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## WISE WORDS FROM THE WICKED

**W**e enter *Parshas Bo* amidst the battle of wills between Pharaoh and *Moshe Rabbeinu*. Moshe demanded that Pharaoh release the Jewish nation while Pharaoh refused to do so.

During this battle, a strange pattern emerged with each plague. Pharaoh would deny Moshe's request, almost daring him to bring the next *makkah*, but would then beg Moshe to stop the plague once the devastation was wrought. However, once the calamity had passed, Pharaoh would then again deny Moshe's petition, and the cycle would continue.

Almost lost in the larger story is a curious term Pharaoh used when asking Moshe to *daven* to Hashem. After the destruction of the locusts, Pharaoh again asked Moshe to *daven*. But the term he used, "והעתירו" is in the plural — meaning Pharaoh was asking both Moshe and Aharon to *daven*.<sup>1</sup>

The Ramban<sup>2</sup> (R' Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–1279) picks up on this subtlety and points out that Pharaoh certainly knew that Moshe was the one who was doing the praying. After all, in multiple instances, Moshe stated that he will *daven* for the plague to end. Why, then, did Pharaoh ask Aharon to *daven* as well?

The Ramban explains that Pharaoh was exhibiting good *middos*. Pharaoh, Moshe, and Aharon all knew who was truly asking Hashem to halt the plague. However, it would not have been polite to only ask Moshe to *daven*. Therefore, Pharaoh asked them both, out of proper behavior.

Put in context, this is quite surprising. Pharaoh viewed Moshe and Aharon as enemies. They were challenging his authority, and undoing his kingdom. Had he singled out Moshe for his prowess in praying, he simply would have been stating the truth. Nevertheless, proper speech included asking Aharon for assistance, despite knowing full well that Aharon was not the man for the job.

There are times where we may be under duress, tired, or simply not in the mood. Yet, Pharaoh's actions show us how proper speech should be our standard mode of conduct, whether speaking with friends, strangers, or even with people that we find difficult to get along with. If Pharaoh can do it, so can we.

<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 10:17

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* s.v. והעתירו אל

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have been polite  
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Moshe to daven.**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Though we know the importance of proper speech, it can be difficult to speak in a manner that we are not accustomed to speaking.

Furthermore, when we think about the daunting job ahead of us — changing our speech at all times with all people — we can be put off by the enormity of the task.

How do we combat these two impediments to refined speech?

While we may feel uncomfortable, or even 'fake' when we change our mode of speech, there is no doubt that after a period of time, this new way of speaking will become natural. The trick is to practice when speaking with people with whom one is comfortable.<sup>1</sup> By doing so, one's speech will change even when speaking to someone who is difficult to interact with.

As for the overwhelming goal of changing our speech, it is important to recognize how each step is a fantastic accomplishment. Of course it would be wonderful to speak softly, gently, and kindly to everyone, always, but don't allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Iggeres HaRamban*

<sup>2</sup> *Sefer Shemiras HaLashon*, Introduction

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**Mussar study is crucial, to the point that it is literally Pikuach Nefesh — absolutely life saving!** - *Mirror Mashgiach, R' Yerucham Levovitz zt"l, Da'as Chochmah u'Mussar vol. 1, pg. 386*

# A CONVERSATION TO REMEMBER

I\* hesitantly opened the doors to the *shul*, looking around to see if I was in the right place. I was newly married, and having visited my in-laws for Shabbos, I needed a *minyan* for *Shacharis* on Sunday morning. I was told that Rabbi Yaakov Baker, the world-renowned *posek* and *rosh yeshiva*, had a *shul* nearby. I didn't know him personally, though I did once call him with a *sheilah*.

*Davening* went as *davening* would, and I wrapped up my *tefillin*, my mind on what we need to pack, and how soon we would hit the road.

I folded up my *tallis*, picked up my *tallis* bag, and took a last look around. The *shul* was surprisingly quiet for a Sunday morning, and I was one of the last people out. From a distance, I noticed Rabbi Baker standing near his seat, speaking with one of the members of his *shul*. I put my hat on my head, and headed to the door.

As I passed about ten feet from where Rabbi Baker was standing, I heard him call out, "*Shalom Aleichem!*" I glanced up to see who he was speaking to, and was surprised to see him looking right at me!

When he noticed my startled look, he smiled, and offered his hand. "*Shalom Aleichem*, are you new around here?" My mind raced — I was in the heart of a large Jewish community, and hundreds of people must have passed through this *shul* every week. Did he do this to every person he met?

"I suppose you could say I am. My in-laws live nearby, and I'm visiting."

We made some small talk, it turned out that he knew my grandfather, and then said our goodbyes. I walked out feeling like a million dollars.

When I exited the doors to the lobby, I stopped one of the men standing there. I introduced myself, and explained what had just happened, and asked, "Does the Rav do that to everyone he meets?"

"You mean, spend time speaking with them? Absolutely. We all know how busy he is, but he somehow manages to spend a few moments with everyone."

I always knew that Rabbi Baker was a *talmid chacham* of the highest caliber. I assumed that a *talmid chacham* was simply someone who knows a lot of Torah. But after speaking with Rabbi Baker, I realized that a true *talmid chacham* also knows how to make someone feel great, just through a few words.

**"We all know how busy he is, but he somehow manages to spend a few moments with everyone."**

*\*Based on a true story, name has been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Not only should one avoid speaking rudely, but one should take care to speak to others with words of respect.<sup>1</sup>
- One who learns a lot of Torah but doesn't speak properly will end up losing their Torah knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mesillas Yesarim*, Chap. 22

<sup>2</sup> *Tosfos Yom Tov* on *Avos* 3:17