

DELIVERY FROM G-D THROUGH YOUR MOUTH

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Mattos begins with the issue of vows and oaths. "When a man makes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to make something forbidden, he shall not break his word; all that was pronounced from his mouth must be fulfilled. [30:3]"

There are different types of nedarim {oaths}. One can sanctify one's own object by designating it for hekdesch {holy usage in the Temple}. This utterance transforms the status of the object from having been available for mundane usage to a state where if one gains any personal benefit, a sacrifice must be brought for atonement. Another type of oath can transform the status of any object--even one that doesn't belong to the person pronouncing the oath--vis-à-vis himself. One can pronounce, "all apples are forbidden like a sacrifice." If he was to derive benefit from any apple after having pronounced such an oath, he will have gone against the injunction stated above ("He shall not break his word") and would bear the consequence of transgressing a commandment.

Transformations from mundane to holy, from permitted to forbidden. The power that our mouths yield is actually frightening. Let's try to gain an understanding of this power.

In the Mishna [Avos 1:17], Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel said: All of my days I was raised amongst the sages and I didn't find anything better for the body than silence.

On that, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that chachamim kedoshim {wise and holy individuals} become like a kli sharais {holy vessel of the Temple used in the divine service}, not involving themselves in any mundane dealings.

The Nesivos Sholom explains this concept further. Man was created to recognize Hashem and to express that recognition. This is done predominantly through our mouths. As such, our mouths become the kli sharais with which we perform that divine service. Just as we find that when the ingredients of a flour offering are placed in a kli sharais, these ingredients undergo a transformation and become sanctified. So too, mundane objects, upon coming in contact with the kli sharais known as our mouths, have the capacity to become transformed and sanctified.

Our mouths have a profound effect on others. We have the capability to channel the power we wield in a constructive manner, building up the esteem of others and thereby sanctifying our mouths and those who are touched by it. And, as with all forces in this world, the potential for good is accompanied by the potential for evil. We can also cut others down, taking from them the feeling that they were created in the image of Hashem, thereby transforming the holy into mundane.

Sometimes, our mouths, unbeknownst to us, can be the holy vessel through which Hashem sends vital life-messages to others.

The story is told that when the Baal Shem Tov was getting ready to leave this world, he summoned his close disciples, revealing to each one the mission they were meant to fulfill. One student by the name of Rav Chaim was told that he would earn his livelihood by passing from town to town and relating stories of the Baal Shem Tov.

A bit taken aback, he nervously asked how long he'd need to travel around telling stories. "You will be shown a sign from heaven and you will know that the time has arrived that you may stop," the Baal Shem Tov responded.

And so it was. After the Baal Shem Tov passed away, Rav Chaim packed his bags and began to travel, spreading the stories of his Rebbe {master teacher} wherever he went.

It came about that Rav Chaim heard of a very wealthy man named Reuven who was willing to pay handsomely to hear any stories about the Baal Shem Tov. Rav Chaim went to his home and told him that he knew a wealth of stories that he'd be happy to share with him. Filled with anticipation, Reuven invited many guests for a beautiful, warm Shabbos filled with inspiring stories about the Baal Shem Tov.

After a lavish meal, Reuven and all his guests turned excitedly to Rav Chaim, waiting to hear some of his stories. Rav Chaim was about to begin when, to his horror, he realized that his mind had seemingly gone blank. He could not remember a single episode involving his Rebbe. With his face a bright red color, he explained that he was exhausted from traveling and assured the guests that after a good night's sleep he would entertain them with stories the next day.

At the Shabbos afternoon meal however, the same thing occurred. Rav Chaim was stupefied, unable to understand or believe what was happening. Once again, he apologized and asked to be given another chance at the third meal.

The third meal came and went with Rav Chaim still drawing blanks. After Shabbos, the disappointed guests left and Rav Chaim apologized to his crestfallen host. He had already ascended onto his wagon to leave when suddenly, as with a flash of lightning, one story returned to his mind. He excitedly ran to Reuven to tell him that he had just remembered a story.

"One day I accompanied the Baal Shem Tov to a town for Shabbos. We arrived on Thursday and were surprised to find the town market empty and desolate. We knocked on the first door that we found with a mezuzah on it and were frantically pulled inside. "Don't you know what day it is today? Don't you know it's Greena Dorneshtag (Green Thursday)? The anti-Semitic priest riles up his congregants and then sends them out on a pogrom!"

"My Rebbe turned to me," Rav Chaim continued, "and sent me to tell the priest that Rav Yisroel Baal Shem Tov wanted to see him. The people begged him not to send me to what they saw as certain

death, but he insisted that I do as he had said. Trembling, I approached the priest as he was delivering his fiery speech to a large mob and gave him the message. He appeared frightened and told me to tell the Baal Shem Tov that he'll come after his speech.

"Happy to be alive, I delivered his message back to the Baal Shem Tov. 'Tell him he must come immediately,' the Baal Shem Tov told me, sending me back a second time. This time the priest excused himself, explaining that he'd return in a few minutes and accompanied me back to the Baal Shem Tov.

"The two were together in a room for a while. My story ends here because I don't know what they discussed or what happened to the priest afterwards."

Looking shaken, Reuven told Rav Chaim, "I now have a story to tell you. You don't recognize me? I am that priest! The church kidnapped me when I was young and they succeeded in purging any memories of my life as a Jew.

"I grew older and became a member of the clergy and eventually became priest of the entire area. However, I was disturbed by a recurring dream where the Baal Shem Tov would appear, tell me that I'm Jewish and warn me to return to my true religion.

"I ignored those crazy dreams and continued with my 'holy' work. However, on that Greena Dorneshtag when you appeared with the Baal Shem Tov's message, I felt that I must comply.

"When the Baal Shem Tov spoke to me and told me who I really was and where my responsibilities lied I decided to leave the Church and return to my religion. The Baal Shem Tov told me that when someone would come and tell me this story, that would be the sign that my t'shuvah [repentance] was accepted.

"That is why I was always eager to hear stories about the Baal Shem Tov. When you came and couldn't remember any stories I was destroyed--my t'shuvah had not yet been accepted. Now your words have told me the decision made in heaven--my atrocities have been forgiven."

A few, select people such as Rav Chaim, have the merit of delivering the words from heaven down to this earth. Every one of us has the opportunity to, with their words, lift the earth up to the heavens.

Good Shabbos,
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