

OUR UNIVERSE SMALL

by Rabbi Label Lam

If a man takes a vow to HASHEM or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes out of his mouth shall he do. (Bamidbar 30:3)

Blessed is He Who Spoke and the world the world came to be. Blessed is He. Blessed is He Who makes the Creation. Blessed is He Who says and does. Blessed is He Who decrees and fulfills... (Baruch She'amar- Morning Liturgy)

...and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being. (Breishis 2:6)

...and man became a living being: He gave him knowledge and speech. (Rashi)

Words are the most powerful intoxicants known to mankind. (Rudyard Kipling)

"Don't talk of love! Show me!" (Show Tune from -My Fair Lady)

Speech is one of those human functions that can all too easily be taken for granted. Yet it is one of our most distinctly human features. It raises us above the common beast. With words alone we can build or destroy. Yet they fly around so cheaply like fall leaves to be bagged and carted away. Why is it that some words remain and have lasting value while others are dismissed?

The humorous story is told about a couple that attended a fundraising event. After the moving presentation, a request for pledges was made. One fellow, in an emotional state, leapt to his feet and shouted, "Twenty Thousand Dollars!" His wife immediately elbowed him sharply and reminded him, "We haven't got that kind of money!"

The fellow sheepish approached the hosts of the event and explained that he had been a victim of over exuberance and he would not be able to match his pledge. A lawsuit ensued and the fellow lost and it cost him another five thousand dollars on top of the original twenty for legal fees. He and his wife appropriately made a moratorium on attending fund raising affairs, which they honored religiously for some time. After a good while had lapsed they noticed a sign in the synagogue for a parlor meeting to benefit orphans. They figured that that had learned their lesson well and decided to attend but not before the wife sternly warned her husband. The slide show and the speeches were so moving that when the moment for public pledges arrived the fellow jumped out of this seat and declared, "Twenty Thousand Dollars and Five Thousand Dollars in legal fees!"

How important is it that words be matched by action to have value. I heard from a special person a

profound explanation for a phrase that is oft repeated in The Chapters of the Fathers, the phrase- "He used to say...". For example: He used to say (Ben Azai), "Do not despise any man and do not dismiss any thing, because there is no man that does not have his hour and no thing that does not have its place. (Avos. 4:3)

The explanation for "he used to say" was taken from a negative example. A fellow who gave a potent presentation about the ills of cigarette smoking was later seen smoking cigarettes. The listeners were disappointed. That's not the example of "he used to say". Whenever it says, "he used to say" it means that not only did he repeat this statement often but that he lived up to his words. He was a living example of his very own speech. Perhaps that's why his words continue to resonate through the ages.

The value of our words is a function of what we do and who we are in proportion to those words. When a check is returned marked- "insufficient funds" the numbers on it, no matter how big, are rendered meaningless. When we say, "Thanks a million" with half a heart, then two words have just been seriously discounted. As the verse above indicates, the holiness of our words is in direct proportion to our very actions. If they don't mean much to us why should they be valued by anybody else? Just as the entire universe is built and maintained through the power of speech so it is with each of us in our universe small.

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