



BADERECH

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Find Good, Do Good

Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt'l, the renowned *Mashgiach* and author of the classic *Alei Shur*, was one of the great educators, thinkers and Torah personalities of our generation.

A yeshiva student came to Rav Wolbe and asked for advice and guidance in dealing with the challenge of *shemiras ha-lashon* and refraining from *lashon hara*. The Gadol acknowledged him warmly, but remained immersed in his studies. A group of *talmidim* gathered around, awaiting his response, speculating on what it might be. Would the *Mashgiach* suggest that the student set an extra daily seder learning the laws of proper speech? Would he recommend adding a special *tefilah* prayer for success in that area, or perhaps advise him to refrain from speaking for a specific time period and conduct a *taanis dibbur*?

The wise *Mashgiach* finally lifted his head, and in the sweetest of tones, said, "Make sure to perform three acts of kindness, and to share a good word, a compliment or word

of encouragement with someone you meet, every day.'

Our sedra (*Tazria*) introduces the prohibition of *lashon hara*, the consequence of which would be *tzaraas*, a spiritual 'leprosy', resulting in exile from the community, being forced to leave the encampment of the Jewish People and remain outside, isolated and alone.


"And Hashem formed man, dust from the earth, ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים - He blew into him the soul of life," and man became a *nefesh chayah*, a "living spirit" (Bereishis 2:7). Targum Onkelos provides a literal translation of the Torah, here defining man as *ruach memalelah*, "a spirit that speaks". Speech expresses our Divine root, and enables us to connect with others and with Hashem. *Shemiras ha-lashon* in its fullest sense is fulfilling the deepest potential of the faculty of speech, and it is rooted in our awareness that we are all created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the image of G-d.


Elevating our speech and speaking positively about others hinges on the *mitzvah* of *V'havta lereyacha kamocho*, the commandment to "love your fellow as yourself." When we express hurtful or damaging words, embarrassing or being dismissive of others, we act in a way which undermines the *tzelem Elokim*, their Divine soul, and ours as well.


A person who has contracted *tzaraas*, a *metzora*, was *motzi ra*, 'finding' or 'deriving' *ra*, the negative in someone else. He fell prey to the gravitational pull to point out what is lacking in his vision of another.


Rav Matisyahu Solomon zt'l, the *Mashgiach*


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of Beis Medrash Gavoha in Lakewood, points out, “We have all heard a thousand times that the Temple was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred, and we have received countless reminders through the words of the Chafetz Chaim, that if we would stop speaking *lashon hara* we would be redeemed. And yet, somehow, we have failed to internalize the message!” In *Sefer Matnas Chayim*, Rav Solomon reveals the root of our failure to maintain holy, elevated speech: a lack of faith in ourselves. Faith in ourselves is essential, because when we feel good about ourselves and are confident with our own stature, we can recognize the value and good in others as well.

To strongly harness the power of speech, however, we still must realize that our words leave a mark in this world and in the world Above. We have an awesome potential to build or destroy, to draw close or *chalilah*, create distance. The gift of speech represents the infinite trust that Hashem has in us, and in creating us in His image. Knowing that every word we speak actualizes the *nishmas chayim* that we were imbued with in our creation is a powerful starting point for maintaining dignified speech.

Perhaps this is the underlying message in Rav Wolbe’s advice: *Acharei ha-peulos nimshach ha-levavos*, “One’s heart is drawn after their actions.” By doing good, we imbue our internal



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experience with goodness, and we feel positivity toward those whom we assist. More and more do we trust the fact that we are generous, kind and capable of benefiting others, and this in turn influences us to see others as generous, kind and capable. We reveal to ourselves our own *tzelem Elokim*, and that of others, and begin to live in a Divine, redeemed world.

May we grab the opportunity and internalize the inner message of our sedra, and commit ourselves to add even just three deliberate acts of kindness or encouraging words to those around us. Someone out there on our contacts list - or someone at home we’ve been spending lots of time with over the Yamim Tovim - is waiting for a good word. Virtually, on the phone or in writing, there is always a way to share something positive, loving and human.

And may the promise of the Chofetz Chayim be fulfilled in our time. ■



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