

ממשלי הלשון

MOSHLEI
HALOSHON

 Mastering Sensitive Speech



A CURRICULUM ON HILCHOS ONA'AS DEVORIM



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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!" Chaim called across the classroom to no one in particular. "Take a look at this!"

Within moments, he was surrounded by a crowd of curious boys and the exclamations began.

"Wow!"

"Who did that?"

"Are you kidding?"

"Ari," Chaim told his onlookers, winking confidentially. "He's a genius."

"...No one even seemed to notice I existed." Ari swiped at his eyes quickly.

"Aw, c'mon," Ari protested, trying to cover up the paper. "It's nothing."

"You call this *nothing*?!" Chaim laughed, gesturing to the boys surrounding Ari's desk. "You think this is nothing?"

"It's fantastic!" Bentzion said genuinely, if a bit surprised. Ari usually spent his recesses alone, reading in the lunchroom. It's not like Ari was unlikeable; it's just that he made no effort to socialize.

"You have to see what else he can draw," Chaim persisted. "Ari, show them that portrait of Reb Moshe."

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

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

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

Ari Shechter had suddenly become part of the class. And Chaim Abrams, whose heart had broken at the sight of his previously lonely classmate, grinned with satisfaction.

* * *

"I'm overwhelmed," said the boy at the podium, adjusting his glasses nervously and holding the large

Talmid Hametzuyan award with trembling fingers. "I... never believed I would be standing here today. Seven years ago, back in fifth grade, I was going through a difficult situation at home. I retreated into myself and, of course, my classmates naturally withdrew from me. No one even seemed to notice I existed." Ari swiped at his 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 one individual, Chaim Abrams. With a few kind, well-intentioned words, he 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

אִי־הוּ מְכַבֵּד הַמְכַבֵּד אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת (אבות:ד:א)

Who is honored? He who honors others.

Story

Kickback

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

That's exactly how I feel, he thought to himself 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 always have to pick on me because of it?

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

Library and chose to sit in his room and mope.

"Avner! Elisha's asking for you!"

Elisha looked at Avner with shocked eyes. He quickly turned away and ran downstairs.

Avner groaned. Elisha was his nephew, just one year younger. He often came over in the afternoons and he always wanted to play with his favorite uncle, Avner.

"Hi," Avner said grumpily, as Elisha came up the steps.

"Wanna see what I got for my birthday present?" Elisha asked eagerly. "It's a space shuttle that you can build into tons of amazing vehicles. Come—I'll let you build the one they show on the

box!"

Avner usually prided himself on being a good friend to Elisha, but today, his bad mood took over and before he could stop himself, the words were out of his mouth.

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

Elisha looked at Avner with shocked eyes. He quickly turned away and ran downstairs. Avner was left alone and was surprised to find a strange new feeling inside himself. A feeling of power.

Ha! Did you see Elisha's face? He 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. Avner determinedly put the image of Elisha's crushed face out of his mind. *Serves him right*, he told himself. *He's such a baby.*

The next day, after being rejected again by his classmates playing basketball because "You're a shrimp," Avner wandered over to a group of younger kids and took a deep breath.

"Having fun?" he sneered. "Look at how Ephraim over there can't even catch a ball!"

Ephraim turned red. The other boys laughed. Avner felt that new feeling again.

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

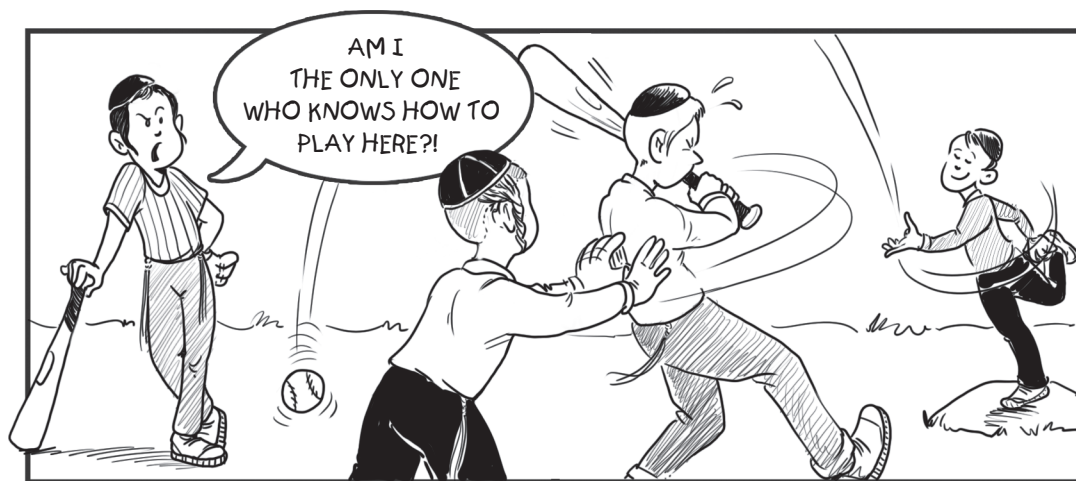
It was only a matter of a few weeks before Avner had become a first-class bully. Kids had started to avoid him; his nephews didn't come around to the house any more. His rebbeim were becoming worried, and his parents noticed that something was very wrong.

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

He was definitely unprepared for Shimmy's response. Instead of turning red, Shimmy stepped closer to Avner and looked him in the eye. "Avner," he said, "do you need to make other people feel bad in order to feel good about yourself? That's really sad."

And Avner had nothing to say.

Say it Right!



Q:

If this boy is unhappy with how his teammates are playing, would there be a better way for him to get his 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 building the largest building-block skyscraper around. Children come from far and wide to see your accomplishment. The Dover Emes Newspaper even runs a picture of it in their weekend edition! Then, one day, a jealous boy in your class walks over to your building and gives it a little tip with his finger.*

CRRRAShhhh_hhh^hh_hhh^hhhh!

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 his drive to succeed. This can make him 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 Moish?" Donny asked no one in particular, pushing excitedly through the chattering recess crowd in search of his best friend. "Whew, there you are," he said, grabbing Moish by the shoulder. "I've got to talk to you!"

"What's up?" Moish 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!" Donny pulled Moish 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!" Moish's eyes widened. "They're notorious for being so hard to get into. They took you?"

Donny nodded joyously.

"That's amazing!" Moish gave him a high-five. "They only choose the best, you know. One of my brothers applied one year, and even though he's a tremendous masmid, and everyone loves him, and even with tons of great references, he didn't get accepted. Wow! I'm so happy for you!"

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

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

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

"What's so exciting?" a voice asked lazily. Moish and Donny whirled around. There stood Shlomo, a sardonic smile on his face.

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

He nonchalantly walked away, before he could see Donny's face fall from the incredible heights of excitement to the bleak depths of disappointment.

Say it Right!



Q:

What was wrong with the boy telling the other boy 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 himself, make an effort to "pump up" his 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 him in the face, permanently scarring him for life. How would you feel? How would you face the feeling of guilt that you caused something so horrible to happen to him?

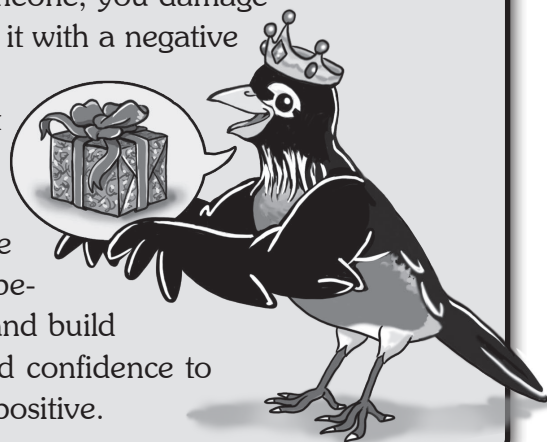
Unfortunately, we do this more often than we could ever imagine, only not with rocks...

"Hey! You're such a..."

When we label a person, even jokingly, that label scars him. It digs deep into that person, grinding down his self-image and changing the way that he thinks about himself. 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 himself, and replace it with a negative one.

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



Story

Label for Life

My name is Binyamin, 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 sports, but let's just say that I'm not the world's greatest athlete. I've been known to drop the ball here and there, or to miss a good kick. Maybe it has something to do with me being a little clumsy. For exam-

ple, 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. My friends Avichai and Yoni were visiting me. We were all sitting outside on the patio, talking and noshing. My older brother Shimshon was sitting nearby, watching us with a bored expression on his face.

"Pass the juice, please," I asked Avichai. He passed me the

**That was when
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a knife.**

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 brother's voice cut through me like a knife.

"You know something, Binyamin?" he 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 Yoni and Avichai 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 he 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 how it was. "Can you please take this vase to the table," my sister would ask. I would hesitate, thinking, "I'll probably drop it; after all, I'm a klutz."

"The shul committee is looking for some volunteers to go around to homes in the neighborhood selling flower bouquets for Shavuot. Would you like to help out?" my mother once asked me. The offer was tempting. I knew I had a way of speaking that was both friendly and business-like—perfect for a salesperson. It would be a fun *mitzvah*! But...what if I dropped the flower bouquets? I do tend to be clumsy... How embarrassing that would be...

"Uh, I don't think I'm right for the job, Ma. Maybe Shimshon is interested."

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 Shimshon'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 brother's comment helped or hurt the boy who didn't clean up?

Let's Recap

Labeling a person with a derogatory name, damages the way he feels about himself. Like a rock, a name that is thrown at another person can wound him, 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.