

WORDS, WORDS, AND MORE WORDS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

When G-d gifted Adam with a Nefesh (human soul) he was also endowed with the power of speech. The ability to speak, the ability to use words to communicate thoughts and feelings, set him apart from every other creature on the planet.

That isn't to say that the human is the only creation with the ability to communicate. As we know, many if not all of G-d's creatures communicate in a manner distinct to each of them. However, the human is the only creature who can create or destroy through the power of speech. Allow me to explain.

All other creations communicate in some primal but limited fashion. For example: warnings of impending danger, parental and offspring interdependency, litter, flock, school, pod, and nest dynamics. These are the studied and documented settings for the instinctual communication of species survival; however, that is all it is, it is communication not speech. On the other hand, the human can speak. He can choose to speak and communicate or chose not to speak and yet communicate. (And of course the most common and frustrating of all, the human who chooses to speak and still does not communicate). The human is capable of speech not just communication.

The Mishnah in Avos states that, "With ten statements G-d created the world." Whatever that really means, whatever the power of G-d's speech is, however the dynamics of Divine speech may work, Chazal (the Rabbis) referred to it as speech. That means that Chazal compared our speech, as limited and seemingly contained as it may be, to the speech of G-d and His power to create. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to view speech as a powerful and potentially dangerous force.

"Who is the one that desires life? Guard your tongue from speaking evil..." Following the verses's line of reasoning we must add, "And who is the one that does not desire life? The one who does not guard his tongue from speaking evil..."

Human speech creates and destroys. With words we can paint unframed pictures that are only limited by the extent of our imagination. With words we create realities of emotion. Words generate love, fear, hatred and courage. Where desire does not exist words can often generate it.

Ambition and determination, success and failure, reputation and its undoing are all the products of words. With words we wound and with words we heal. War and peace can rise and fall on the power of words.

Words allow us to express complex thoughts and feelings. With words we can make the profound simple and the simple profound. Knowledge is conveyed through words and laughter finds its truest expression in the word-talent of the humorists.

With words Avraham argued for justice and compassion. With words G-d commanded the sacrifice of Avraham's one and only, and with words the Satan stole away Sarah. Avraham mourned Sarah with words and with words he negotiated the purchase of Meoras Hamachpeilah.

Eliezar was enjoined through the power of words to seek out Rivkah, and with words Yakov bought the birthright of Eisav and the salvation of a world. With words Yakov promised G-d he would be faithful and with words G-d promised Yakov that his children would become His chosen and inherit the Land. Words were the undoing of Yakov's well-laid plans for first marrying Rachel and besting Lavan, and it was overheard words that warned Yakov when it was time to return to his father's home.

Words describing dreams were shared with the brothers and they hated Yoseph because of them. At the same time, the words they hated implied a truth that Yakov could not ignore, "and his father guarded the words."

Conspiring brothers sealed Yoseph's fate with words while Reuven's unspoken words would have saved him. It was Yoseph's words of fear that they then chose to ignore while with words they negotiated his sale for the price of shoes.

Words were the medium of Yoseph's fall and they proved the manner of his stellar rise. Words were given to protect a king's confidence and the same words would guarantee Yoseph's final confidence to his father. Yakov blessed his children with words and thereby defined the reality of his nation.

With words Pharaoh introduced his nation to anti-Semitism and swayed them to enslave and persecute the Children of Israel. It was their words of anguish that rose up to the heavens and began their redemption.

Moshe killed the Egyptian with words and with words he confronted the seeming hatred between man and his fellow man. Words forced Moshe to flee from his people and G-d's words from a burning bush commanded him to return and save them.

With words Moshe and Aharon awoke their people to the impending redemption and with words they presented G-d's majesty and power.

At the Parting of the Sea, it was the absence of words that revealed G-d's greatness and it was Moshe and Miriam's words which immortalized the moment in divine exaltation and song.

With words G-d revealed Himself to all from atop a mountain and the tragic response to Chur's words forced Aharon to use other words in hope of delaying further disaster.

Moshe's Prophecy, the Written Torah, recorded G-d's words to His chosen children while the Oral

Torah explains those very same words in a way that the Jews can understand.

Miriam's questioning words were intended to help Moshe and Tziporah but it was Moshe's few words that were then needed to heal her leprosy.

The Miraglim destroyed a generation with the timing and inflections of their words, and the lone challenging words of Kalev and Yehoshua earned them personal greatness and deliverance.

With words Korach rebelled against G-d and Moshe and for all eternity his words rise up from the depths of Gehenom (Hell) to confirm the trueness of Moshe's prophecy.

The evil Bilam attempted to destroy us with the power of his words but instead those same words were converted into an eternal source of encouragement and strength. It was with final words that Bilam advised Balak as how to destroy the Jewish people but words alone would not have sufficed to save the nation from G-d's anger. Pinchas's zealous action proved to be more powerful than words, and with words of love G-d conferred upon him His covenant of peace.

With words the Jews complained for water and with words Moshe was to have quenched their thirst. Instead, Moshe's unspoken action would silence his words and left Yehoshua to write the final words of his prophecy.

Concern for promissory words began last week's two Parshios, because words are powerful, plentiful, and cheap. Yet, words are also the medium of our service to G-d, the manner in which we convey wisdom to our children, the expressions of our heart, the brilliance of our minds, and the only way we ever heard G-d speak.

As Moshe began to relate his final prophecy to the Bnai Yisroel he described where and when he was doing so. The place and time of Moshe's final words that begin the end of the Torah were to be inscribed in the collective memories of the nation and their descendents so that the stark majesty of the Moabite plains and mountains would forever echo with the awesome humility of G-d's most trusted servant.

"With Moshe's death, all of his physical personality will depart. Only a description, recorded in the most precise terms possible, of the place where the people heard the last of his faithful words, will be handed down to posterity so that, if some day a late descendent of the Children of Israel will come to this place, it may perhaps echo for him these words and inspire him to follow them faithfully in the midst, and for the good, of his people." (Rav S.R. Hirsch 1:1)

1st and 2nd Aliyot:

Moshe recounts the history of the 40 years from after the 2nd Luchos, until the request by the people to send the Spies. (Pasuk 12 is read to the tune of Eicha - Lamentations) He notes the establishment of the Sanhedrin and the Judicial system.

3rd and 4th Aliyot:

The incident of the Miraglim - Spies and its terrible consequence is related. Remember, the sin of the Spies and the decree for that generation to die out in the desert occurred on Tisha B'Av 2449, 3316 years ago.

5th and 6th Aliyot:

Moshe's historic review jumps 38 years during which the decree of the 40 years was carried out and focuses on Israel's encounter with the nations of: Eisav, Moav, and Amon. The battles with Sichon and Og and the acquisition of Trans-Jordan are retold.

7th Aliya:

Trans-Jordan is given to the 2 1/2 tribes, and Yehoshua is encouraged to view these victories as a promise of future success in taking Land.

Haftorah Devarim - Isaiah 1:1 - 1:27 - The Third Haftorah

The Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av receives its name, "Chazon", from the opening verse of the Haftorah. Starting with the words "Chazon Yishayahu - A vision of Isaiah", we fearfully hear the echo of the Prophet as he decries Israel's betrayal of G-d. (1:11-15) Boundless selfishness, greed, misuse of power by those in authority, and oppression of the defenseless widow and orphan is why the Navi characterizes the people as "the lords of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah." (1:10)

Hearing Yishayahu's indictment of the people, one would think that the end was near. In truth, Yishayahu began to prophesies in 3142 (619 b.c.e.) and the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed in 3338 (423 b.c.e); 196 years before the end! Clearly, the Navi's intent was to effect change in hope of averting the destruction. If so, our reason for mourning on Tisha B'Av must be better defined.

"The Jew does not mourn that thousand of years ago the Temple was destroyed but that it had to be destroyed. Not over the destruction, but over the causes of its destruction". (S.R. Hirsch)

If only the people would have heeded the cry of the Navi! If only they could have foreseen with the clarity of a prophet's vision what it means for G-d to "draw back his protecting hand" (1:25) from Israel! Shabbat Chazon transports us back in time. We stand in the shadow of the Bais Hamikdash. We hear the word of G-d as the Navi beseeches His children to do Teshuva (repentance). Will we listen? Would we listen?

Laws of Erev Tisha B-Av on Shabbos & Tisha B'Av

Some Poskim forbid learning Torah after 1:00 PM (Chatzos) on Erev Tisha B'Av, except those topics permitted on Tisha B-Av. However, many others permit it.

This year, Erev Tisha B-Av is Shabbos, Aug. 13. Mincha will be at 6:00 to give enough time to eat Shalosh Seudos. The fast begins at 7:44. Not eating and drinking and all other restrictions, except

wearing leather shoes, go into effect at sundown, 7:44. The prohibition against wearing leather shoes begins at the beginning of Mariv immediately after Boruchu. Leather shoes should be removed after 8:29 PM. Be sure to bring non-leather foot wear to shul before Shabbos.

Tisha B'Av

Tisha B'Av, like Yom Kippur, is a 24+ hour fast, with additional restrictions.

The following are prohibited: Eating, drinking, wearing leather shoes (referring to leather construction such as the soles or uppers, not leather strips or ornamentation), washing any part of the body, marital relations, and the use of creams, lotions, or oils. Anti-perspirant and medicinal ointments for rashes and irritations are allowed. Netilas Yadayim is performed by washing fingers till the knuckles. Women do not go to Mikvah on Tisha B'Av night.

On Tisha B'Av the following additional customs reflect our status as mourners:

- 1.** Until 1:00 p.m., we sit on the floor or a low stool (not higher than 12").
 - 2.** Like an Avel, we should not greet each other all of Tisha B'Av. **3.** It is forbidden to learn Torah all day except for those topics relating to the laws of mourning or the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash.
 - 4.** One should not go to work on Tisha B'Av; however, if you must, it is best do so after midday - 1:00 p.m. Tisha B'Av is not to be used as a day to catch up on housework or repairs.
 - 5.** Tallis and Tefillin are first worn at Mincha, and Tzitzit should be put on in the morning without a Bracha.
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