

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

PARSHAS BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

THE POWERFUL TONGUE

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Part I. The Hurting Tongue

A Double Grievance

In Parshas Behar the Am Yisroel is warned against deceiving one another in business transactions: **כִּי תִמְכְּרוּ מִמְכָּר לְעַמִּיתְךָ אוֹ קָנָה מִיָּד עַמִּיתְךָ** – *When you're doing business with your fellow Jew, selling to him or buying from him, אַל תּוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו* – *you should make sure not to vex him* (Behar 25:14). It means: if you're the seller, you shouldn't aggrieve him by cheating him, either in the price, or in the weight or quality of the merchandise.

And if you're the buyer, sometimes the seller might be deceived if you give him less money than it's worth and he doesn't know. So not only shouldn't you overcharge, but you shouldn't underpay either. Unfortunately it happens many times, people give checks that bounce. That's not called underpaying – that's robbery. A check has to be an honest check. But even if you pay the good check, it has to be paid properly. So whatever it is, whatever the details are, it's the sin of *ona'as mammon*, of causing sorrow, vexation, to your

fellow Jew in business matters. It's a very serious crime.

But then, when the Torah comes to the end of this subject matter, there's another *possuk* that seems to be repetitious. We're warned the same thing a second time: **וְלֹא תוֹנוּ אִישׁ אֶת עַמִּיתוֹ** – *And you should not aggrieve your fellow man*. And the Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) is bothered by that – what's this repetition for? What is the second *possuk* telling us that the first *possuk* didn't say?

And what the Gemara answers introduces us to an entirely new Torah commandment altogether, a new and important branch of Torah living: **מָה אֲנִי מְקַיֵּם** – *What is this second possuk coming to say?* **בְּאוֹנָאֵת דְּבָרִים הִפְתּוּב מְדַבֵּר** – *It's talking about hurting a person with devarim, with words*. The seeming repetition of these *pessukim* above actually is no repetition at all. It's not speaking about preying on your fellow Jew's money but about preying on his emotions – it's a specific *lav* against speaking words that hurt a fellowman's feelings. **כְּשֶׁם שֶׁיֵּשׁ אוֹנָאָה בְּמִמּוֹן כֵּן יֵשׁ אוֹנָאָה בְּדְבָרִים** – *Just like there's aggrieving a person with money,*

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there's also aggrieving him with words. It's a Tosefta.

Two Storekeepers

But even more than that, the Gemara tells us a big *chiddush* there. It says there that not only is it an *aveirah* to hurt somebody with your words, but it's even worse than hurting him monetarily. That's what Chazal say: גְּדוֹל אוֹנְאָת דְּבָרִים מֵאוֹנְאָת קְמוֹן – It's more severe when you hurt a man's feelings than if you would steal his money (*ibid.*).

I always give the same *mashal*. Here are two storekeepers on the same avenue. One of them, when you walk in there, you have to watch him very carefully because when he's weighing the merchandise on the scale, sometimes he pushes down with his hand – he's trying to add a little bit more weight to the banana you're buying so that he can overcharge you. "Mister, I see you," you have to say, "Please take your hand off the scale." With him you also always have to count your change. He's always liable to shortchange you.

However, this cheating grocer is a polite fellow; he's always kind to you and he doesn't say any mean words. You have to watch out when he's handling your bananas and your money, but you don't have to beware of a sharp tongue.

Now, on the other side of the street, there's another grocer. He's a man who is perfectly honest, 100% trustworthy. He wouldn't cheat you even out of a nickel. If you accidentally left a penny of your change on the counter he would put it on the side for you and give it to you next time you come in. He takes *dinei mammonos* very seriously.

But on the other hand, he is mean. If you say an extra word, if you ask him where the tuna fish is, he answers you with a sharp word: "Look right in front of you on the shelf! Can't you see?!" If you want to make an exchange, a return, he'll berate

you for not getting it right the first time. He'll never hurt you in the pocketbook, not even a penny, but he'll hurt you with his careless tongue.

The Bigger Crook

So listen now to what the Gemara (*ibid.*) says about this: גְּדוֹל אוֹנְאָת דְּבָרִים מֵאוֹנְאָת קְמוֹן – *The sin of hurtful words is worse than the sin of cheating a man out of his money.* It means that the nice crook on this side of the street is better – because he's only cheating you out of your money; but at least he's not hurting your feelings. And who's the bigger crook? The honest grocer who would never take a penny from you.

So here's a nice Jewish boy who would never even dream about stealing from his mother – a son wouldn't sin against his mother like that. But suppose his mother is talking up a storm so he pipes up, "Ma, don't talk so much." Ooooh! He's hurting his mother's feelings! That's worse than sneaking into her room when she's out and stealing money from her pocketbook! גְּדוֹל אוֹנְאָת דְּבָרִים – *Hurtful words are worse than geneivah.*

Words are Worse than Sticks and Stones?

Now, a *chiddush* like that needs explanation and so the Gemara right away tells us a few reasons why it's so. Rabbi Elazar says זָה בְּגוֹפוֹ וְזָה בְּמַמּוֹנוֹ – When you harm somebody in money matters you're only taking away money from him; when you hurt his feelings, however, you're actually hitting him in his emotions. Even his internal organs are affected by it. He's affected physically; his nerves, his heart, his mind is hurt.

We know that the Jews in the concentration camps when they were being whipped, beaten by Germans, they suffered more from the insults than from the blows. This the inmates repeated. When the Germans said, "Dirty swine," "Filthy pigs," that hurt more.

Don't think that what you say just bounces off of people. *יש בוטחה כמדרקרות חרב* – Words that come out of your mouth can be like the piercings of a sword (Mishlei 12:18). Words are like arrows. They hurt. Actually hurt. You know that many times people have committed suicide because of an unkind word. They were already loaded down with so much discouragement, all they needed was one more word and they said, “forget it all.” A woman, a sensitive woman, told me that her husband almost killed her once. She wasn't well and he came home and said something careless and he pierced her with a sword. He almost finished her off. Hurtful words are *b'gufo*, they physically affect a person.

Reparations Won't Help

Now, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini adds yet another reason. *זה ניתן להישבון וזה לא* – Money you could always pay back but hurt feelings you can't pay back. Money you can always repay. You took it away, you give it back. If a man stole from you, he might mail you a check some day and pay it back. It's a good idea by the way; if you ever did something when you were a little boy, if you took something from a candy store without paying, don't just forget about it. Pay up! You must! But at least you can make restitution! But if you hurt someone's feelings no check can make that up. You can never pay back the hurt feelings.

You know, there's a beautiful custom that some husbands and wives have, to ask *mechila* of each other before the *Yomim Nora'im*. Rav Itzele Petterburger, when he went to shul on *erev Rosh Hashana*, before he walked out of the house he turned around and told his wife, “*Zeit mir moichel* – Forgive me, my wife.” And she said, “Forgive me too.” It's a very good *minhag* to imitate! And you don't have to wait for *erev Rosh Hashana* either. It's very wise to do that.

Or at least on her deathbed, he should approach the bed and say, “Please forgive me for everything I said.” At least he should have *seichel* then. Some don't even have *seichel* to say that. And when he is dying, his wife should approach him and say, “Please, my husband, forgive me for everything I said or did against you.”

Scarred Forever

But even if you do that, you have to know like the Gemara said, it's *bigufo* and it's not *nitan l'hishavon*. Even if you asked for *mechila* and he says wholeheartedly, “I am *moichel* you,” but his feelings are still hurt – the effect is still there. It's pain that cannot be repaid. It's like if you cut him with a knife. So you asked for *mechila* and you also paid his medical bills. Wonderful; very good. But the gash, the scar is permanent; he's a *baal mum* forever as a result. A man who hurts his wife with words, it's not forgotten – and even though she is willing to overlook it, in her heart it rankles! The pain is still there and it's considered a blot on his record.

That's how it is with feelings too; they are forever. When you'll be an old man of a hundred years and you'll look back, you'll remember, “This one hurt my feelings,” and “That one hurt my feelings.” It's engraved in your mind.

Speech, Stockings and Sleds

Don't you remember what happened many years ago even as a child? Somebody said a mean word and you still remember it. You'll remember it for all your life. It rankles like a thorn inside of you. I remember I was a poor boy and somebody once said something to me in the schoolyard about my torn stockings. It was over seventy years ago. I didn't forget it. It rankles to this day. Of course, it's silly, but silly or not silly, it was a hurt.

Or when my father couldn't afford to buy me a sled in the wintertime so he made a sled of his own; he took plain boards and made for me a homemade sled. So the boys who could afford a sled used to call it a 'cheese box'. It was very embarrassing to me. For years and years every winter I hauled out my 'cheese box' and there was a barrage of *ona'as devarim*, of hurtful words. Finally from my *bar mitzvah* money, I got a dollar and seventy five cents and bought a sled. In those days you could buy a sled for \$1.75 – a real sled that came from a factory. I was finally redeemed from that suffering for all those years. To this day I haven't forgotten the cheese box.

And so *ona'as devarim* can never be retracted. It's a hurt that's forever. And therefore it's *lo nitan l'hashivon*, you can't pay back a mean word no matter if you repent. He can forgive you, but you can't take it back. It hurts and hurts forever.

Part II. The Dangerous Tongue

Rashbi's Sisrei Torah

Now Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, he says there (*ibid.* 59a) another reason – actually it's the first one on the list – and it's something that should cause us to shudder. How do we know that vexing someone with words is worse than vexing him with money? *שָׂדָה תֹּאמַר בּוֹ וְיִרְאֶתֶתָ מֵאֱלֹקִים* – *because by this one, by ona'as devarim, it says "And you should fear Hashem"*, *וְזָה לֹא תֹאמַר בּוֹ וְיִרְאֶתֶתָ מֵאֱלֹקִים* – *and by vexing with money it doesn't say anything about being afraid of Hashem.*

Of course we know that we have to be afraid of Hashem about anything we do against the Torah but when it comes to hurting our fellow Jews with words, the Torah goes out of its way to add the words, "*You should be afraid of Hashem.*" Which means, *be especially afraid!* A *ganav* also has to be afraid, but if you hurt feelings, the Torah

says: "Start worrying! Beware of the repercussions! Hakadosh Baruch Hu takes action if you hurt people's feelings."

Retribution in Brooklyn

I'll tell you one little story, a true story. There was a young woman, a *frum* girl, who was getting a ride in a taxi cab in Brooklyn and the taxi cab bumped into another car and together they bumped into a telephone pole. And the pole fell upon her and killed her. It crashed onto the cab and killed this woman.

Now I'm not capable of telling you anything, reasons, but I'll tell you something about this girl. I know the story with her. Once there was a poor teacher trying to make a living and she was teaching a class of girls, forty girls. And one of the girls in the back of the room made a habit of mimicking the teacher's voice – all the time, mocking her. The teacher was very much embarrassed, very hurt. Every day it was *בְּמִדְקָרוֹת כְּחֶרֶב*, like a knife twisting in her heart. But what could she do? It's her *parnassah* so she kept quiet. She was very hurt though, very much so, but she couldn't do anything about it; she tried to forget about it.

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't forget. And He warns us, *וְיִרְאֶתָ* – if you're going to do something like that, it's very serious business; who knows what the result might be.

Now, we can't explain anything. Don't go out from this place and say Rabbi Miller says he knows this and that. We don't know anything. Maybe she did *teshuvah* and maybe there was a *mechilah gemurah* – maybe it's not like I'm presuming. But whatever it is, it's absolutely true that the Torah warns us when it comes to *ona'as devarim*, even more than by cheating and stealing, it says *וְיִרְאֶתָ מֵאֱלֹקִים*.

The Missing Brother

You think it doesn't happen that Hashem steps in? I'll tell you a story of a *tzaddik* – he was a bigger *tzaddik* than that girl – who even without opening his mouth he hurt his wife and he was punished; he perished because of that.

I'm talking about R' Yehuda, the son of R' Chiya. You know R' Chiya had two sons, R' Yehuda and R' Chizkiya, both *talmidei chachomim*, both *tzaddikim*. But Chizkiya, we know very much about him; Chizkiyah the son of Rabi Chiya, he's frequently mentioned in Shas, in the *sugyas*. But his brother, Yehuda, is rarely mentioned. And it's a queer thing because we know that both men were great.

And the answer is because he died when he was young. He too was going to be as great as his brother, maybe greater, but he went lost. Lost?! What happened? The Gemara tells that all week he sat in the yeshivah and learned. He didn't come home at night; his wife allowed that for him, so that he should be able to grow great in Torah. Today we praise the women who give their husbands permission to be out all day Sunday in the *beis medrash* and late at night too on the weekdays. Excellent! But R' Yehudah's wife was especially loyal and she only saw her husband on Shabbos; *erev Shabbos*, that's when he came home.

And so, every Friday his wife would wait by the window, looking down the road. She's so happy – her husband is coming home for Shabbos. What kind of Shabbos would it be without a father at the table?

The Dangerous Tear

One Friday afternoon, it was getting late and somebody asked R' Yehuda a Talmudic question in which he was interested and he became involved in a discussion that dragged out; and it

became later and later. And his wife was sitting at the window waiting; it was getting late and there was no sign of him. And so her heart fell within her and she thought, "Maybe he's not coming for this Shabbos." And a tear dripped out of her eye, down her cheek.

At that time Hakadosh Baruch Hu took action and R' Yehuda never came home again. Something happened in the *beis medrash*; there was an accident and R' Yehuda perished.

Now R' Yehuda didn't do any sin of *kares* or *misas beis din*. He wasn't *mechallel Shabbos*. He wasn't *oved avodah zarah*. None of the capital crimes. He was tardy because he was learning Torah; and certainly he intended to come home. And yet because of a certain disregard for the feelings of his wife who was waiting for him, because he caused her to shed a tear, Hakadosh Baruch Hu took action.

Now by the way, a woman should also know that it's a similar story for her. The Gemara there is especially warning a husband *מתוך שהמעטה מצויה* – because a woman is more tender and she'll more easily shed a tear, *אונאתה קרובה* – therefore the punishment is very close. That's what it means *kerovah*; *kerovah* means Hashem is fast. Sometimes something happens to a *frum* man, a loyal husband, and we don't know why; but Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if you would ask Him, He would say it's because of *ona'as devarim*.

But it applies to a wife too, how she treats her husband's feelings. Her husband expects her to look up to him, to honor him, and if a woman disrespects her husband and says something that hurts his feelings, she should know she is held responsible. Something can happen to her. Very serious.

Marriage Counseling

You should know that I consider *ona'as devarim* the most serious *michshol* in marriage, the cause, *chas v'shalom*, of most breakups. For many years I've dealt with people coming to me. Sometimes I succeeded, sometimes I didn't succeed, but I can tell you that most of the time the troubles began with *ona'as devarim*, words that hurt.

Unfortunately, some people spend all their lives saying unpleasant words to each other – fifty years of bickering and constant quarreling; each time hurting each other's feelings. These people who are spending their lives in careless words and recrimination, they have to know what a very great burden there's going to be on them! A very great guilt!

Now, *baruch Hashem* they remained married and they became old together. They refused to separate. Very good! Otherwise it's a great pity. It's a tragedy. It ends up in a divorce court, oh yes. \$60,000 for his lawyer and she spends \$60,000 on her lawyer, and years and years go by in litigation and finally he gives her a *gett*. And now their lives are ruined and the lives of their children too. It's a *churban Beis Hamikdash*, and it all started with words.

And so the wise couple stays together anyhow. Nevertheless there's a long list of *chato'im* that they have, and even though they're willing to overlook it, the pain is still there, and it's considered a blot on their records. And they should know that although Hakadosh Baruch Hu approves of they're being together, He's quite satisfied that they didn't break up and they'll live together in their old age, but nevertheless when they come to the Next World the records will be taken out before the *Dayan Emes* and they will be judged. They won't be able to get away with the things that they said.

Marriage Advice

That's why, when a *chosson* or *kallah* come and ask for advice, this is one of the first things they should know, the *aveirah* of *ona'as devarim*. It's a very serious *chet*. It's like eating a *davar tamei*, like eating ham all their life. Is that a *frum* house? Even if people wear *shatnez*, is that a *frum* house? But people who talk *ona'as devarim* are transgressing a much more serious *lav*. And they're doing it all their lives, and very many times. Sometimes thousands of times.

Now, of course if you're a wise person you'll say, "What do words mean? I'll forget about the words!" That's right! That's what you should do – make believe you never heard it. But not always are both wise; sometimes one is not so wise, sometimes the other one. And what you said to her, or what she said to you, who knows how long it will rankle?

Don't Forget the Children

And children too. You have to be careful not to hurt children's feelings. Sometimes it's better to give a *potch* rather than insult a child, to call him a dummy or other things. And sometimes if a child is insulted in front of all the other children, he'll remember it forever. You have to be careful of that. Exactly what to do, *aseh k'chochmosecha*, but you should know *ona'as devarim* applies to *ketanim* too, yes.

Just like *gezel*, if you steal money that belongs to a *katan* – let's say it was *רֵעַת אֶחָת מִקְנָה*; if somebody gave a *katan* a *matanah*, so it's his property now. You can't steal it from him.

I know a *zeida*, when his grandchildren come in he gives them lollypops, little toys. When they go out sometimes one leaves over something in the house so the *zeida* doesn't give it to anybody else. He gave it to the grandchild, *da'as acheres makneh*, the child was *koneh* it. He can't give it to

another grandchild. So he puts it away and he waits for the grandchild to come back. It's a *halachah*. It belongs to that grandchild. You say, "Well he left it over; I'll give it to somebody else, a different grandchild." No you can't give it to somebody else. The same is what you do to his feelings; only that it's worse than stealing from him. *Ona'as devarim* is worse and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will remember the unnecessary shame you caused that child.

Hashem's Children

And therefore to remember the *chomer hadevarim*. Your husband, your wife, your children, your neighbors, your friends, co-workers – don't hurt anybody's feelings. You must always be careful when you're talking to a Jew. A Jew is beloved by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hashem loves *amo Yisrael*, and He doesn't tolerate anybody who hurts their feelings. There's a big *kepeidah*.

And therefore, it becomes necessary for people to begin thinking more about what they've done. Husbands and wives, boys and girls, old sages and business people, yeshiva people, everyone must spend some time thinking about how they speak. It should be a program, a project. "What did I say during the day? I am too careless with my words. I should train my tongue to be restrained. For how long am I going to be careless and allow my tongue to be a tool of hurt for others and destruction for myself?"

Part III. The Healing Tongue

The Other Side of the Tongue

Now, it's important to conclude our subject with one more idea, to take our subject in a different direction. Up until now we were saying that *מָוֶת בְּיַד הַלָּשׁוֹן* – *death is in the hand of the tongue* (Mishlei 18:21); it means that words are

very powerful and can be very destructive. You can even kill somebody with your words! And you can ruin yourself too. But we shouldn't forget the other side of the coin, the other word in that *possuk*: *וְחַיִּים בְּיַד הַלָּשׁוֹן* – *The power of life is also in the hands of the tongue*. A tool as powerful as the tongue can also be a life-giver in this world.

That's what Mishlei (15:4) tells us, *מְרַפֵּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים* – *A healing tongue is a tree of life*. It means that you can actually be a healer, a life-giver with your tongue. If you train yourself to console people, to encourage them, to make them feel good, you're going to become not only a *tzaddik* but also you'll be a very great professor of medicine.

A Needy World

Because people everywhere are ailing. Everyone needs a lift; everybody can use a word of consolation, a friendly word or a compliment. And don't think that because a person is an extrovert, because he's bubbling with talk and it's hard even to get a word in sideways, that he doesn't need it. Oh no! You can be sure that even he is listening, waiting for something from you. Because that's what people want most – kind words.

I hear it when people call me on the telephone. They call me up for advice but they don't let me talk! It's remarkable! It looks like they're coming for advice but they don't want to listen to me. They are waiting for a "wow." Once in a while they'll give you a space of a few seconds to say a word or two in between, "You're right. You're right." Of course you can't always say, "You're right," but that's what they want. They don't want advice; they want justification and kind words.

And so, with just a little foreplanning, you can be the one who pours salve on the wounds of your discouraged fellow Jews. They want some

recognition, some kind words; that's the medicine that mankind craves most and you have the medicine to give them. With your tongue you can accomplish more than physicians do.

One Test After Another

It means that every person you meet is an opportunity! And you have to realize that a person is measured, he's judged, by how many people he encounters successfully. It pays to think about that; to make a *cheshbon hanefesh* about that. It's not a bad idea to do that sometimes before you go to bed; look back at your day and see how successful your encounters were. So you start thinking. In the morning you encountered your wife, let's say, when you got out of bed and you went to the kitchen. What did you say?

Then you went to the *beis hamedrash* to pray, and you encountered somebody on the way and then in the synagogue you encountered a few people. You didn't speak to most of them but maybe one or two you did. And then you went home for breakfast and encountered your daughter who was on her way out the door to the Beis Yaakov. Then you ran to the corner to catch the bus, so the bus driver was also an encounter. Yes, *goyim* too; you should practice up on *goyim* to train yourself in good character.

And then in the place where you work or in the yeshivah, you also bumped into a few people. There are a lot of boys in the yeshivah who need encouragement. If you're a teacher, look around. Your pupils need encouragement. There are some who are not getting along well; some are sad, some are broken because of home conditions. Some have struggles at home. Some are not well. Some have difficulty keeping up with the studies.

So how many people were you tested with today? Look back at your day and see how successful these thirty, forty, fifty encounters

were. Of the fifty times you met people, how successful was the way you spoke to them? Were you successful in the important *avodah* of *marpei lashon*?

The Man With Many Wives

Now, once you understand this principle, that every human being you encounter is a test and the more people you encounter, the more tests you have, so you'll begin to understand what a wife is. Your wife is a lot of people. Even after the *cherem d'Rabbeinu Gershom*, it's not one wife because the many times that you encounter your wife add up to many people. Each encounter is another opportunity, another test.

And the same with a husband. The thirty times in one evening that you had some *masa umatan*, a talk, exchange of words, or something, that's thirty encounters; it's like different people. That's how we look at a mate, a husband or a wife.

And therefore, with whom is it more frequently possible to utilize your tongue for healing than a husband to a wife and a wife to a husband? They see each other more than anybody else. What difference does it make if it's your wife or your neighbor or another neighbor or another neighbor? Your wife is like a hundred neighbors. Each encounter is a new test. Did she have a pleasurable response to your company, to your words, or *chas v'shalom* the opposite?

A Man's Business

That's the outcry of very many women: "He never once gave me a compliment. He never told me he appreciates the supper I prepared."

Now, the husband is an honest man. He's not a superficial fellow, and he thinks it's ridiculous. He says, "She knows I appreciate everything – I have to say it?!" And because he is begrudging in

words, his life goes one wasted opportunity after another.

You have a whole treasury of gold, golden words, that costs you nothing to share. And your wife is right there and she is willing and ready to hear it from you. Your poor wife, after a day in the hot kitchen, after hours of taking care of the children, is waiting for it. And if you'd be willing to donate one or two words of encouragement, you don't know what you're accomplishing.

When you walk into the house, say, "How nice and clean your house is." Or say, "You're an expert manager, a good *balabuste*." From time to time, tell your wife she's an *eishes chayil*. On *erev Shabbos* you can say, "I see you're working very hard to bring in *Shabbos Kodesh*. What a big mitzvah to be involved with all day."

Show appreciation. It costs no money! The human being is capable of finding the right expressions and that's your job; to look for ways and means of complimenting your wife. Sing her praises – not once and finished. Investigate, find what to praise – that's your function. You might think it's nothing; no, it's not nothing – it's everything!

A Wife's Business

Wives to their husbands too. Your husband puts on a facade maybe, but he craves the respect of his wife. So your poor husband when he comes home tired from a day in the office or in his shop – he has so much friction with customers, with supervisors, with competitors.

Maybe his boss was mean to him and he's knocked out. If you're a wise wife, you greet him with a couple of nice words. "Chaim, I'm glad to see you. I made a nice supper for you today."

As much as possible she has to show appreciation for her husband. If she sees that her

husband is *osek in Torah*, she should praise him. Anything he does, she should praise. It doesn't mean she has to stand there like a canary all day long and sing his praises but she should make it her business always to look for opportunities to drop a word of encouragement to her husband. "Chaim, you fixed the sink very well. It's working perfectly now." Or "You're looking good today." It's all part of the great career of *marpei lashon*.

Home Sweet Home

Of course, in the home there's more than a wife. Actually of all the opportunities there's not one that is as prolific, as fertile, as the home. The Jewish home is the scene where the *avodah of marpei lashon* can be carried out in the best possible way. Your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your children – those are the best opportunities because they're always available in the house.

Children who are encouraged in the home learn better. They are more neat in their habits. They are cooperative if they are encouraged. And most of all it's the best vitamins! Encouragement, compliments, praises – those are the best vitamins for your children. When he does a little bit, make it better than it is and let him feel that there's an incentive to do good.

And by the way children should seek to encourage parents. Don't forget about that. You have to encourage your father. He's slaving away in the factory to give you a home, to pay your tuition, to give you clothing. You have to encourage your mother. She's standing over the stove. She's cleaning your shirts, your underwear. Don't think it's just a one-way business. There are a lot of ways you could encourage your parents, and they need it too because the world is busy doing the opposite. And therefore a few kind words from children mean a great deal.

A Great Career

It's a great career, this program of *marpei lashon*, and therefore, when we read about *ona'as devarim* in this week's *parsha* and we study the words of Chazal describing how wicked it is to say hurtful words to your fellow, we must understand that avoiding that sin is only the beginning of our careers. Because by means of your tongue, you can become great. The tongue is the opportunity for a man to achieve in this world.

And therefore, people who have a head on their shoulders and they think about the tremendous opportunity that they have, they won't be satisfied if they just don't criticize or recriminate. It's not enough if they won't bicker and belittle. Avoiding *ona'as devarim* is most vital, but it's not enough. Because really it is only the foundation for much greater things – it's the stepping stool for the great career of *marpei lashon*. How important it is to learn that the **חיים** **הַלְשׁוֹן**; that life, in this world and also everlasting life in Olam Haba, is in the power of the tongue. And therefore, the man who lives with idealism and understands the greatness of this gift, that man can live most successfully.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

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Q&A WITH RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l



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QUESTION

How can I teach myself to think before I speak?

ANSWER

I told you this already; make up your mind that for the next two hours whenever somebody speaks to you're going to refuse to answer you unless you count first to five.

Shlomo Hamelech says that; he says you shouldn't hurry to open your mouth. **וְלִבְךָ אַל יִמְהַר לְהוֹצִיא** – *Don't be in a hurry to open your mouth, to say what's on your mind* (Koheles 5:1). If somebody says something to you, the first thing is don't hasten to open your mouth. And so isn't that a good idea, to count to five? It's good you came here tonight.

And so for the next two hours when somebody says something to you, count to five. Do it also tomorrow for two hours. And the day after. And after a while you'll get into the habit of thinking before you talk.

By the way, when you talk to important people, you'll notice that even gentiles, *l'havdil*, have learned not to shoot their mouths off.

The best thing is you don't answer at all. A lot of small things you don't have to answer at all. You don't have to answer all the time. But if you must, then take your time before you answer. Count; one, two, three, four, five, and then you answer. That itself makes you considered a wise man to other people.

January 1984

Life Questions?

Cybersecurity Questions?

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