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בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
TOLDOS

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

A WORD TO THE WISE

In our *Parshah* we find Yaakov Avinu about to face a critical event. Yitzchak Avinu just told Eisav to go bring food for Yitzchak, and then Yitzchak will bless Eisav.¹ These blessings were not simply a father's wishes for a child. These blessings were handing over the entire future nation that was promised by Hashem to Avraham and to Yitzchak. Whoever received these blessings would become the next link in the chain of Avos.²

Having overheard Yitzchak's plan to bless Eisav, Rivkah told Yaakov to dress up as Eisav, wearing a hairy coat, so as to fool the blind Yitzchak into thinking that Yaakov was indeed Eisav. It was imperative that Yaakov imitate Eisav as much as possible - even going so far as to mimic Eisav's voice³ - for Yaakov was afraid that Yitzchak would curse Yaakov if he discovered the ruse.

With this background, it's almost shocking to find Yaakov forgetting to speak in the same manner as Eisav! Yaakov knew that Eisav didn't speak softly, didn't refer to Hashem, and certainly didn't say 'please!' Why, then, do we find Yaakov doing all of these things - in fact raising the suspicions of Yitzchak, until Yitzchak commented that the voice of the person in front of him seems to be that of Yaakov. How could Yaakov risk the *Berachos*, the future of *Klal Yisrael*, for this mistake?!

R' Moshe Shternbuch⁴ (b. 1928) explains that the way a person speaks affects the entire essence of the person. Yes, the entire future of *Klal Yisrael* was on the line - but so was the character of Yaakov. In weighing the two options, Yaakov determined that it is not worth risking the damage to one's character, despite the risks to the nation!

We often speak whatever comes to our mind, not realizing that our speech is not only a reflection of our character, but our speech affects our character! 'Please' and 'thank you' engender a feeling of gratitude. 'Good morning' causes us to care and think about others. 'I'm sorry' is not just a product of remorse, but actually helps us regret our actions.

If we use our words properly, there is no doubt that our actions will follow.

1 Bereishis 27:1

2 Ramban on Bereishis 27:4 s.v. בעבור תברכך

3 Ramban on Bereishis 27:12 s.v. אורלי

4 Ta'am V'Da'as Bereishis 27:22

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

When it comes to speaking properly, it would seem that we are stuck in a cycle. Our speech generally reflects our inner feelings and attitudes, but it also affects our inner feelings and attitudes. So, where do we start, if we want to grow?

The Ramban¹ suggests starting with speech. However, he makes the point that one should work on one's speech in all situations, and with all people, not just 'in the moment.' If one trains oneself to speak softly and politely in low-stress situations, that training will carry over to the instances when a person would normally speak curtly, angrily, or without thinking.

The key is to recognize that at first it will sound fake, to the speaker, and perhaps to the people being spoken to. That's a very normal part of the process - think of it like learning a new language. Learning a new language takes time, it doesn't sound natural at all. Yet, people do it all the time, overcoming the barriers and awkwardness involved, in an effort to improve their skills.

Similarly, over time, speaking properly will become a second nature.

1 Iggeres HaRamban



Although I also study Midrashim and Aggadata every day, the classic Sifrei Mussar never leave my hands.

- R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin, *Sefer MiTuv Yerushalayim*, p. 117

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A SOFT ANSWER TURNS AWAY ANGER

Rabbi Chaim Heber* is a beloved 8th grade Rebbi, well-known for his exemplary *Middos*, and his gentle demeanour. His students adore him, as he genuinely respects them, and treats them with dignity.

One day, in the course of discussing the *Middah* of anger, Rabbi Heber surprised his students with a bit of personal history. "You know, boys," said Rabbi Heber, "I'm aware that people view me as a calm person. However, people don't know the history behind this. When I was a teenager, I had a terrible temper. If anything didn't go my way, I would be furious, blowing up at the slightest provocation. I finally realized that this cannot go on, and changes needed to be made. I decided to work on my anger.

"It wasn't easy. I had years of habit against me, in addition to my natural bias towards anger. But I knew I had to do it. One thing I did early on was to train myself to speak softly, and this really worked wonders. Over the years this has become second nature, and I rarely get as angry as I used to."

The fact that Rabbi Heber was able to overcome his nature is amazing enough, but it's even more amazing when you consider the following story.

It was a week before the 8th grade graduated and said their good-bye's to the school. Rabbi Bower, the principal, came into class one morning, and informed the students that Rabbi Heber would be away for the next week. "Will Rabbi be back for our graduation?" inquired some of the boys. "I'm afraid not," replied Rabbi Bower. "I'm sorry, but an emergency came up, and though your Rebbi was very apologetic, he will not be able to attend your graduation."

Understandably the boys were upset by this news, and it wasn't until after the graduation that the explanation behind Rabbi Heber's disappearance became known. A bit before graduation, two boys in the class were arguing during recess, and had come to blows. Rabbi Heber had jumped in to separate the two, but in the fracas one of the boys accidentally pushed Rabbi Heber, knocking him down. Unbeknownst to the boys, Rabbi Heber had broken his arm in the fall, but had made the decision not to let the boys know, so that no one should be embarrassed. Hiding his pain, Rabbi Heber made his way out of the class and to the hospital, to have x-rays taken, and a cast put on his arm. Once the cast was in place, Rabbi Heber could not go back to class, as he knew the boys would quickly figure out the real cause for his broken arm.

How was Rabbi Heber able to control his pain and his anger, and make the split-second decision needed to do so? It all started with a soft word.

**Based on a true story. Names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Our mouths become more holy, and our learning and *Davening* more effective, when we are careful with what we say.¹
- Man is superior to animals because of his ability to speak,² but this superiority only applies if we use our words properly.³

1 *Shmiras HaLashon, Sha'ar HaZechirah*, Chap. 10

2 *Targum Onkelos on Bereishis 2:7*

3 *Shmiras HaLashon, Sha'ar HaZechirah*, Chap. 3