

# Journey To Better Speech

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Journey To Better Speech is a website set up as part of an ongoing project by a group of people who are working on improving the way they speak in every element of their lives. If you feel this is important please come and join us to like us on facebook

## Reunification

Growing up entrenched in western society you couldn't miss the fact that there are some people who are terrified of the number 13. And when the 13th of the month lands on a Friday, oy vay, that is a really dangerous day! It is such an integral part of the culture that Friday 13th has been the title of a series of horror movies and a couple of heavy metal albums. For many years, football (soccer) clubs in England refused to give the number 13 in the squad to anyone and, according to John Roach, who wrote a book on the subject, it has been estimated that between \$800 and \$900 million is lost in business on Friday 13th as people are too scared to follow their normal business routines! The fear of the number 13 even has its own name - triskaidekaphobia, while the fear of Friday 13th is called paraskevidekatriaphobia (if you can't say it in one breath something really bad may happen to you!) The source for this highly illogical superstition is unclear however it may have something to do with the number of people allegedly present for a last supper before a certain person was killed the next day - which may have been a Friday.

And yet, in Judaism, the number 13 has positive connotations. A boy becomes Bar Mitzva, becomes a fully fledged member of the adult community, with all its ramifications, at the age of 13. There are 13 Principles of Faith and 13 Attributes of Hashem's Mercy. It is also, as the Midrash points out, the number of different types of gifts listed in this week's Parsha that the Jewish people donated to the Mishkan. (There are actually 15 listed but, as Chizkuni explains, two of them, the precious stones for two of the High Priest's clothes, were donated by the Nesi'im, the leaders of the Tribes, and not by the people as a whole). So what is so special about the number 13?

The most integral part of Jewish philosophy is that Hashem is One. We say it twice daily in the first verse of Shema and belief in His Oneness is one of the 6 Constant Mitzvot that should be directing our lives. There is nothing else in reality apart from Him (everything that we experience is only a manifestation of His will), no other power, no other source. Even the Yetzer Hara, the inclination to do wrong, is created by Hashem to give us free choice. For those of us who have been influenced by other cultures we may imagine Satan as being a red devil with horns and a pointy tail. But in reality Satan is a white Malach (angel) who constantly carries out the will of his Creator, which

## Parshat Teruma

13

## Prayer Insights

Many of us have been praying since we were young. We know the words by heart and often rush through them by rote, without thinking. In fact there are many words that we say on a daily basis that, if asked, we would not be able to tell you the translation or what they mean! The Talmud quotes a verse in Psalms that can be expounded to describe this phenomenon. 'כִּרְאוֹת וְלֹא יָדַם' is traditionally translated as 'when vileness is exalted among people'. However another way of reading it could be 'Things that should have an exalted position are treated with disregard by people'. Prayer is an amazing opportunity to connect and communicate with the One who created us. To acknowledge all that He continues to do for us, to express our needs, to share our struggles. There cannot be many other things more exalted than connecting with our Father, our King, our Creator on a personal one-to-one basis?

If we had an opportunity to meet an official who could get our child into the right school, a judge who could get us off an unjust charge or an investor who may possibly invest a large sum in our start-up business we would surely prepare carefully everything we would say and make sure we understood every word. And when we would actually speak those words, we would take steps to guarantee that we were actually focussed on what we were saying, even though the official in question could not read our mind!

Of course, prayer is harder. It is every day, three times a day and we can't see Him. But what is at stake is so much more important! We can at least make a start at learning the meaning of the words we are saying and choosing at least one or two moments where we will have full intent.

**Prayer Insights** has been written as a zechut for a refuah sheleima for Elisha Ben Ayala, a young boy who is undergoing treatment for leukemia. Please take a moment to say some tehillim on his behalf

is to create a situation where we have an opportunity to choose wrong over right, thereby enabling us to receive a reward when we choose correctly (if we had no free choice, we could not receive a reward for choosing correctly as we only did so because we were pre-programmed to.) Every time we have a choice to do right or wrong we need to be aware that Satan's real wish is that we don't listen to him and instead fulfil the will of Hashem, which is ultimately his will too! The word **אחד**/Echad/One - in its essence, therefore, represents Hashem. The *Gematria* of the word Echad is 13 (Aleph = 1, Chet = 8, Dalet = 4) and so the number 13 actually represents One too! But it is much deeper than just a number game.

Hashem is One, and yet He has created a world of parts, of division, within which it is often difficult to find the ultimate Oneness. Our role in this world is to reveal the Oneness within the disparity. It is possible to suggest that the number 13 (in the same way that the separate letters of Alech, Chet and Dalet join together to make Echad) represents the concept of revealing Oneness from the apparent discordance. Therefore a Bar Mitzva boy takes on this role at the age of 13, there are 13 Principles of Faith which all add up to a Oneness that there is nothing apart from Him and 13 gifts are given by the Jewish people to build the Mishkan which will bring Hashem's Oneness into the world. The number 13 therefore signifies the Oneness that **we** reveal!

The Midrash also says that there are 13 objects that Hashem declared a personal affinity to and it brings verses where it uses the term **'ל** - Li, meaning 'for Me' or 'Mine'. Two examples appear in the beginning of this week's Parsha, 'Take for Me a Teruma, a donation' and 'Make for Me a Sanctuary'. Each one of the 13 in the list (if used correctly) is integral to revealing Hashem's Oneness in this world and therefore Hashem expresses a 'close connection' to them. However the Midrash ends by explaining that there is one thing that overrides everything else and that is 'Peace' as we see that a verse in Yeshaya uses the word **'ל** twice when referring to Shalom. The most devastating divergence is when 'brothers' fight with each other and therefore the ultimate way to affirm the Oneness of Hashem is by being at peace and at one with each other.

Chafetz Chaim explains that the vast majority of divisiveness is a result of not using our mouths correctly, most physical fights originate from verbal argument. But even more than that, when people see that you are careful with your mouth, you don't tell tales about them or pass on their secrets, they feel closer to you, love you and will not be jealous of you in any way. They will not speak badly about you and will be happy discussing their secrets with you. Therefore, if we can learn to compliment and not degrade, if we can learn to keep secrets to ourselves and not telltale, if we can control ourselves when we have a tremendous urge to say something derogatory and consider the wider repercussions, we can start a positive cycle of events that can slowly build and bring peace into the world.

לען מרים בילא בת אברהם דוד הלוי

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## Kosher Chatting

One of the biggest concerns people express when considering learning the Jewish laws of good and productive speech is - "but what will I speak about? I don't want to have to sit in stony silence all the time!" This really is a legitimate concern. But we need to understand that it is a concern born out of the culture that we live in. When a considerable percentage of what we read and see in the media is critical debate about other people, when a significant majority of the available entertainment is based around one person attacking and putting down others (especially in reality shows), is it surprising that this is what we spend our free time talking about? And therefore, is it surprising that we find ourselves bereft of 'kosher' topics when this is removed? Imagine bringing up a child and ensuring that the only words he heard were curse words. Now tell him to stop cursing! Even if he could, he would not have the vocabulary available to replace it! Although that is an extreme example, it highlights the situation that we find ourselves in.

And yet, it doesn't need to be that way. In a book about the Chafetz Chaim compiled by his son, he mentions that even though his father was particularly careful to never speak Lashon Hara he was still an extremely 'chatty' person. People would come to visit him and he comfortably talk to them for long periods about a variety of topics, none of them forbidden!

The story is told of a time when the Chafetz Chaim was sitting anonymously with some farmers and for hours they were talking about their business, the cost of buying and selling animals, different techniques for yielding a good crop. After some time, however, they were made aware who was sitting with them and they were mortified that they had been speaking such mundane matters in the presence of such a saintly individual. The Chafetz Chaim however reassured them and said that he'd greatly enjoyed the conversation for throughout the hours they'd been speaking they had not said a word of Lashon Hara!

If we are to be successful at not speaking Lashon Hara we need to have a suitable supply of topics for 'Kosher Chatting'! This can be about work, Torah, the wonders of creation and its Creator, it can be funny, positive stories about family and friends. But one thing is definite, if we don't build our 'kosher vocabulary', we will find ourselves dumb like the child who cannot curse anymore.