

מושלי הלשון

MOSHLEI
HALOSHON

 Mastering Sensitive Speech



A CURRICULUM ON HILCHOS ONA'AS DEVORIM



Chapter 1: Insights Into Speech

Lesson 1: Pure Power

The Power of Speech

Lesson 2: Your Creations

The Matter of Words

Lesson 3: In the End

The Path of Our Words

Lesson 4: Speaking Tons

The Quantity of Words

Lesson 5: Painting People

Changing Other's Self Image

Lesson 6: Beware! Dangerous Sound Waves!

How the Invisible Can Hurt You

Lesson 7: CRASH and CRUSH

Words That Break People

Chapter 2: Causes of Ona'as Devarim

Lesson 8: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #1: Anger

Lesson 9: How to Fix It!

Putting the Brakes on Anger

Lesson 10: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #2: Blind to Another Person's Worth

Lesson 11: How to Fix It!

Recognizing Another Person's Worth

Lesson 12: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #3: Feeling Unimportant

Lesson 13: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #4: Knocking Others Down to Pick Ourselves Up

Lesson 14: How to Fix It! Picking Ourselves Up

Picking Ourselves Up (so that we are not tempted to knock other people down)

Lesson 15: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #5: Impulsiveness

Lesson 16: How to Fix It!

Appreciate the Importance of Every Person in Your Life

Lesson 17: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #6: Ga'avah - Arrogance

Lesson 18: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #7: Jokes and Humor

Lesson 19: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #8: Blaming Others

Lesson 20: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #9: Self Righteousness

Lesson 21: What Drives Us to Hurt Others?

Cause #10: Justification

Chapter 3: Forms of Ona'as Devarim

Lesson 22: Deflating Self-Esteem in Others by Causing Them to Feel Yiush (hopelessness)

Lesson 23: Knocking Someone's Feeling of Accomplishment

Lesson 24: Magnifying a Person's Fault by Depicting Her as "Not Normal."

Lesson 25: Insulting a Person's Family in the Heat of a Fight

Lesson 26: Implying that There are Ulterior Motives Behind a Virtuous Act

Lesson 27: Labeling

Lesson 28: Nicknames

Lesson 29: Causing Pain to Someone Who is Different Than You

Lesson 30: Learning Mistakes

Lesson 31: Knocking Someone's Appearance

Lesson 32: Knocking Someone's Possessions

Lesson 33: Knocking Food

Lesson 34: Uncomfortable Questions

Lesson 35: The Double Edged NO!

Lesson 36: Mind Works

Lesson 37: Dousing the Flame

Lesson 38: Painting Portraits

Lesson 39: Praising People's Purchases

Lesson 40: They're Talking About Me!

Lesson 41: Fear Not

Lesson 42: The Prank's on You

Lesson 43: Buzzing Off



Lesson 44: Good to the Last Drop

Lesson 45: Healing Wounds with Words

Lesson 46: Details, Details.

Lesson 47: Don't Imitate

Lesson 48: Top Secret

Lesson 49: Stealth Attack

Lesson 50: Sarcastically Speaking

Lesson 51: A Day at the Zoo

Lesson 52: Beyond Compare

Lesson 53: Staying in Tune

Lesson 54: Speechless

Lesson 55: Writing Wrongs

Chapter 4: Strategies for Success

Lesson 56: Strategy #1: High Stakes

Lesson 57: Strategy #2: Rain Gear

Lesson 58: Strategy #3: Seeing and Articulating the Good

Lesson 59: Strategy #4: Read the Signs!

Lesson 60: Strategy #5: Solutions Not Circles

Lesson 61: Strategy #6: Clean Up the Mess

Today's Focus

Pure Power-The Power of Speech

We have legs; a horse has legs.

We have a nose; an ape has a nose.

We have eyes; a gerbil has eyes.

What makes us different than the animals Hashem created?

When making us, Hashem blew a special life-force into our airways. It was not just oxygen--- it was one of the most powerful tools ever given to any of Hashem's creations.

It was our power of speech.

When we speak we are not just pushing air through our vocal cords. We are releasing some of the powerful energy Hashem planted within us when we were created.



That is why our words have such an incredible force. With a few words of prayer, we can tear open the gates of Heaven. On the other hand, with a few puffs of loshon hora, we can bring terrible pain to ourselves and others.

Words can build worlds or destroy worlds. It all depends how we use this incredible force we were given.

From the Source

וַיִּפֶּחַ בְּאַפִּי נְשֹׁמַת חַיִּים (אונקלוס: בראשית: ב:ז)

And He blew into his nostrils the soul of life and man became a living being – a speaking being.

Story

Picture Perfect

C'mere!" Chaya called across the classroom to no one in particular. "Take a look at this!"

Within moments, she was surrounded by a crowd of curious girls and the exclamations began.

"Wow!"

"Who did that?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Ayala," Chaya told her onlookers, winking confidentially. "She's a MAJOR artist."

"Aw, c'mon," Ayala protested, trying to cover up

the paper. "It's nothing."

"You call this *nothing*?!" Chaya laughed, gesturing to the girls surrounding Ayala's desk. "You think this is nothing?"

"It's fantastic!" Bracha said genuinely, if a bit surprised. Ayala usually spent her recesses alone, reading in the lunchroom. It wasn't as if Ayala was *unlikeable*; it was just that she made no effort to socialize.

"You have to see what else she can draw," Chaya persisted. "Ayala, show them that portrait of Reb Moshe."

"...No one even seemed to notice I existed." Ayala swiped at her eyes quickly.

Ayala's face flushed, but nonetheless she pulled out a piece of paper with a brilliantly executed portrait, done in charcoal. Excited cries of "Wow!" and "Oooh!" filled the air.

"I'm telling you, Ayala's amazing," Chaya said again. The whole class nodded in agreement. "We should really ask her to do something for the class newsletter, no?"

"For sure!" It was Yehudis, the class president. All heads nodded vigorously.

Ayala Shechter had suddenly become part of the class. And Chaya Abrams, whose heart had broken at the sight of her previously lonely classmate, grinned with satisfaction.

* * *

"I'm overwhelmed," said the girl on the podi-

um, adjusting her hair nervously and holding the large Valedictorian award with trembling fingers. "I...never believed I would be standing here today. Seven years ago, back in fifth grade, my mother was undergoing treatments for a serious illness. I retreated into myself and, of course, my classmates naturally withdrew from me. No one even seemed to notice I existed." Ayala swiped at her eyes quickly. "I felt all alone in the world. And then, one day, everything changed. My classmates started paying attention to me, they started admiring my talent for drawing and from there everything else picked up speed—it was amazing! And it was all thanks to the power of one individual, Chaya Abrams. With a few kind, well-intentioned words, she built me up and changed the entire course of my life. Forever."

Say it Right!



Q:

How can our words really help or hurt others?

Let's Recap

Words have incredible power; they are an awesome gift from Hashem. We can use them to bring extraordinary good into the world, but if we are not careful, our words can cause incredible destruction.

Daily Do

Use your power of speech in a positive way. Give someone a sincere compliment today.



Today's Focus

What Drives Us to Hurt Others? Cause #3: Feeling Unimportant

No one likes feeling small and unimportant. When we feel this way, we see ourselves as weak and helpless.

This is a very uncomfortable feeling for any person to have. We want to get rid of the feeling, and so we look for ways to make ourselves feel **big**.

There are many good ways to make ourselves become **BIG**.

But unfortunately, the Yetzer Hora has his own basket of lowly tricks which he tempts us to use to give us a brief feeling of being **big**...



...like, acting important, tough - bullying and teasing others -- which makes us feel **big** by making other people feel small and unimportant.

Unfortunately, none of these tricks really make us big. They just work for a little while to hide our feelings of being small, but deep down inside, we are the same person.

From the Source

אִיִּחוּ מִכְבֵּד הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת (אבות:ד:א)

Who is honored? He who honors others.

Story

Kickback

Jt just wasn't fair. Talia kicked a little stone, watching it skip across the sidewalk. Bump, bump, bump.

That's exactly how I feel, she thought to herself miserably. Kicked around all day. At home, they treat me like a baby. It's not my fault I'm the youngest in the family, but why do they have to make me feel so small and unimportant? And then at school, all the kids call me "Shortie." So what if I'm on the shorter side? Why do they have to always pick on me because of it?

The bad mood stayed with her all afternoon. Talia refused her mother's offer of a trip to the Jewish Children's

Library and chose to sit in her room and mope.

"Talia! Pessi's asking for you!"

Pessi looked at Talia with shocked eyes. She quickly turned away and ran downstairs.

Talia groaned. Pessi was her niece, a couple years' younger. She often came over in the afternoons and she always wanted to play with her favorite aunt, Talia.

"Hi," Talia said grumpily, as Pessi came up the steps.

"Wanna see what I got for my birthday present?" Pessi asked eagerly. "It's a doll that you can feed and she actually eats the food. Come—I'll let you feed her!"

Talia usually prided herself on being a good friend to Pessi,

but today, her bad mood took over and before she could stop herself, the words were out of her mouth.

"That's such a dumb toy!" she said angrily. "What a babyish present! Go play with it yourself. I'm busy!"

Pessi looked at Talia with shocked eyes. She quickly turned away and ran downstairs. Talia was left alone and was surprised to find a strange new feeling inside herself. A feeling of power.

Ha! Did you see Pessi's face? She sees that I'm in charge. I'm grown up and important!

The feeling of power was just strong enough to overcome another feeling: Shame. Talia determinedly put the image of Pessi's crushed face out of her mind. *Serves her right, she told herself. She's such a baby.*

The next day, after being rejected again by her classmates during Kickball because "You're a shrimp," Talia wandered over to a group of younger kids and took a deep breath.

"Having fun?" she sneered. "Look at how Chavi over

there can't even catch a ball!"

Chavi turned red. The other girls laughed. Talia felt that new feeling again.

No more being kicked around. Now it's MY turn to feel important!

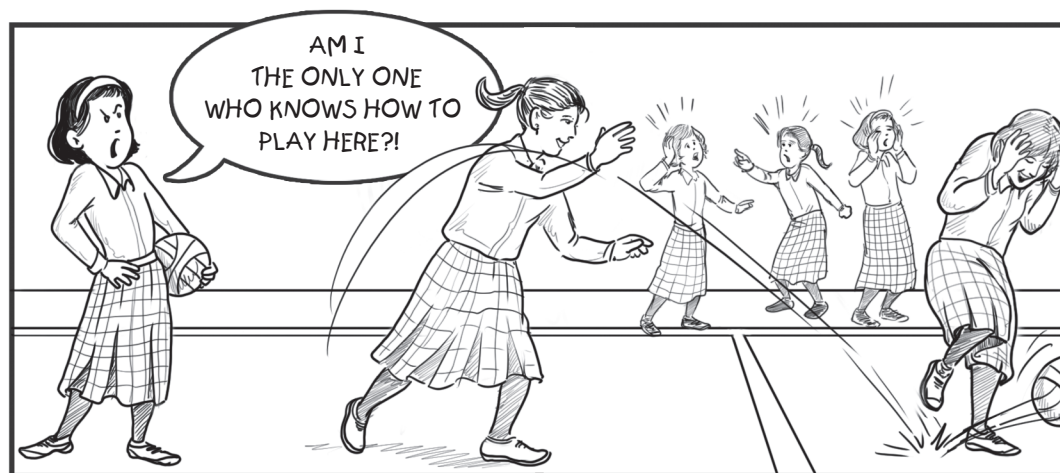
It was only a matter of a few weeks before Talia had become a first-class bully. Kids had started to avoid her; her nieces didn't come around to the house any more. Her teachers were becoming worried, and her parents noticed that something was very wrong.

"Oh....nice shoes," Talia scoffed at her friend Tzippy one morning. "Where'd you get them? At a second-hand store?"

She was definitely unprepared for Tzippy's response. Instead of turning red, Tzippy stepped closer to Talia and looked her in the eye. "Talia," she said, "Do you need to make other people feel bad in order to feel good about yourself? That's really sad."

And Talia had absolutely nothing to say.

Say it Right!



Q:

If this girl is unhappy with how her teammates are playing, would there be a better way for her to get her point across?

Let's Recap

Feeling unimportant- Let's not fall to the low level of knocking others in order to make ourselves feel big.

Note: You will see in the upcoming lessons that most of the causes of Ona'as Devarim come from feeling unimportant. We will also learn ways to really make ourselves feel big so we will never have to knock others down to feel big again.

Daily Do

Do you wish you were BIGGER in some way? Think of one simple thing you can do to help yourself grow, just one small, tiny bit – and DO it!



Today's Focus

Deflating Freshly Earned Self-Esteem By Knocking Someone's Feeling of Accomplishment

*Two weeks! You spend two **full** weeks beautifully decorating a scrapbook with a collection of your family's photos. Neighborhood children come to see your accomplishment. The Dover Emes Newspaper even runs a picture of some of the pages in their weekend edition! Then, one day, a jealous girl in your building spills her melted Italian ice on some of the pages.*

SMMMUDGeeee ee°e°e ee°eee!

There is nothing quite like the feeling of accomplishment—knowing that you have proven to yourself that you are special in some way. Whether you did well on a test, played well in a game, made a personal siyum, finished a challenging project... whatever it may be, when you accomplish something, it builds your self esteem, giving you a bigger boost to achieve more and more.

Let's imagine that you just completed a long and difficult project. Now, try to picture that just as you take a step back to admire your accomplishment, cherishing it in your mind, someone comes by and comments that what you have just achieved is simple—or even worse—that your achievement is worthless. Your self-esteem gets knocked right down to the floor.

When we criticize someone's accomplishments, we take away the very motivation which fuels her drive to succeed. This can make her want to give up. Just like taking the fuel out of an airplane mid-flight, removing a person's enthusiasm to achieve can cause that person to crash right down to the ground.



Story

Bursting the Bubble

Where's Tamar?" Dina asked no one in particular, pushing excitedly through the chattering recess crowd in search of her best friend. "Whew, there you are," she said, grabbing Tamar by the shoulder. "I've got to talk to you!"

"What's up?" Tamar asked. "Is everything okay? You're all out of breath and red in the face."

"Yeah, yeah, everything's fine. Listen, you'll never believe it!" Dina pulled Tamar over to a corner of the classroom. "You know how I applied to be a junior counselor

at Sasson this summer?"

"Don't even tell me!" Tamar's eyes widened. "They're notorious for being so hard to get into. They took you?"

Dina nodded joyously.

"That's amazing!" Tamar gave her a quick hug. "They only choose the best, you know. One of my sisters applied one year, and even though she's so talented and everyone loves her, and even with tons of great references, she didn't get accepted. Wow! I'm so happy for you!"

"Whew, there you are," she said, grabbing Tamar by the shoulder. "I've got to talk to you!"

Dina grinned. It hadn't been an easy process at all. Camp Sasson was, as Tamar said, really strict about the counselors they accepted. It had taken lots of courage and bitachon for Dina even to think about applying, and even after she had finalized her application, she hadn't dared let herself hope that she'd get in.

"Well, they certainly know how to pick 'em!" Tamar said, clapping Dina on the arm. "This is so exciting!"

"What's so exciting?" a voice asked lazily. Tamar and Dina whirled around. There stood Dassy, a sardonic smile on her face.

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation," she said wryly. "Why are you making such a big deal about getting accepted as a JC to Sasson? I heard they're *desperate* this year, so they're pretty much accepting anyone who applies."

She nonchalantly walked away, before she could see Dina's face fall from the incredible heights of excitement to the bleak depths of disappointment.

Say it Right!



Q:

What was wrong with the girl telling the other girl that it was an easy test?

Let's Recap

Belittling someone's accomplishments damages that person's very self-esteem.

Daily Do

When someone you know tells you good news about herself, make an effort to "pump up" her feeling of accomplishment even further with your own genuine compliment.



Today's Focus

Labeling

Imagine if you threw a rock at your friend and it hit her in the face, permanently scarring her for life. How would you feel? How would you face the feeling of guilt that you caused something so horrible to happen to her?

Unfortunately, we do this more often than we could ever imagine, only not with rocks...

“Hey! You’re such a...”

When we label a person, even jokingly, that label scars her. It digs deep into that person, grinding down her self-image and changing the way that she thinks about herself. If we do this in public, we cause even more damage, ingraining that painful image deeper within the heart of the victim, as well as the hearts of all those listening.

Labeling is a dangerous weapon. When you “shoot” a label at someone, you damage the positive outlook with which that person views herself, and replace it with a negative one.

Often, people feel the urge to call a person a name, telling her that she is lazy, clumsy, or scatterbrained. They may have good intentions—they want to show that person that there is something wrong with her and get her to fix her problems. But calling names can never change that person for the better. If we really care about her and want her to become better, we should point out her strengths—not her weaknesses, and build up—not tear down—her self esteem. This will give her the ability and confidence to overcome her faults, which in turn will help her change her life for the positive.



Story

Label for Life

My name is Ruthie, and I’m in the fifth grade. Believe me, it’s not easy for me to write my story, but I’m doing it so that hopefully someone can learn from what happened to me and it can save them. I think my story is, unfortunately, a very common one. You’ll see what you think when you read it all the way through.

I’m a pretty average kid. I get seventies and eighties on tests, and I have a lot of friends. I like to play Machanayim, but let’s just say that I’m not the world’s greatest player. I’ve been known to drop the ball here and there. Maybe it has something to do with me being a little clumsy.

**That was when
my sister’s voice
cut through me
like a knife.**

For example, at home, my mother doesn’t like when I drink from a glass, because I’ve broken quite a few. Things slip out of my hands sometimes. It happens to everyone, now and then, right? What’s the big deal? At least I have a lot of other good qualities that make up for a little clumsiness here and there. Or so I thought.

Until “The Incident.”

It was a warm Sunday afternoon. I had a group of my friends over, studying for a Navi test, and we were all sitting on the patio, schmoozing and munching on snacks. My older sister, Avigayil, was sitting nearby watching us “younger kiddies” with a bored ex-

pression on her face.

"Pass the juice, please," I asked Chaviva. She passed me the glass pitcher. And...whoops! Before I even knew what had happened, the pitcher fell from my hands and hit the floor. Crash! Splash! There was apple juice and broken glass everywhere! I felt bad. I mean, I thought I had my hands tightly on the handle. How did it just slip out like that? My face turned a little red, and I got up to get some towels to clean the mess. That was when my sister's voice cut through me like a knife.

"You know something, Ruthie?" she yelled. "You're a real klutz!"

I was stunned. I remember standing there, with one foot in the air, about to take a step forward, but feeling as if I was frozen. It was one thing to be "a little clumsy sometimes." It was another thing to be labeled a "klutz," especially in front of my friends. Sure enough, I heard Chaviva and Racheli burst into peals of laughter. I'm sure they didn't realize how bad it made me feel, but it sliced right through my heart. I stumbled into the house, ran up to my room,

and cried and cried. It's hard to explain why it hurt so much. I think it's because of the way she said it. Like, "From now on, you are a klutz. That is you." It felt like I was now carrying an enormous burden that I would never be able to pull off of my shoulders.

Sure enough, that's exactly what it was. From Chaviva and Racheli, my new label traveled on to the rest of the class. My old label, "Ruthie the Nice, Regular Kid" was gone. Instead, I was "Ruthie the Klutz."

"Don't pass the ball to Ruthie!" my classmates would shout. "She's a klutz!"

"Be careful with that vase," my sister would warn. "You know you're clumsy."

I don't know if it's my imagination, but I really feel that since that incident, I've started being even clumsier than I ever used to be. Maybe Avigayil's right. Maybe I really am a klutz. Or, maybe all that name-calling did something to my brain and my hands. I know for sure that it did something terrible to my heart.

Say it Right!



Q:

Do you think that the older sister's comment helped or hurt the girl who didn't clean up?

Let's Recap

Labeling a person with a derogatory name, damages the way she feels about herself. Like a rock, a name that is thrown at another person can wound her, often leaving a scar that lasts for life.

Daily Do

If you feel the urge to call someone by a negative label today, remember how damaging it is, and control yourself.