

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE CAN MEAN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #436 Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes. Good Shabbos!

A Slip of the Tongue Can Mean The Difference Between Life and Death

Rashi [Bereishis 23:2] cites the reason given by the Medrash Tanchuma for the juxtaposition of the "Binding of Yitzchak" with the death of Sarah: "Through hearing the news of the Binding, that her son was readied for slaughter and was nearly slaughtered (kim'at shelo nishchat), her soul flew from her and she died."

The Sifsei Chachomim makes an inference from Rashi's use of the expression "kim'at sehlo nishchat" (which literally means "he was almost NOT slaughtered"). The simple translation of Rashi is that Sarah was shocked by the fact that Yitzchak was almost slaughtered. However strictly speaking, that is not what the words of Rashi are saying.

The Sifsei Chachomim therefore explain the scenario as follows: The angel came from Mt. Moriah and began describing to Sarah what happened at the Akeida. He told her something to the effect that "your son was slaughtered, but he was not killed." The angel should have told Sarah "I have good news for you. Your son is fine. He was almost slaughtered." Rather than saying it that way, the angel began with the dramatic statement "Your son was on the verge of being slaughtered." Sarah died before he had a chance to add the words "but he wasn't."

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz (1874-1936) comments that we see how someone - even an angel - can have the opportunity to deliver good news, but simply spoil the whole message because of the way he chooses the order of his words. The angel of "good news" became the angel of death.

The lesson here for us all is that we must be extremely careful in how we speak. So many times, people mean no harm whatsoever. But they wind up saying things to people in a way that is painful to them. There is no ill will. Their intent is not to be mean. It is just a matter of carelessness or, at worst, stupidity. But one is not allowed to be stupid. Rav Yisrael Salanter used to say that the first mitzvah in the Torah is "Do not be a fool!"

Sometimes, merely the way the words are said makes all the difference in the world. Sometimes people are so terribly hurt as a result of careless in the expression of certain ideas, as a result of someone not thinking something through.

We need to sensitize ourselves to all that is going on in the homes and the minds of our listeners. We must think before we talk and think while we talk. We must know what to say, who to say it to, how to say it, and in what situations it should not be said.

As we see from this Rashi, sometimes just a slip of the tongue can mean the difference between life and death.

Avraham Arose From The Presence of His Dead

The Minchas Ani (the Chumash Commentary of Rav Yakov Ettlinger [1798-1871]) asks what is the meaning of "Avraham arose from the presence of his dead" [Bereishis 23:3]? The Minchas Ani says that Avraham Avinu suffered a terrible tragedy. He just lost his wife. In a sense, his wife was the only "victim" of the Akeidah test.

This could have been a terribly traumatic spiritual experience for Avraham. He just returned from the Akeidah where he heard G-d testify "Now I know that you are one who fears the L-rd" [Bereishis 22:12]. He is at the apogee of his career and his life. He comes home only to find his wife dead - a result, at least indirectly, of this very Akeidah. This could have been an event that could have set him back emotionally and spiritually to the extent that he would never recover. He might always look at the Akeidah, not as the high point of his career, but as the cause of his wife's death.

But the Torah testifies that Avraham "got up" from the presence of his dead. He arose from this experience. He had the inner strength - despite this trauma that he had just experienced - to arise from the situation and even to grow from it. He did not let this situation beat him down.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com Technical Assistance by Dovid

Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chayei Sarah are provided below:

1. Tape # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha
2. Tape # 072 - Superstition in Halacha
3. Tape # 121 - The Jewish Cemetery
4. Tape # 168 - The Laws and Customs of the Hespel
5. Tape # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?
6. Tape # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch
7. Tape # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?
8. Tape # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan
9. Tape # 392 - Purchasing a Burial Plot
10. Tape # 436 - Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes
11. Tape # 480 - Calling Off an Engagement
12. Tape # 524 - The Badeikin
13. Tape # 568 - Feeding Your Animals
14. Tape # 612 - You, Your Animals and Mealtime
15. Tape # 656 - Getting Paid for Mitzvos

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.