

The Weekly Farbrengens



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EDITOR - RABBI SHIMON HELLINGER

WIELDING WORDS (I)

WORKING WONDERS

Chazal say that even the bracha of an ordinary person should not be considered insignificant, for Dovid HaMelech and Daniel, no less, were benschd by ordinary people and the bracha bore fruit. When Dovid HaMelech bought the land for the Beis HaMikdosh from a goyishe farmer, the farmer benschd him that the plague inflicting the Yidden should stop, and his bracha was fulfilled. Similarly, Daniel was benschd by King Daryavesh (Darius) that HaShem should protect him from the lions in the den, and so it came to be.

(מגילה טו ע"א)

Chassidim of Reb Mendel Horodoker, among them the Alter Rebbe, once sat together and chazered the Torah that they had recently heard from their Rebbe. After reviewing it numerous times, they discussed related matters in kedusha, and one of them brought out some mashke.

A chossid present, who had been suffering from a sickness for which the doctors had not found a cure, wept and asked those present to bensch him with a refua shleima. Some of the others queried: "Do we have the power to give a bracha?!" Some even rebuked him for believing in simple chassidim like themselves, for brachos, they held, are only in the power of tzaddikim. Without relenting, the chossid continued to plead from the depths of his heart. Thinking there was nothing they could do, his friends began singing niggunim, in the hope that this would calm him.

"Shal" the Alter Rebbe called out. The niggunim stopped abruptly, and the chossid too fell silent. "My brothers and friends, have you forgotten the message that came down from Shamayim to the Chevraya Kaddisha? (That is, the Holy Brotherhood, as the talmidim of the Maggid were known.) That which a farbrengen can accomplish, even Malach Michael cannot accomplish."

The Alter Rebbe explained that when HaShem sees Yidden benschng each other lovingly, He fulfills their requests immediately. The chassidim were aroused, and with brotherly love they benschd their fellow chossid with a refua shleima.

(אב"ק מהור"י צ"ח ג' ע"ת"ב)

In Lieple there lived a well-to-do chossid of the Tzemach Tzedek, who would learn Chassidus in depth, daven at great length and would be among the first attendees at all chassidische farbrengens. At one point, however, he

reconsidered the hours he spent at farbrengens. "They don't allow me to learn Chassidus in depth," he mused to himself. He decided to continue contributing towards the expenses of the farbrengens, but rather than attend, to stay home and learn Chassidus.

As time passed, one misfortune after another befell him. His business declined, his shalom bayis was disturbed, and members of his family fell ill with various illnesses. He realized that these were not mere coincidences, and went to seek the counsel of the Tzemach Tzedek. Pouring out his troubled heart to the Rebbe, he wondered why he was encountering so much hardship. "Tell me about your daily conduct," the Rebbe said.

The chossid described his everyday routine, mentioning also his decision to forgo the farbrengens in order to use the time more efficiently for learning.

"That is the reason for all your difficulties," said the Rebbe. "Participating in a chassidische farbrengen is very beneficial. When chassidim gather together, say LeChayim, and wish one another Lechayim tovim uleshalom, they are in fact showering vital brachos upon each other. Lechayim, life, contains the bracha for physical health; tovim, goodness, implies wealth, and uleshalom, peace, indicates harmony in the home. By avoiding the farbrengen, you are forgoing these brachos."

(רשימות דברים ח"א ע' קל"ח, וע"ש להנוסח לחיים ולברכה)

The Torah forbids cursing another Yid. One reason is that speech has such a lofty source that it has the power to affect even outside occurrences. This power is heightened by the level of the person speaking.

(מועד קטן י"ז ע"א, ס' החינוך מצוה רלא, ראשית חכמה שעה"ק פ"ג)

Once, the amora Shmuel went to console his brother Pinchas who had lost a child. Seeing that his fingernails had grown long, Shmuel encouraged him to trim them. Pinchas responded, "If you would lose a family member, would you still belittle this act of mourning?"

Soon after, Shmuel lost a family member, and when Pinchas came to visit, Shmuel said with frustration, "Do you not realize the power of words?!"

(מועד קטן י"ז ע"א)

Yehuda, the son of Rabbi Chiya and son-in-law of Rabbi Yannai, would learn all week in yeshiva, returning home on Friday night. As he approached his home, a pillar of fire could be seen leading the way. One week he was so engrossed in his learning that he stayed longer than usual, so his father-in-law said in jest, "Who knows if he is still alive?"

His words had an effect and the son-in-law passed away.

(כתובות ט"ב ע"ב)

It is paskened in the Shulchan Aruch that one must be very careful with what he says. One should not jokingly comment about a living person, "If he would be alive, he surely would be here already," for this can ch"v harm that person.

(שו"ע אדה"ז הל' שמירת הגוף והנפש ס"ב)

R. Yehuda HaChossid writes: One should not say to someone behaving inappropriately, "You are acting like a galach," for this may cause this to actualize in this person or one of his descendants.

(ס' חסידים ס' תעט)

Even when reciting a possuk or mishna which includes a negative statement, one should change the wording so that it will not imply a curse.

Thus we learn that Rav Kahana sat before Rav Yehuda and repeated the words of the mishna, "May HaShem smite you." Rav Yehuda instructed him, "Say 'smite him' instead, and do not curse me."

(שבועות לו ע"א)

ומסיימים בטוב

CONSIDER

What is so powerful about a bracha: the words themselves or the good intentions behind them?

How can an unintended negative comment have such repercussions?

THE MISFORTUNE OF NEGATIVITY

Chazal say that "a covenant has been made with the lips" – the speech of a person has the power to make things happen. A person should not predict something bad, for then he is giving power to Satan.

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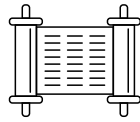


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TZEDAKA COMMITMENTS

I saw someone collecting tzedaka in shul and considered giving him, but he didn't come over to me. Must I make sure to go over and give him?

Verbal agreement to sell or gift something doesn't finalize the transaction without a kinyan (halachic acquisition), and without it, one may retract. Yet, Chazal disapprove of one who does so, and he is called "not acting in good faith," for it is proper to keep his word. Failure to honor a very large gift, however, is not considered a lack of faithfulness because the recipient did not count on it until actually receiving it.

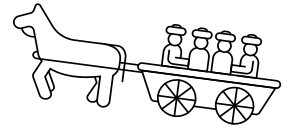
One who says he will donate money to tzedaka, or give a gift—even a large one—to a poor person, is obligated to fulfill his word, for this mitzva commitment has the status of a vow, unless he said "bli neder." Some poskim hold that he may give the sum to a different tzedaka cause, even if he specified a particular recipient, since his "vow" is for the mitzva and not for the person. Others argue, since it is also considered to have already been handed over to the original cause (amiraso l'gvoah k'mesiraso l'hedyot). In practice, one should follow the latter opinion.

Mental decisions to a fellow need not be upheld out of faithfulness. Nonetheless, a G-d fearing person should fulfill them, as the posuk says, "He speaks the truth in his heart." Thus, if one made up in his mind to sell something for a certain price or to do a favor for another, he should not change his mind. However, one's own non-mitzva needs, even if expressed verbally, need not be fulfilled.

Mental designation of an animal or money for a korban constitutes an obligation. Rishonim discuss whether the same applies to tzedaka and the consensus of the Rema and Alter Rebbe is to be stringent and fulfill a mental tzedaka decision. Poskim discuss whether the sum may be switched to a different cause, depending on whether mental commitments accomplish an actual transfer (amiraso l'gavoah). In practice, although halachically he may switch, a G-d fearing person should uphold his original commitment. However, if one planned to verbalize and only then finalize his commitment, he is not bound by his prior mental decision. Thus, if one received an aliyah, he may lower the sum he considered pledging before finalizing it when telling the gabei.

There is a discussion amongst contemporary poskim whether writing down a tzedaka commitment is compared to a verbal or a mental commitment. Yet, typing on a computer (e.g. filling out credit card details) surely does not have the halachic status of writing, and is considered a mental commitment. (If one has in mind that they are only committing if the credit card goes through, it is not binding at all.)

A mental commitment applies only if he decided to do so definitively and not just considered doing it. Therefore, in the case of the collector, it depends if he actually decided to give or only considered doing so.



REB BETZALEL AZARITZER

Reb Betzalel Azaritzer was a talmid of Reb Hillel Paritcher and was of those yungeleit who were guided in Chassidus by the Mittlerer Rebbe. He was of the great chassidim of the Tzemach Tzedek, and served as a Shadar for him. The Friediker Rebbe praised Reb Betzalel for his ability to learn from any person.

Reb Hillel Paritcher and Reb Betzalel were very close friends. They would visit one-another every week, alternating between Reb Hillel travelling to Reb Betzalel and vice versa. Once, Reb Betzalel was not well and did not visit Reb Hillel. Reb Hillel sensed there was something wrong and decided to travel to see Reb Betzalel. The travel fare was a hefty six ruble, and Reb Hillel's wife protested. "Why are you wasting six ruble for a wagon?!" she said, "This is anyways not your week to visit him! We will not have the money that we need for our needs!" Reb Hillel was insistent and went on his way.

This was Thursday. Reb Hillel traveled with a minyan of chassidim and when they arrived at the house, Reb Hillel saw that his intuition was justified; Reb Betzalel was seriously ill. The visitors spent Shabbos there, staying in one room, while Reb Betzalel lay in the adjacent room. At Seudah Shelishis, as was his custom, Reb Hillel said Chassidus three times, each prefaced by three niggunim. At that time, they heard that Reb Betzalel was nearing death. Reb Hillel went in to Reb Betzalel's room and said, "Tzalkeh! What's happening with you?" He placed the sefer Kesser Shem Tov on Reb Betzalel's heart and said, "Look at the oisyo of the Baal Shem Tov". With that, Reb Betzalel's neshama left his body.

Reb Betzalel used to say that he does not understand why people think it is hard to be a chossid. "The first thing is 'taporu da plachu' (lit. 'the ax on the wood') - which means action. Then one can become an oved Hashem through davening, learning, Torah and mitzvos."

A Moment with The Rebbe



PROVE THEM WRONG

The Rebbe's mandate for Chabad of Eretz Yisroel was "to remain above state politics," and during election times the Rebbe would send out a message that anash should vote for the "most chareidi party."

Reb Shmuel Elozor Halperin, a Chabad rov in Yerushalayim, related:

Dr. Yosef Burg, then the leader of the Mafdal religious-Zionist party,

once complained to the Rebbe that his chassidim were interpreting the directive to vote for Agudas Yisroel or Peilei Agudas Yisroel parties.

The Rebbe simply responded, "You have ample time until the elections to prove to them that your party fits the criteria best."

(Sefer Hatze'etzoim, page 382)

1. ראש שו"ע ר' ח'מ"ה הל' מכירה ומתנה ס"א-ב. ושם שג"מ במתנה גדולה צריך לומר כן בדת גמורה. וראה סמ"ע רמ"ג סק"ה. 2. שו"ע חו"מ סי' רמ"ט ס"א. מתנה לעני - שו"ע חו"מ סי' רמ"ג ס"ב (ראה הוספת רמ"א שם ונו"כ שם) ושו"ע הל' מכירה ס"ד. 3. ראה קצוה"ש חו"מ סי' ר"ב סק"ד שמביא מח' (וראה תוס' ערכי"ו ע"ב), ובשו"ת חת"י יו"ד סי' רל"ח מחמיר בזה בשם רוב הפוסקים, וי"א שכן משמעות שו"ע הל' מכירה ס"ד "אינו יכול לחזור בו מן הדין". 4. ראה ב"ב דף פ"ח ע"א. שו"ע ר' אור"ח סי' קנ"ו ס"ב. הל' מכירה ס"א. 5. חו"מ סי' ר"ב ס"ח ויור"ד סי' רנ"ח ס"ג (וראה רעק"א שבי"ד הלשון וכן עיקר אבל בחו"מ ויש להחמיר והסיבה שבדיני ממנות א"א להוציא ממון). שו"ע הל' מכירה ס"ד. 6. לקולא - מובא באחרונים בשם שו"ת בית יצחק ח"ב סי' פ"ב ושו"ת בית שלמה ח"ב סי' פ"ו - פ"ח. לחומרא - כך משמע בשו"ת משנה הלכות ח"ד סי' קל"ג. ההכרעה בפנים שמעתי מכמה דיינים. 7. ע"פ ש"ך יו"ד סי' רנ"ח סק"ה. 8. ערוה"ש יו"ד סי' רנ"ח סל"ט.