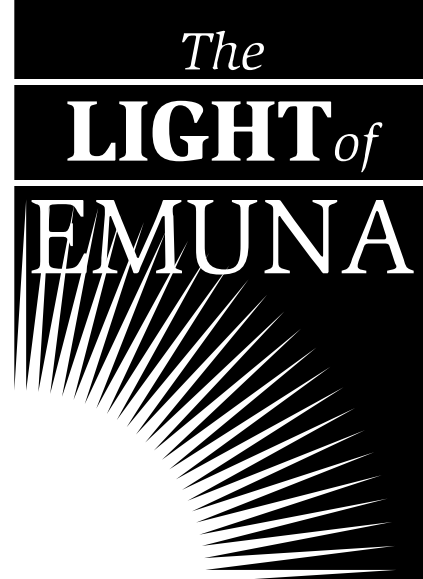


# פרשת מטות-מסעי

This week's adaptation is dedicated in memory of:  
our dear father – Moische Horn a"h  
לז"נ ר' משה מניס ב"ר יעקב יצחק הארן ז"ל  
נפטר ב' מנחם אב תשנ"ד תנצב"ה - July 10, 1994



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

"וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות" (ל, ב) ... "אלה מסעי  
בני ישראל אשר יצאו מארץ מצרים" (לג, א)  
**"And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes  
of the children of Israel ... these are the  
journeys of the children of Israel who left the  
land of Egypt"**

Why did each of the locations listed in this week's *parsha* deserve mention? Since they hosted the Jewish people, Hashem rewarded them, as it says, "Desert and wasteland shall delight over them, and the plain shall rejoice."<sup>1</sup> If the desert is rewarded for hosting us – how much more will one who hosts a *talmid chochom* be rewarded by Hashem. (תנחומא מסעי ג)

"לא יחל דברו ככל היצא מפיו יעשה" (ל, ג)  
**"He shall not violate his word; according to  
what emerges from his mouth, he shall do"**

A person's speech has enormous power. At the *akeida*, Avraham Avinu told his servants, "stay here with the donkey and I and the lad will go yonder and we will prostrate ourselves and return to you."<sup>2</sup> Avraham spoke of both himself and Yitzchak – saying that they would both return – and, at the end, they did indeed both come back.<sup>3</sup> This teaches us how careful one must be to utter only positive declarations and avoid negative ones. If we accustom ourselves to make only optimistic expressions, good things will happen. Covenants are forged with our lips. The Ari Hakadosh explains our *pasuk* as meaning that one must not allow his words to be cheap

<sup>1</sup> ישושום מדבר וציה ותגל ערבה (ישעיהו לה, א)

<sup>2</sup> שבו לכם פה עם החמור ואני והנער נלכה עד כה ונשתחוה ונשובה אליכם (בראשית כב, ה)

<sup>3</sup> מועד קטן יח.

but rather must value every word emitted. All speech accomplishes extraordinary things in the higher spheres. If one's words are positive and pure, influencing spirituality and holiness – he creates angels who advocate on his behalf. If, G-d forbid, one's words are evil and forbidden – he accomplishes for the side of evil and he creates evil, destructive angels, who prosecute him constantly. That is what our *pasuk* means: "according to what emerges from his mouth" down here "he shall do (accomplish)" in the higher realm. When we speak negatively - we cause and create a negative reality, G-d forbid. The *Gemara* teaches, "A person should never open his mouth for the *Satan*"<sup>4</sup> (i.e. one should never incite the *Satan* by mentioning that he is worthy of punishment). There are many stories of people who were careless with their speech and their proclamations came to fruition. We must guard our mouths! Some language may be ambiguous, but G-d forbid, we must not say certain things outright. Our lips are holy and the words that we utter can cause trouble and suffering, may we never experience such things.

In the Segula Cemetery in Petach Tikvah there is an old tombstone, the oldest one in the cemetery, engraved with the words, "A covenant forged by lips." The backstory is frightening. The person buried in said plot was among those who founded the cemetery. As is the custom, the land

<sup>4</sup> לעולם אל יפתח אדם פיו לשטן (ברכות יט).

for the cemetery was consecrated for its new use. Before leaving, one of the attendees of the dedication, someone teasingly asked who would be the first person to be buried there. Our protagonist jokingly responded, "I don't mind being first." Less than ten days later, to the shock of all those who knew him, he died. When they buried him, the local Rabbonim engraved the words "a covenant forged by lips" in large letters on his tombstone so that others would learn a lesson.

The *Gemara*<sup>5</sup> relates that R' Yehuda would remain in the *Beis Midrash* all week to learn Torah. When he would return home on Fridays, a pillar of fire would precede him and his father-in-law, R' Yannai, would stand by the window to observe the phenomenon. One Friday, R' Yehuda was so engrossed in his learning that he was delayed in returning home. When he was late, R' Yannai remarked that "he definitely died, for if he was alive he would not have neglected" to return home. He was not careful with his words and they were fulfilled - R' Yehuda died.

The *Gemara* relates another story about Yehu, King of Israel after the evil, idolatrous house of Achav. Yehu wished to kill the false prophets of Ba'al. In order to assemble them, he cunningly issued a proclamation stating, "Achav served Ba'al a little, Yehu will serve him a lot." He made it known that Achav's service of Ba'al would seem trivial when compared to how he was prepared to act. It worked, they gathered - and he killed them all. But the *Gemara* continues with a terrifying postscript - later in life, Yehu actually served idols. Such a decline could only have occurred because pacts are formed with the lips. He expressed a plan to worship idols - the words emerged - and they came to pass.

From these and other well-known stories, we must acknowledge the holiness of speech and how careful we must be to safeguard our mouths. One should never incite the *Satan* by saying that he is ill - because his very utterance may induce sickness. Rather than say, "there is

no hope, I am certain since ..." - one should say, "miracles will occur" - then, they will occur at the right time. It is sufficient to warn a child, "be careful" without adding "you will fall" - the additional phrase may actually cause him to fall. If you prefer not getting involved in something that does not concern you, it is sufficient to just say, "It is not my concern" without adding that those involved "will harm me" because the addition of that language may actually incite damage.

By contrast, in the town of Ropschitz there lived a family with a paralyzed child. One day, the family was advised that the *tzaddik*, Rav Naphtali of Ropschitz traveled to the *Beis Midrash* across the river, via a narrow bridge. It was suggested that they place the child on the bridge. The Rebbe started to traverse the bridge while deep in thought and the child, as the family had anticipated, was blocking his way. The Rebbe assumed that the child was sprawled out playfully, so he nudged him with his foot and ordered him to "get up." As soon as the order emanated from the Rebbe's mouth, the child arose and cleared the path.

We find a similar concept in Rebbe Nachman's famous story of the princess. The story is about a king who had six sons and one daughter. His only daughter was so precious to him. Yet, once, out of anger, he yelled, "may evil ones take you." The next morning, the princess was nowhere to be found and, after much searching, was finally discovered among evil people - all because of the king's words that he did not even intend.

Speech has tremendous force. Therefore, we must be so careful with it, to allow only positive ideas to emerge from our mouths. Speech is the soul. Every word that emanates from one's mouth is essentially a part of his soul. "My soul went out when he spoke."<sup>6</sup> One who speaks negatively places his soul among the husks (קליפות), G-d forbid. One, who speaks positively, infuses his soul with holiness. Just as one's days are numbered, so are his words. When his word

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כתובות סב:

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נפשי יצאה בדברו (שיר השירים ה,ו)

count is completed, his life ends. Therefore the *Mishnah* teaches us, "I have found nothing as beneficial for the body as silence."<sup>7</sup> Silence is not only advantageous to the soul, it is also best for the body - for it preserves one's life. "Therefore, it is advisable for a person to muzzle his mouth, not to voice idle expressions - only speaking when necessary. Why waste words for no purpose and thereby squander our lives? It is beneficial to use words of Torah and holiness, for those, by contrast, increase our lives and prolong our days. As we say each day, 'and we will rejoice with the words of the study of Your Torah ... for they are our life and the length of our days'<sup>8</sup> (ארון העדות)

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah teaches us the wonderful power of speech. A simple statement of a Jew can constitute a brand new Torah obligation. Such is the power of a vow. Until this moment, it was permissible - at the very instant that I prohibit it to myself - with simple words - I transform it into a Torah injunction. "In reality, the matter of vows is a sublime wonder for it demonstrates the greatness of a person, who has the power in his mouth to create novel *mitzvos* that were not decreed. By means of verbalizing a pledge, one obtains the fortitude to overcome what must be surmounted." (ליקו"ה ברכת השחר, ר, צ)

Vows must be fulfilled. Therefore, Jews are so careful with them. When there is even the slightest doubt that we will be unable to keep a promise, we always say, "*bli neder*." Promises must be honored, as the *pasuk* directs us, "the utterances of your lips, observe."<sup>9</sup> If one fulfills all of his declarations - Hashem will do his bidding. The *Gemara*<sup>10</sup> relates a story about R' Yehoshua ben Levi. When the time came for him to die - the Angel of Death approached him with his knife drawn but agreed to the *tzaddik's* final request that he be shown his resting place in heaven. When they reached the place, R' Yehoshua leapt into heaven and swore that he

would not leave. The Angel of Death complained to the heavenly tribunal. Hashem ordered them to investigate R' Yehoshua's record to see if he ever reneged on an oath. When it was determined that he had never once failed to keep a promise - it was decreed that he could not be forced to do so now. Thus, he was cheated death.

Speech is most elevated. It is what separates us from the animals. "And the superiority of man over beast is naught, for all is *hevel*."<sup>11</sup> What *hevel* is the *pasuk* referring to? - The breath (*hevel*) from the mouth of children - speech is what makes us superior. And the greatest form of speech, above all else, is speaking to Hashem. That is the infinite source of joy and vitality. That is what builds our personal relationship with Hashem - that is the primary portion of our *teshuva*. A bond with Hashem is the ultimate distinction - it is what builds our *emuna* - and if we have *emuna* - we have everything. Consider the following story: One evening there was a knock at the door and dozens of people stood outside. The owner of the house asked them who they were. One of them responded, "I am happiness. He is *emuna*. That one is wealth. This is health. The tall one is success. The hoodlum over there is power." And so he identified each one. "We are your wishes and desires. But," he said to the bewildered family, "you may choose only one of us." The family was uncertain. Success or health? Happiness or money? Finally, the patriarch decided, "we will take *emuna*." *Emuna* entered the house - and all of the other wishes began to follow him. "What's going on," wondered the father aloud, "you said we could only choose one wish?" "That's true," explained happiness, "but wherever *emuna* goes, we all follow."

Speech has enormous power. That is precisely why we must remain silent at times. The *gaon* R' Chanoch Verner once asked his daughter if she wanted to know what it meant to honor one's parents. He instructed her to look at a note that was left in the cupboard. The note read, "Please note the *Gemara* on a certain page." He

<sup>7</sup> ולא מצאתי לגוף טוב משתיקה (אבות א, יז)

<sup>8</sup> ונשמח בדברי תלמוד תורתך ... כי הם חיינו ואורך ימינו (מעריב)

<sup>9</sup> מוצא שפתיך תשמר (דברים כג, כד)

<sup>10</sup> כתובות עז:

<sup>11</sup> ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין כי הכל הבל (קוהלת ג, יט)

explained that the day before he had been learning with his son, her brother, Shmuel Baruch. R' Chanoch had suggested an elucidation of a particular idea. Shmuel Baruch, not wishing to contradict his father, left the note. "When I looked up the *Gemara*, I realized that he was correct." (נר לשולחן שבת)

Prayer is also speech – when one is no longer able to speak. When a person *davens* and cries until he can no longer move his lips – that *tefilla*, in the heart, without using the lips – is a complete *tefilla* – and it is never returned empty-handed. (הזוה"ק, שמות)

Arguments are a forbidden form of speech – the most dangerous kind. Quarrels burn everything – strike everything – everyone is injured by disputes – those in the wrong as well as those in the right. Complaining is another form of speech to avoid. When the Jewish people complained to Moshe Rabbeinu in the desert, what did they complain about? "He hit me, he took from me, he humiliated me. I would have been successful, but he ruined it for me." These separate us from Hashem. They are wasted moments of life. Being

appreciative is a particularly good form of speech. In this week's *parsha* Moshe Rabbeinu does not personally participate in the war against Midian because when Moshe fled Egypt, he lived there for many years. He was grateful to that nation and could not attack them. We must say thank you, appreciate. If we are in traffic and someone allows us to merge, we should make a thankful hand gesture. When there is gratitude between two people, the Shechina rests with them – Hashem's Presence is immediately felt.

Speech brings us closer to Hashem. It is our primary source of pleasure in the service of Hashem. It is the essence of our life's journey – connecting to that deep point inside that desires Hashem, that is happy with Hashem, that understands that there is nothing else – only Hashem. "These are the journeys of the children of Israel" – this is our journey, each one on his own path – with his unique mission – with the challenges and corrections that he must endure. The entire life of a Jew is one continuous voyage of becoming closer to Hashem, of recognizing Hashem, of loving Hashem – with simplicity and innocence.

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## תפילה

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**Master of the World!** Teach me to *daven* before everything I do, big or small – a short *tefilla* - I do not have the time or strength for more.

Before I buy an appliance or furniture – to ask You to help me choose suitably - one that will please my wife, be a blessing to us and serve us for many years, without breaking.

Before I place a letter in the mailbox - to ask You that the letter reach its destination, as quickly as possible.

Before important conversations - to ask You, to be with me, make them go well, keep me calm, help my words pierce the other party's heart.

Before I go outside – to ask You to help me guard my eyes.

Before every purchase for Shabbos – to ask You to help me not to forget to say "for the honor of Shabbos" – because I, almost always, forget.

Before driving (even a short local drive) – to ask You, Father, to protect me - so that no child suddenly jumps in front of me, G-d forbid.

Before a doctor's visit – to ask You that the doctor make the correct diagnosis and provide the correct treatment.

Before a visit to the mechanic – to ask You that he find the problem quickly and it cost as little as possible.

Before a haircut – to ask You that the barber not accidentally cut my ear.

When I place books relating to a holiday back on the shelf – to ask You, Father, that we merit using them again next year, healthy and happy.

**Master of the World!** Help me not to forget You, for I have seen that when we walk through life, hand-in-hand with You, things are much more successful. Help me, Father, that this be simple, natural, that it not be a strain for me – that it be a pleasure, for both You and me.

**Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,**

Dov

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* 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 and it provides some *chizuk*.

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