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# בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS  
BEREISHIS

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
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## WITH JUST A WORD

The world was newly constructed, awaiting the last creation - Man. Hashem gathered dirt from around the globe,<sup>1</sup> formed it into a person, and blew a soul into this creation.<sup>2</sup> By doing so, man became a "רוח חיה" - 'a speaking spirit,' as translated by *Onkelos*.<sup>3</sup> While speech is indeed a trait specific to mankind, why would the Torah define the difference between humanity and the animal kingdom as dependant on the ability to speak? What about creative thought, the ability to control desire, or the other myriad of differences between people and animals?

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch's (1808-1888) words may shed some light on this. In discussing the Jewish outlook, R' Hirsch writes, "The primary source for a comprehensive study of a nation's culture and philosophy are its language and literature. Word and speech are the sole elements which bear the imprint of that nation's spirit and attitudes. Language and literature are the conscious and subconscious reflections of a people's philosophy."<sup>4</sup>

Though there may be many ways to describe the unique qualities of humanity, the best way to understand mankind is to understand their usage of language. This does not only apply to an entire group, this applies to each individual as well. Our words reflect our character. One's choice of words, topics, content, and tone all indicate what type of person they are. Thus, we can understand why *Onkelos* translates "רוח חיה" as a 'speaking spirit' - as speech may give us the greatest insight into a person's nature.

This amazing gift of speech is not to be taken lightly. Words can harm, and words can heal. Words can be spat out in anger, in the heat of the moment, and can cause great destruction. On the other hand, the right choice of words can soothe terrible wounds, and create peace between enemies. Amazingly, even children can wield this awesome power, creating or breaking friendships, all with their choice of words.

Once we recognize the primacy of speech, we can take measures to be conscientious of how we express ourselves to others.

**Amazingly, even children can wield this awesome power, creating or breaking friendships, all with their choice of words.**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

"Improper speech" can take many forms. Malicious gossip, angry words, and even idle chatter at the wrong time can all be termed "improper speech." How does one go about enhancing their mode of communication if it encompasses so many different areas?

Oftentimes, our words are natural outgrowths of our personal thoughts and feelings. If our thoughts and feelings are of a more sublime nature, our speech will be more refined as well.

If a person wants to be careful with "improper speech," one suggestion may be to focus on the background area that leads to that speech. For example, if person often denigrates others, it may be a good idea to work on finding the good in others, or work on feeling others' pain.

If a person finds that they waste away time with idle chatter, it may be prudent to focus on the importance of whatever the task at hand may be. In whatever area a person grows, their mode of speech will grow with them.

1 Rashi Bereishis 2:7 עפר מן ש.ו.ס.

2 Bereishis 2:7

3 *ibid*.

4 *Collected Writings of R' Samson Raphael Hirsch*, Vol. 8, p. 22

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**"The purpose of creating the entire world - the entire universe - was to produce even one individual that would achieve Yiras Shomayim"**

- R' Elazar, Talmud Bavli, Brochos 6b

# A DROP OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Naomi Harris\* was having 'artist's block.' This wasn't the typical wall; this was more like a dead-end. Although Naomi had dreamed of being an artist ever since she was a little girl, and had shown exemplary talent, she felt that her paintings didn't have the spark that she was seeking, that her creativity had run dry, and that her technical skill had simply run out.

Ms. Harris had felt this way before, and every time she moved closer to dropping the profession altogether.

One day, Naomi sat down at her computer, and noticed that she had a new message in her inbox. Curiosity piqued, she opened up the email, sent from a person she did not know. "Hi, I just wanted to drop you a line," read the message. "I came across your work the other day, and I was so impressed, by both your technical prowess and your creative style. I really love how you mixed the various shades of blue and yellow, and the angle you chose to portray your subject. It was so nice, I felt I needed to say something. Please continue your outstanding work!"

Naomi sat back in her chair, with a smile on her face, and perhaps the glimmer of a tear in her eye. Oddly, the piece in front of her didn't look too bad anymore. In fact, it looked pretty swell. Exhaling, she continued her outstanding work.

**"It was so nice, I felt I needed to say something."**

*\*Name has been changed, based on a true story.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- One who speaks improperly gives permission to the *Satan* to have influence over him.<sup>1</sup>
- Words are the essential bases for *Teshuva*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedaka*.<sup>2</sup>
- Dovid *HaMelech* specifically points to watching what one says as a source for a good and long life.<sup>3</sup>
- When one speaks improperly, they spiritually damage their mouths and tongue. Part of the *Teshuva* process is to use one's speech for *Mitzvos*.<sup>4</sup>

1 *Adir Bamarom*, by R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto

2 *Shnei Luchos HaBris: Torah Shebichsav: Ki Seitzei: Torah Ohr*

3 *Tehillim* 34:13-14

4 *Sha'arei Teshuva*, Chap 1. s 35