrive.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov

NOTICE: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the parsha sheet disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and should not necessarily be viewed as an exact translation of the sheet or even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented. The sheet is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions, or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy it.

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