

HOLY WORDS!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"When a man shall make a vow or swear an oath, to make a prohibition upon himself, he shall not profane his word; he shall do in accordance with all that leaves his mouth." [30:3]

What is the objective? As Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) explains, "he should not make his words 'Chulin.'" We translate 'chulin' as profane, but really the word simply means 'ordinary.' The days of the week, compared to Shabbos, are called 'chol.' The Talmudic tractate which discusses the slaughter of kosher animals for food, rather than those slaughtered for various Temple sacrifices, is called 'Chulin.'

Thus what we have is not a denigration of the words - this is hardly what we would refer to in English as 'profanity' - but, to the contrary, a recognition of how high and holy words can be. One who fails to meet the obligations set out in his oath has failed to preserve the lofty level of his speech when first uttered - by comparison, the words now seem profane. The lowliness of an oath unfulfilled is in the comparison.

The Chazon Ish, Rabbi Abraham Y. Karelitz, was one of the leading Rabbis in Israel during and after the founding of the modern State. One Shabbos afternoon in his later years, when he was elderly and not able to go to pray with ease, he realized that nine other men were in the room with him - and he asked them if they could remain and pray Mincha, the Afternoon Service, before they left.

He noticed that one guest looked uncomfortable, and asked him why. The latter, somewhat embarrassed that his discomfort had been noticed, responded that he had agreed to meet someone else within ten minutes - but he could surely be a few minutes late in order to "make the minyan" for one of Israel's great Rabbis!

The Chazon Ish responded, "Heaven forbid! You told someone you would meet him? Go fulfill your word!"

Making a commitment, especially to do a mitzvah, is a great and holy thing. But it cannot be treated lightly: "Lo Yachel Devaro" - "He shall not profane his word!" The holiness of our words is only preserved when we **keep** our word; when we meet our commitments.

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