

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

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פרשת תזריע

Volume 6 Issue # 26

לעילוי נשמת
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פרשת תזריע

וְהוּבָא אֶל אֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים (ויקרא י"ג ב')

מחשבה and דיבור

In this weeks' Parsha, we find that the words of the Kohen carry tremendous weight. The *pasuk* clearly states that until the Kohen pronounces a *nega tzara'as* impure, then the person is completely pure; he only becomes an official *metzora* after the Kohen proclaims that he is *tamei*. The same goes for the purification process: the *metzora* is not considered *tahor* until the Kohen says so.

In order to understand the importance of the Kohen's words, let us take a moment to delve into the broader topic of דיבור - speech, and מחשבה - thought. Here is the general question we will be addressing: does the מחשבה get influenced by the דיבור, or is the דיבור another level of מחשבה? In other words - which of these two is the cause, and which is the effect?

Let's give some examples to illustrate this question. The Gemara in Pesachim discusses the *mitzvah* we will all be doing in two weeks, *bez"h: Biur Chametz*. The Gemara teaches that one must nullify all of his *chametz* in his heart, which is called *bittul belaiiv*; but then, he must also say the words of "כל המירא". The question is, why does he have to also say the words - does the nullification in his heart not suffice to accomplish the *bittul*?

Here's another example. The Gemara discusses the case of "החושב לשלוה יד בפיקדון" - one who intends to steal or use an item that was deposited in his domain for safekeeping or as collateral. The words seem to imply that he just *thought* of committing this crime, but Tosafos reveals that the Gemara is actually referring to someone who *voices* these intentions. The Ba'alei HaTosafos draw a comparison to the prohibition of "פיגול" - a Kohen who intends to consume or be *makriv* a *korban* outside of the designated time or place. Tosafos says that פיגול is only when the Kohen actually verbalizes this intention, even though the texts seem to imply that the transgression is committed merely through thought.

We also find this idea in מציאות פרק אלו מציאות. The Gemara says that when a person is מייאש over his misplaced item - meaning, he loses hope in ever retrieving it - then there is no longer an obligation to return it. However, the Gemara clearly states that the original owner must verbalize this loss of hope: he must say, "ווי לחסרון כיס" - "what a shame that I sustained this loss".

Words Make Thoughts Tangible

Why is it that these cases require actual speech? Aren't the person's feelings and thoughts - מחשבה - the main point in all of these scenarios? Let's give a *mashal* to explain this:

A Yid walks into a Judaica store. He spots the table in the front of the store displaying all of the seforim and books that are on sale. After looking through a few of them, he starts thinking to himself, "Wow, I can really use this sefer... Ooh, I always wanted this book, and it's on sale for just ten dollars! And I should really get this sefer as well, they sell out very quickly..."

In his mind, he already decided to purchase the entire stand. He's ready to just put some wheels under the table and roll the whole thing home. But when he starts adding up the math, it's obvious that he can't get them all; the total would be far too costly! So, yes, he does have the wonderful intention to fill his house with numerous new seforim - but what he actually buys at the register will be a much shorter list.

Let's say a woman walks into a shoe store. She finds at least ten pairs that work perfectly for her - in her mind, she's ready to take them all home! But if she would have to pay for her thoughts, she'd go broke pretty quickly.

There's a big difference between what we think and what we actually do. True, the thought is generally responsible for the final action, but if the thought were just to remain what it was - an abstract, intangible notion - then it wouldn't be worth much. When we actually voice our thoughts, then we solidify them; we make them into something substantial and concrete. So according to this, the דיבור and the מחשבה are really one and the same; the מחשבה would be pointless unless it was solidified through דיבור. In other words: when a thought process is verbalized, then it actually becomes a concrete thought or intention. Until the point that it receives the דיבור form, it is not yet a complete מחשבה; rather, it is a mere impulse.

The Importance of מחשבה

However, we find in a number of places that the opposite is also true. The Sefer HaChinuch writes regarding the *mitzvah* of מצרים יציאת סיפור that the utterances of the mouth are intended to awaken the heart. In other words, by just contemplating the miracles of Yetzias Mitzrayim, you are really accomplishing the mitzvah; the goal of the night is to remember the outpouring of love that Hashem displayed for his people during that time. But it's difficult to reach the level of complete focus that is necessary for truly reliving our forefathers' experiences in Egypt. Therefore, we are commanded to actually verbalize the words of the *Haggadah*; this way, our words will awaken our feelings, and will hopefully transport us to that period in time. So, from the explanation of the Sefer HaChinuch, it would appear that the words are actually the catalysts that bring about the proper מחשבה, unlike the examples we have offered previously.

Now that we have proven that there are sources for both explanations for the relationship between דיבור and מחשבה, we can address our original question: which *p'shat* do we *pasken* like? There can be a tremendous *nafka minah* in many instances in Halacha. For example: the Halacha dictates that one must vocalize the words of *Krias Shema*, rather than just contemplating them. Well, what happens if there's a whole row of ear-shattering hand dryers blasting away right behind the Bais Medrash, and you can't actually hear the words you are saying as you recite *Krias Shema*? If the words are just a finalization and completion of the thoughts, then you were *yotzei* the *mitzvah*. But if the purpose of the words is to awaken your mind to their meaning—then perhaps you accomplished nothing by vocalizing them, because the words were inaudible to your ears?

I believe the answer is that both are true. Words are indeed an outgrowth of a completed thought process, but they also succeed in awakening the heart. The two feed off of each other. So too, by *Krias Shema*, both components are necessary, but ultimately one can be *yotzei* without accomplishing both of them.

Noticing Our Own Flaws Can Be a Challenge

Now let's return to the *Kohen* in Parshas Tazria. Why does the pasuk say וטימא אותו, that the *Kohen* must pronounce him impure?

Says Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, there is a flaw that most human beings live with: they have a hard time recognizing their iniquities. The Gemara in Shavuos (4a) discusses the rules of a *shogeg* bringing a *korban chatas*. It says that if a person was totally oblivious of the fact that his actions were prohibited, then he is not considered a *shogeg*. He only brings a *korban chatas* if he forgot that the action was *assur*, or if he forgot that he was in a time frame that would render it *assur*. Now, what happens if he knew that the *issur* existed, but he failed to focus on that thought, and unwittingly committed the transgression? For example: he was well aware of the fact that touching a *sheretz* would render him impure, and he was also aware of the fact that he actually touched a *sheretz*. However, he failed to conclude in his mind that he was now impure—and he strolled right into the Bais Hamikdash. Regarding this case, there is a dispute between Abaye and Rava as to whether or not he must bring a *korban*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks on this—what does that mean, 'he didn't conclude in his mind that he was impure'? He knew the Halacha that a *sheretz* is מטמא; he should have an immediate recognition of the fact that he is now impure? The answer is: people tend to not focus on their shortcomings. They subconsciously assume that they're 'alright', that they are doing okay with their *Avodas Hashem*, and that they don't require much self-perfection.

Shortly after World War II, there was a public event in Germany where they were discussing new findings in the world of medicine. Rav Yankel Galinsky zt"l was in a DP camp at the time, so he decided to go hear what these medical professionals had to say.

At the event, one professor got up and gave a long speech about the dangers of smoking. He listed the numerous findings that proved that smoking could have a ruinous effect on one's health. (This was in the 1940s; today they have far more findings that prove this point.) When the professor returned to his seat after his lengthy speech, he promptly whipped out a cigarette and began to smoke.

Rav Yankel couldn't help himself. He approached the professor and asked incredulously, "How could you smoke after everything you just said? I mean, you are the one who has seen the dangers of smoking firsthand! Surely a man like yourself can't smoke!"

The professor looked at him and answered wryly, "Does a mathematician look like a triangle?"

This is the point Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was teaching us. A person could know in his mind that certain things are impure, but he doesn't allow that knowledge to affect him so easily. He can have all the proofs, all the studies, or all the *halachos* lined up clearly in his mind; but when it comes to his own faults, he just doesn't see it the same way. Sometimes, it isn't clear to him that he is doing something wrong until he is told so straight in the face, with a loud and clear דיבור. So too, the *metzora* may know the *halachos*; he may be capable of declaring his own *nega* impure without the help of the *Kohen*, but this wouldn't suffice, because people tend to struggle with the concept of declaring themselves impure. In these instances, the only way forward is for the *Kohen* to inform him, point-blank, that he is *tamei*, and it is time to embark on the journey towards purity.

Remembering that Our Leaders Are There to Help Us Grow

If this is all true, then why does the *Kohen* have to declare him *tahor* as well? Surely he has no subconscious temptation to remain impure and banished from the camp for longer than necessary!

The Ohr Hachaim answers this question in a different manner. Chazal tell us that when a Jewish family gathers around the Shabbos table on Friday night, two Malachim are present, judging the scene they are witnessing. If they observe a serene, warm atmosphere, where the table is set, the husband and wife are unified, the children are gathered around the table with joy in their eyes, and the entire family is ready to welcome the holy Shabbos into their home - then the good Malach says, "May it be this way next week as well." And the bad Malach has no choice but to answer, "Amen." However, if they witness the opposite scene - the husband and wife are bickering, the children are being disrespectful, the table is unprepared - then the bad Malach says, "May it be this way next week as well," and this time, the good Malach has no choice but to respond "Amen."

Says the Ohr Hachaim, the *Kohen* plays a similar role to these Malachim when it comes to a *metzora*; he is there to guide the person along his path, both when he is doing well and when he is failing. It is his obligation to inform him the bad news that he is impure - and it is also his job to let him know that he has succeeded in becoming pure once again.

It is important for us to remember that our Rabbonim and Rebbeim are there for us to help us grow. Oftentimes, we only recognize them when we think they made a mistake or they did something wrong, but we forget how much they aid us in our spiritual growth.

Some people blame everything on the Rav, including the taste of their cholent. If they come home from shul and the cholent is burnt - they say, "Oy, the Rav... He gives such long speeches - and his jokes aren't even funny! Couldn't he just speak a few minutes less today so I can get home before the cholent burns to a crisp?" But if the cholent is good, they'll say, "Why did the Rav have to speak for a half an hour today? I could have enjoyed this delicious cholent so much sooner!" And if the cholent is undercooked, they'll say, "The Rav always schlepps with his drasha forever. Couldn't he have schlepped just a few more minutes this week, so that the cholent would be a little more well done? Davka this week he had to finish five minutes earlier?"

We have to remember that our leaders are actually a source of light for us. They sometimes have to call us out on our mistakes - but ultimately, it's all for our benefit. We have to stop only noticing the proclamations of "*tamei*" and begin paying attention to the "*tahor*" as well.

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