

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Are we using our power of speech to improve ourselves or harm ourselves?

What are words for – Are we using our power of speech to improve ourselves or to harm ourselves?

In the essay I wrote on eat drink and be merry, it became clear that there are natural limits on these activities, because in excess they become unhealthy. Using that as an analogy, I began to think about speech. Our tongues never get tired – we can talk and talk with no muscle soreness or exhaustion, aside from needing to take a drink here and there. Yet what we say is the subject of many halachos of speech. We are instructed to guard our tongue. In fact, [Rabbi Kessin](#) in his Tisha B'Av [drasha](#) several years ago explained in great detail exactly what happens in the spiritual realms to us when we speak, listen to or become the object of derogatory remarks. It is so destructive.

Rabbi Rietti explains in his CD series on [Jewish Meditation](#) that Gd created the world with words. Words are the building blocks of everything. We have the power of speech. Whenever we say anything, WE are building, either something positive or something destructive. The sound we make when we say our words may dissipate, but the spiritual reality of what we constructed remains and will greet us after 120 years, either as a benefit or as a sin. And, Rabbi Rietti says that the spiritual force we create is what leads us in the path we wish to go as well.

How are we to use this power of speech? Combined with our judgments, we are truly tested at our free will point most of the day. The gift of gab. What are we saying? Aren't we projecting our worst fears onto others most of the day? Who are we speaking about to whom? Are we not always just looking in a mirror? What are we creating? With whom are we bonding when we analyze each other's faults? Is it a constructive bond to speak the way we do or are we undermining our well-being? What selfish need do we not want to admit that we are satiating? What path are we embarking upon?

And if we stop speaking about others, what will we find to stimulate us, to involve ourselves in that will engage the same faculties of mind and soul, bring us close to each other, and give us satisfaction?

When we learn the laws of lashon hara and understand how dangerous is our unbridled talk, how dangerous and destructive it is for ourselves and others, we understand intellectually that saying negative things about each other cannot be anyone's mission, if we desire eternity. But it feels so good! And it seems so personal and bonding! And it can be SO effective (lowering others)! How can something so natural that feels so good and is so satisfying to our emotions really be prohibited? We search for loopholes. There are not any. Instead, we must look at these facts with a more creative eye - how do we engage the parts of us that feel so satisfied and channel our energy to bond in a way that uses speech for good?

I believe Rabbi Rietti's CDs on [Jewish Meditation](#), which explain the practice of spontaneous conversation with Gd in isolation – called hisbodidus- holds the answers. When we use our emotions and our words and our judgments to see ourselves in Gd's presence for the purpose of spiritual growth, we acquire a means toward holiness because we develop a very close relationship with Gd that helps us at our free will point to resist our imperfections from getting the better of us. Our feelings and emotions and situations upon which we might project inappropriately with people can be spoken out and aired openly before none other than our loving Father, our Creator. When we are alone and we know that Gd already knows our faults and we admit our imperfections, and we ask for help, we see that we are more than our imperfections and gain a real choice - because Gd loves us, we are safe to expose what He knows about us, to see ourselves in His presence and the best part is, we can begin to see our faults as only PART of ourselves, not as our whole self. We can grow spiritually when at our free will point by using words to passionately cling to what we know is good and right in Gd's eyes. And by saying these words, we have the ability to develop choice and rise above our nature, uprooting unhappiness and frustrations from our souls by acquiring perspective, choice, and loving support from Gd.. In so doing, we engage our very being in stimulating investigation and

mystery into our own inadequacies and by channeling our speech upward we take the passion we might otherwise spew negatively on another person and re-channel it to be used for our own eternal benefit, all the while building the most pleasurable relationship a person can experience, a relationship with Gd. And how much does Gd love it when we have a close personal relationship with Him? In Parshas Chaya Sarah 24: 42, referring to when Eliezer spoke out to Gd saying "Hashem Gd of my master Abraham, if You would please make successful my way on which I go. Behold I am standing by the spring of water; let it be that the young woman who comes out to draw and to whom I shall say, 'Please give me a little water to drink from your jug, and who will answer, 'You may also drink and I will draw water for your camels too'', she shall be the woman whom Hashem has designated for my master's son. Rashi writes that the Amora R'Acha said "The conversation of the slave of the Patriarchs is more pleasing before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their descendants, for the episode of Eliezer's quest for a wife for Isaac is doubled in the Torah (the story is told as it happens and then repeated when Eliezer relates it to Rivka's family) while many essential elements of the Torah were given only by allusion.

Let's trade in "Why can't you be more like me?!" complaints to "Why can't I be more like Your 13 Attributes of Mercy, GD?" and let's trade in "Why can't you just give in and do it my way" for "Dear Gd help me accept Your Will, to see this as good for my ultimate growth and development, and to do Your Will with love and passion". Let's trade in "What is the matter with her - she is so..." and take that same analytical ability and say, "What is keeping me from emulating your attributes of mercy - my lower self is so.....why did you create me like this and please with my free will I beseech you to lead me out of this tendency, to rise above my nature, and to use the energy that is wrapped up in this tendency to do what is good and right in Your eyes with devotion, love and loyalty."

May we find contentment in utilizing our power of speech and our need for stimulation to help us grow spiritually in hisbodidus and may the result of building our relationship with Gd in the process give us the ability to speak to our family members, friends, and all other people with words of kindness and prayer that are pleasing to Hashem.

The ideas in this essay developed from Rabbi Rietti's CD series on Jewish Meditation reinforced by seeing the same ideas in the sefer "To Heal the Soul" The Spiritual Journal of a Chasidic Rebbe - Kalonymus Kalman Shapira - translated and edited by Yehoshua Starrett. Below are some excerpts from that sefer:

From page 23 The Need for Stimulation

"The human soul relishes sensation, not only if it is a pleasant feeling but for the very experience of stimulation. Sooner sadness or some deep pain rather than the boredom of non-stimulation. People will watch distressing scenes and listen to heartrending stories just to get stimulation. Such is human nature and a need of the soul, just like all its other needs and natures. So he who is clever will fulfill this need with passionate prayer and Torah learning. But the soul whose divine service is without emotion will have to find its stimulation elsewhere. It will either be driven to cheap, even forbidden sensation or will become emotionally ill from lack of stimulation."

From page 29 The Dynamics of Passionate Emotions

"When a person has not prepared himself for the spiritual afterlife, when he departs he will be exposed to the naked experience of a wasted life. These are called the "naked souls" who, spiritually homeless, must enter the spiritual netherworlds. But even in this life, when a person sins and channels his passions in the wrong direction, parts of his soul already enter into the spiritual netherworlds. And even if he doesn't sin, just does not channel his passions into spiritual service, with no outlet of holiness in which to go, his passions will pass toward the netherworlds. These parts of the soul, his potential passion for Gd, are transformed into baser passions. The greater the soul, the greater the danger if he does not channel his passions Gdward. His greater soul with its greater passions remains naked, and his passions will go somewhere else. So as sitting back from refraining from sin is tantamount to doing a mitzvah, sitting back and not serving Gd with passion is sometimes tantamount to a transgression."

From page 37 Personal rules for Spiritual Growth I

"...the spiritual seeker who channels his efforts to his inner world will inevitably be faced with difficulty and distraction - not only external ones like supporting his family but also in his inner world such as indolence, negative tendencies, destructive character traits, and so forth - and because the spiritual seeker is constantly involved in this inner battle, sometimes winning and sometimes losing, he will inevitably come to conclusions: which strategies work for him and which ones bring out his weakness. ..."

From page 39 Loathing your negative nature I

"You cannot ward off your negative drives unless you also hate them. An intent to just not welcome them is not enough – you must actively despise them. They can destroy your life, both spiritual and physical. So train yourself to become enraged when negative drives cloud your mind or emotions. Only then will you be able to control them. When our sages said, 'Develop a wrath toward your baser nature' they meant it literally – wrath and vexation."

From page 43 A Journey into Creation

"...Let go of this world for an hour or two – its hustle and bustle, its cunning deceptions, and all your earthly aspirations. Seclude yourself in privacy – go out into a forest if possible. Let yourself become a simple creature in Gd's world. With the sun the moon the birds and the trees, sing songs of praise to Him. Reveal the greatness of Gd to the world and fill it with a sense of that greatness. "

From page 13 Cathartic Prayer

"Relax, then envision yourself standing before Gd: there you are, mortal creature, beseeching the Infinite One. Pour out your heart, speak out your soul, tell Him what's on your mind. Without inhibitions, in whatever language, say whatever comes to your mind....for example, 'Gd! From the depths of my soul I call out to You, Creator of my very existence. My body, my spirits, and my soul, they are Yours – I have no intrinsic existence. My yearning is great, can't You see, to be pure of spirit and heart...when I clean out myself so that my soul shines before You I just place my waste out of my sight – deep inside my soul where my conscious mind cannot see it...I feel so filthy because of this sewage that putrefies in the depths of my soul. My soul bursts at the seams because of this load that floods forth at most inopportune times....It is only with Your help that I can restrain the urge to act out these inner voices. But how bitter I feel that my soul is so soiled by those drives that express themselves in various ways in my life. Please Gd have mercy and purify my soul; root out those weeds from my soul. Remove all these urges that make me stray from You so that they do not come to haunt me in old age....Let my soul soar fueled by my yearning to surrender completely to You..."