



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Sensitizing Our Speech

“Vayomer Hashem eilay al tatzar et Moav ve’al titgar bam milchamah ki lo etein lecha mei’artzo yerushah ki le’vnei Lot natati et Ar yerushah—And Hashem said to me, Do not distress the Moabites, and do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land [as] an inheritance, because I have given Ar to the children of Lot [as] an inheritance.” (Devarim 2:9)

Rashi *zt”l* points out the difference between the instructions given to *Am Yisrael* regarding provocation towards the Moabites vs. the Amonites. *Am Yisrael* was restricted from provoking Moav in battle, as opposed to the Amonites, against whom they were restricted from any kind of harassment. **“As a reward for the modesty shown by**

their ancestress [Lot’s younger daughter], who did not publicize her father’s conduct, as did his elder daughter, who named her son Moab, [like “mei’av,” from the father] (Baba Kamma 38b).”

What lesson can we take from this observation?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner *zt”l* in *Nefesh Hachaim* shares a powerful insight on the verse, *“Umagid le’adam mah seicho—*and declares to man what his speech is.” (*Amos 4:13*) Rashi teaches us that it means that all man’s deeds are related in detail to him at the time of his death. Rav Chaim adds an additional dimension; not only will man be shown his deeds (and speech in his lifetime), but he will also be shown **the implications** of what he did and said.



Baal HaTanya *zt”l*

So often we are not even aware of the impact of our words, and we say things as a casual comment or remark. After one leaves this world, Hashem shows each person the effects and repercussions of his words both in a positive sense and otherwise. Thus, we can understand how we use the phrase *“yirat shamayim”* as opposed to saying one has *“yirat Hashem.”* The implication being that one’s fear of what he will see in heaven after he dies should influence his action and speech in his lifetime. The indiscretion of Lot’s daughter determined the fate of her descendants hundreds of years later, when the Jewish people

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encountered them as they approached the Land of Israel.

The *Ba'al HaTanya zy"ra* illustrates this very idea in his commentary on Lecha Dodi. We say “*shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad*,” in every *dibur*, in every word one says, he must be *shamor v'zachor*, he must be careful and remember that “*Hashem echad*,” he must express the Oneness of Hashem. We must weigh each of our words and decide on the most appropriate and refined language and phraseology.

Our gift of speech is one of the most valuable mediums that we can use to combat *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Both in the written form, as well as in oral communication, one's words can bridge gaps and create multiple opportunities for connection.

Let us use our speech to promote positivity and kinship, bringing all of our people together in unity and brotherhood. ■

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