

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

# בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS  
YISRO

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT  
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS  
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

## THE LANGUAGE OF NOBLES

**P**arshas Yisro begins with Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, Yisro, joining Klal Yisrael after having heard all the miracles that Hashem had done for Klal Yisrael. After witnessing how Moshe alone sat in judgement all day while anyone who wanted to be judged had to wait for him, Yisro suggested that Moshe appoint judges that would be able to handle the 'smaller' cases.<sup>1</sup>

Yisro began explaining his reasoning by saying, "לא טוב הדבר," that "the matter is not good." The Medrash Lekach Tov<sup>2</sup> points out that Yisro did not say, "the matter is bad," but instead spoke in a roundabout manner, stating that Moshe's actions were, "not good." Though the meaning is the same, why didn't Yisro speak plainly, instead of speaking in a roundabout manner?

The Medrash explains that Yisro was a dignified person, and therefore spoke in a distinguished manner. It would not be proper for a man of his station to speak in a lowly manner. It was for this reason that he spoke in an indirect way, referring to 'bad' as 'not good.'

Yisro's actions as recorded in the Torah are a reminder of the great gift of speech that we have, and the discretion we must use when utilizing this precious gift. Referring to something as 'bad' is not that different than referring to the same thing as 'not good.' The difference is subtle, but enough of a difference that a person of noble bearing would not use one term, while they would use another.

In our own lives there are many times where something unpleasant needs to be expressed, but we have multiple options as to how to express it. For example, when we don't like something served to us, we can say, "It's not my taste." or, "I'd prefer something else."

When we choose to use our words properly, we will be acting in a dignified and distinguished fashion, one that elevates us, and the people around us.

1 Shemos 18:1-23

2 Shemos 18:17

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How does one work on one's language skills, especially when one is emotional, angry or tired? If something is bothering us, it's so much easier to say how terrible it is instead of speaking in a more delicate manner, so how does one make the change?

The key is practice, which has to take place beforehand. Much like a prince or a princess is trained from an early age to speak in a dignified manner, we can train ourselves to speak similarly.

To do so, it might be a good idea to truly imagine oneself as a prince or princess. We might feel like a regular person, but Klal Yisrael are all children of Hashem,<sup>1</sup> and as such, we truly are princes and princesses.

Once we are in the correct mindset, we can practice common terms that we use, but substitute other phrases. How would a nobleman say it? That's how we should say it.

By having this mindset and this training, we will be able to naturally use terms that are polite and refined.

1 Avos 3:14

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**Nowadays it is essential - actually, an obligation - to study Sifrei Mussar.**

- R' Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Brisker Rav, Otzros Rabboseinu M'Brisk pg. 240

# WORDS AND ACTIONS

Eli Mayers\* was feeling very frustrated. Though he was doing well as an accountant, he was not happy with the direction of his life. Having studied in yeshiva for many years, it was not an easy transition into the workforce. Because of his yeshiva background, he had a strong work ethic, was willing to work late hours, and had a strong sense of fairness. Yet, because of his yeshiva background, Eli felt something was missing. He needed to work to provide for his family, but he simply did not feel that he was accomplishing anything. He wasn't learning as much Torah as he used to, and he certainly wasn't teaching. As this feeling gnawed at him for many months, he finally decided to speak to his Rebbi, Rabbi Kagan.

Rabbi Kagan greeted him warmly in his study, and sat quietly as Eli explained the problem. Eli finished, and the room was silent.

After a moment, Rabbi Kagan said, "You said that you don't feel like you are accomplishing anything, or at least not the things that you were hoping to accomplish. Providing for your family is no small thing, but it sounds like you wanted to teach Torah, and here you are, working in a corporation. Is that correct?"

Eli nodded.

"Eli, you have to understand, teaching is not only done in the classroom. It's done in everyday life, by our words and our deeds. Tell me, do you find that your co-workers act differently around you?"

"Actually yes," said Eli. "One mentioned to me that he noticed that I don't speak the same way that they do. And in fact, they change the words that they use when I'm around. I suppose that it's a small influence"

Rabbi Kagan nodded. "It's not a small thing; it's a very big thing! You're an example of how a human being should act, and others are following suit. The language that we use can affect the entire person. Eli, your example is something that you should be very proud of."

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Reb Yehuda Hanasi was able to discern which student of his would become great simply by the manner in which they spoke.<sup>1</sup>
- Even if one had a decree of seventy years of good, they can turn that into a decree of seventy years of bad by speaking in a particularly lowly manner.<sup>2</sup>
- The first step to eradicating anger, and creating humility, is speaking pleasantly.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Pesachim* 3b

2 *Shabbos* 33a

3 *Iggeres HaRamban*