

# CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin*

Give me any ten people who have witnessed the same act and I can assure you there will be fifteen accounts of what happened. It's human nature. We all see things differently and describe them in our own terms. No one is lying; each just sees things in another way.

Many of the arguments we experience are due to this quirk of nature. What one person thinks is funny will strike another as aggressive and bad mannered. As one who spends much of his life in the public eye, I can attest to this. How often a comment made with friendship and care is misconstrued in awful ways, how differently folk hear what you say. Whenever I am called upon to speak in public I am aware that what I may think I'm saying doesn't always translate as such to my different listeners. It's part of what a speaker or teacher has to keep in mind when presenting something to any audience.

This is clearly brought home to me weekly, following the shiur I give to a group within my community. I try to prepare as well as I can (I never take speaking lightly), yet I'm always amazed by some of the questions asked afterward. It's as if some people heard an entirely different shiur than the one I thought I was giving.

Studying this phenomenon, I have realized that it usually can be traced down to one or two words. Every one of us has key terms that kick off entire mental landscapes. When this happens, our minds drift off to those other places and we are no longer truly listening to what may follow. We get stuck in those other vistas and predicate what follows accordingly. In fact, much of the harm caused by lashon hara is because what we think others did or said is actually something our own minds conjured up according to what we may have previously experienced.

Someone once said, "Words don't mean what they mean anyway. But listen to them for clues." What people say or hear are glimpses to where their inner mind really is.

All this leads me to one of my favorite topics. When we speak to Hashem through prayer we should be aware of what we are thinking. I don't mean in terms of kavana as such; rather, I refer to the fact that our words should encapsulate what our hearts seek. No two people think the same, nor do they feel like anyone else. Rather, the words that make up our tefillos are a script that is read according to our own individuality. Every person is a complex individual who carries to the amud his own lifetime of emotional baggage. This is no bad thing, for by davening as who we really are we can connect ourselves with Hashem at a real level. When we extol Hashem for all His gifts, we should see those

gifts as they are reflected in our own, personal lives. When mentioning Hashem's miracles, these too should be examined in light of our own existence.

Too often we parrot these holy words, not actualizing them into our personal world. This is such a tragic loss. We stand in prayer yet do not involve the words with our inner selves. Every time we recite the holy words we should read them within the framework of our actual experiences. Then they become alive, a balm of hope to our weary hearts.

There is but one barrier to all this, and it is a huge one. We often don't know who or what our inner self is. The actualization of our connection with Hashem can only happen if we are honest and truly seek out our inner being. Yet there are so many things that stand in the way - ego, self-hate and misguided impressions are all factors that work against us. The antidote to this barrier is small yet gigantic. It is called humility, and it makes all the difference as to whether we stand or fall.

Let us look at this kapitel and discover a bit more about this.

HARNINU LE'ELOKIM UZEINU..., "Sing joyously to Hashem, our strength, shout for joy to the G-d of Jacob." There are many different levels of joy. Sometimes we feel a burst of joy at the most mundane of instances. These are but glimpses of what full-throated joy can be. That exhilarating experience is discovered when we come to the realization that all strength and joyfulness are connected to their Source, Hashem. Nothing exists without Him, and we are nothing when we don't feel this within our inner selves.

TIKU BACHODESH SHOFAR..., "Blow the shofar on Rosh Chodesh, at the appointed time for our holiday." This psalm was designated for Rosh Hashana, for on Rosh Hashana so much can be realized. On this day we appear before Hashem as we really are. There can be no falsehood when standing before our Creator on the anniversary of that Creation.

HASIROSI MESEVEL SHICHMO..., "I removed his shoulder from the burden, his hands were removed from the cauldron." Hashem tells us that He took us out of the harshness of the Egyptian slavery. Not only were we freed from the work of the field, but even from the menial kitchen tasks.

Why do we reiterate this minor point? Because for some it is the huge tasks that they find most difficult, while for others it is the little indignities of the slave status that causes them the most damage. Here we see how each individual was given his particular freedom at the time of the exodus.

BATZARA KARASA VAACHALETZEKA..., "In distress you called out, and I released you, though you called out in secret I answered you thunderously; I tested you at the waters of Meriva, selah." The children of Israel cried out to Hashem in their pain. Sometimes we do so in secret, so secretly that even our inner ear doesn't hear our cry. There are times when our interior self doesn't even accept how much it needs Hashem. Yet Hashem answers, and this in itself is thunderous given the fact that we never even understood how great was our need. We were tested by the waters of bitterness

after the exodus from Egypt, and this continues to be our challenge throughout history. No matter, for even though we fail at times, Hashem always comes forward for us.

SHEMA AMI VE'A'IDA BACH..., "Hear, My people, and I will testify about you; Israel, if you would but listen to Me." Hashem is with us, always and in all places. It is up to us to listen to His voice. We are our worst enemies, because we let so much stuff get in between our core and Hashem.

LO YEHIYEH BECHA EL ZAR..., "Let no strange god be within you, and do not bow before a foreign god." Obviously this refers to prohibited idol worship. However, the Kotzker Rebbe gives us another insight and interprets Kel as holy: "Hashem should not be foreign to you." In this vein, we find that Chazal quote Hashem as saying, "A haughty person and I cannot dwell in the same abode." There is no stranger god than the one created by one's own vanity. Hashem seeks one thing from us - that we accept His Oneness. This takes humility. Without it we stand amongst the idol worshipers.

ANOCHI HASHEM ELOKECHA HAMAALCHA ME'ERETZ MITZRAYIM..., "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it." If we allow ourselves to be humbled by the knowledge that there is but one G-d, then everything will be ours. It is only with Hashem that we can escape the slavery that is within our own perceptions. We will then be empowered to open our mouths fully and sincerely ask for deliverance, and Hashem will hear us, as He always does.

Hashem then decries the folly that has been ours. VELO SHAMA AMI LEKOLI..., "But My people did not heed My voice, and Israel did not want Me." We pray to succeed in breaking down the barriers we have created through our own arrogance. However, if we do so half-heartedly, without allowing our thoughts to focus on what is real, then we won't hear Hashem's Will. We will be deafened by our own foolishness.

VAASHALECHEIHU BESHIRUS LIBAM..., "So I sent them to follow their heart's desires, to let them follow their own devices." Hashem seeks us, but we often follow our foolish, shallow whims. His is an unbounded love, to the point that if we insist in our vanity, He allows us to.

LU AMI SHOME'A LI..., "If only My people would heed Me, if Israel would walk in My ways. I would immediately subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their tormentors." Yidden! Hear what awaits us. If we allow ourselves to find Hashem within our true selves, then all the torment, even that born within our own hearts, will be banished forever.

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