

# עֵפֶרֶת הַשָּׁבוּעַ

A Weekly Torah Publication from the Students of Mesivta Ateres Yaakov  
Ruth & Hyman Simon High School

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Candle Lighting:	7:55
First זמן קריאת שמע:	8:54
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## SPEAKING THE GOLDEN TOUCH *Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz, 11th Grade Rebbe*

BECAUSE OF THE SIN OF UNKEPT PROMISES  
CHILDREN PERISH [MASECHES SHABBOS 32.]

The Baal Haturim points out that the numerical equivalent of "nedarim" is 304. So too is the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for murder - "רוצח".

Children perishing as a result of our inability to control our speech labels us as a murderer. Why does Hashem punish with such a severe punishment for not keeping a promise? One who does not keep his word may be harming himself – but one cannot compare the severity of not keeping a promise to Lashon Hora and Rechilus (whose punishment is apparently less severe). In addition, we see how concerned the Torah is about the promises we make. The Torah set up a system for a person to nullify his promise in front of a Talmid Chacham or when in front of three non-scholars. Even more powerfully we all recite *Hatoras Nedarim* in front of a Bais Din of three every Erev Rosh Hashanah. In this pronouncement we not only express regret for past vows but declare that any future vows should be nullified as well. If all of this were not sufficient to underscore the significance of vows, all Jews stand in trembling trepidation and fear filled awe as the Chazzan begins the Yom Kippur with the soulful saying of Kol Nidrei – another declaration of vow nullification. Why are we directed to approach this whole issue with such dedication and determination? What is

at the root of the severity of vows and promises?

We can gain some insight from the use of an unusual term in our Parsha. "One who makes a promise to Hashem or swears an oath establishes a prohibition on himself – לא יחל דברו", he should not

*(Continued on page 3)*

## THE MARCH UPHILL

*Binyomin Agular, 11th Grade*

The trumpets have blared endlessly and the war cries have died away, as the leaders of Klal Yisroel's army return home to bring an atonement "offering". When discussing this seemingly quaint event, the *pasuk* says [31:50], "And we brought an offering for Hashem; each man that found a gold vessel, an anklet, and a bracelet, ring, earring, and kumaz- to atone for our souls before Hashem."

This *pasuk* appears very odd. What was the nature of the sin that the soldiers of Klal Yisroel needed to atone for? Rashi says that the sin was one of *hirhur* - the thought of doing *aveiros*. It was for these thoughts that occurred during war that the men were bringing 'sacrifices' of jewelry as atonement for their souls.

When we follow the events of the soldier's return, Rashi's answer is hard to comprehend. Firstly, the soldiers appear to be bringing more items than needed to the *mishkan* for such a little sin. Bracelets, earrings, etc.- doesn't this seem like an awfully *expensive* donation - only for the sin of *thinking* of sinning? Secondly – people can generally bring a *korban* to Hashem if they feel they have sinned in any way, and want to rectify the situation. Why then, do the soldiers bring all this jewelry, rather than a regular offering? What symbolism can be seen in these items of adornment, that reveals the thoughts of those who brought them?

The *sefer Mayana Shel Torah* quotes Reb Yisroel Meir of Ger; The

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9 Tammuz 5659 / June 17, 1899 – 23 Av 5745 / August 10, 1985

- In the spring of 5694 (1934), Rav Kanievsky, along with his family, emigrated to Eretz Yisroel. Soon after, the Chazon Ish also came to the Holy Land, and settled in Bnei Brak.

- Shortly after his arrival, the Steipler published his famed work, the first volume of *sefer Kehillos Yaakov*. The word 'kehillos' is equal to the word 'Yisroel', thus hinting in the title to his name – Yaakov Yisroel.

- Someone once asked the Steipler Gaon, "Chazal teach that serving as a *sandak* at a *bris* is a *segulah* for attaining wealth. You have been honored as a *sandak* countless times, yet you are far from wealthy. What of the *segulah*?"

The Steipler Gaon replied, "Wealth is relative; different people have different ideas of what it means to be wealthy. To me, having my *sefarim* gain acceptance in the Torah world is wealth. *Baruch Hashem, I am wealthy.*"

- Many people came to the Steipler for advice in many different areas, ranging from difficult *sugyos* to personal *hashkafa*. All questions presented to him had to be written down because of his hearing problem. If the person had to write an additional question, he could hear the Steipler learning during those moments - no time went to waste.

- Many *sefarim* were written by and about the Steipler, in areas ranging from *hashkafa*, chumash and *gematrios* among others. Among them are several volumes of letters titled *Karyana D'Igrasa*, and several volumes written by one of his talmidim, describing his daily life, called *Orchos Rabbeinu*. There is also the *sefer Eitzos V'Hadrachos*, containing a volume of letters to an American psychologist, Dr. Yaakov Greenwald, in which The Steipler advises him on various psychological problems.

- In his later years, the Steipler's family tried to limit the amount of people that would be allowed into the house. At certain times, they would close the door to indicate that visitors should return the next day, but the Steipler would go and open the door. When the family would beg the Steipler not to strain himself, he would reply, "How can I close the door? What if a Jew needs encouragement and support? A person never knows in what merit he lives . . ."

- A talmid of the Steipler recalls a specific incident that is a constant inspiration to him, and one that



he can never get enough of. "I knocked on the door of rebbe's house, and the *rebbezin's* response was that he wasn't feeling well and had gone to lie down. "You can go into the room and give him a note," she suggested. I entered and saw that rebbe was lying down "resting" with a *chiddushei Rav Akiva Eiger* . . . He was resting, on his side, with a large volume

of Rav Akiva Eiger in his hands. He was resting."

- The Steipler was always available to talk with yeshiva bachurim to grant them encouragement and support in any way he could. Many young men who felt lacking in their learning or *middos* could always be *mushpah* from the words of the Steipler, and left his home to continue on with a renewed spirit.

- Every night before going to sleep, the Steipler would say some *tehillim* and daven for the sick of Klal Yisroel. His family would sometimes find him late at night crying bitterly, praying for all those in need of *refuah* and *yeshuah*.

- He once told someone that on top of his bookcase, there are more than one thousand pens from people who had written their requests and mistakenly left their pens behind.

- Once on a Friday night, The Steipler was sitting at his Shabbos *seudah* in a darkly lit room, when someone brought to his attention that an insect had landed in his cup of tea. The thought that he had come so close to eating something forbidden prevented him from sleeping the entire night.

- It happened several times that Reb Kanievsky came for *tefillah* and found that he didn't have his *gartel*. There was no time to hurry home and get it before the *tefillah* began, but neither was it possible to *daven* without it. Right then and there, The Steipler put his hands up, took off his tie, undid the knot and girded himself with it in preparation for *tefillah*. To do what had to be done; that was his sole criterion.

- The Steipler possessed a deep belief in the ultimate redemption, and his *emunah* was always on his lips. Someone once gave him a beautiful new *kapote* (rabbinic frock) as a present, which he decided to put away until he could don it in Moshiach's honor. Unfortunately for us, the garment is left unworn.

- Someone once noticed the Steipler at the

(continued on page 4)

desecrate his words – ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה, according to whatever comes from his mouth he shall do [30:3]. Rashi comments on the words “*lo yache!*” that he shall not desanctify his words. The employment of the words “Chullin” tells us that words themselves have a status of holiness or Kedusha. We are admonished to guard the holiness of our verbal statements. We are warned to guard our speech and adhere to the sanctity of our promises. What is the source of this Kedusha?

My Rebbi, HaRav Moshe Shapiro *shlit”a* of Yerushalayim has frequently explained as follows. When Hashem created man the verse tells us that Hashem blew into the nostrils the breath of life – *Nishmas Chaim*. The term “*neshama*” comes from the expression of *neshimah* – breathing. Chazal teach us that “he who blows, blows from within himself”. The application of this demonstrates that our *neshama* is essentially the “inner parts of Hashem” so to speak. The Maharal and others frequently refer to the human soul as חלק אלוהים ממעל, “a piece of Hashem from above”.

Our every movement is a result of and testimony to the life source of the soul. We are fueled by the spirit of Hashem. We are comprised of the body – earth, and the soul - heaven. Where is the “meeting point” of these two realities?

The Maharal explains that the soul joins with the body at the mouth. The Targum Onkeles

alludes to this when he translates the verse, “*ייהיה*, *האדם לנפש חיה*, *And man became a living being*”, By writing, “*And man became a soul who speaks*”. When we speak, the soul is speaking. When we speak, the spiritual part of us is expressing itself. When we speak it is clear and evident that the חלק אלוהים ממעל is behind it. The wealth of Hashem – the power of speech. Man is speech. Man uses the breath of Hashem to speak. “Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never harm me” is a children’s taunt which has no roots in Judaism or in reality. Words are powerful. Words pain more than physical blows. Words are spiritual and reach the depth of the soul and the very essence of the person.

When a person utters a promise or issues a vow he is employing, “Spiritual Speech” to create a reality.

Just as Hashem created the reality of this world with ten utterances, so too we create or destroy worlds. . . and people with our utterances. Abuse of that power is abuse of the *neshama*, of our essence, of Hashem’s Spirit. Speech creates sanctity and marriage when the Chosson pronounces the words . . . הרי את מקודשת. Speech can elevate the status of an animal from chullin to Kodesh. Abuse of speech is a violation of the gift and the trust which Hashem singularly gave to

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איש כי ידר נדר לה' . . . [ל:ג]

by Tzadok Picker

IF A MAN TAKES A VOW TO HASHEM. . .

The beginning of this week’s parsha discusses the laws of one who makes a promise, thereby making something that was permitted become forbidden to him. The Baal HaTurim explains that the word “נדרים, promises” has the same *gematria* as the word “רוצח, murderer”. This is because if one makes a promise, and does not follow through with that which he promised, his children will die (*rachmana letzlan*) because of his sin. This can help give us a perspective of how strong our words can be, and that we must not take that which we say lightly.



Chiddushei HaRim, presenting the following answer. He explains that at first we would think that a thought of sin alone - without an action following - is not something so terrible, and an atonement would not be required for it. However, this is not so. The essential difficulty with *hirhur* can be understood from the laws of a vessel that was obtained from a non-Jew. The halacha is that if one obtains a pot from a non-Jew, they must *tovel* it in the mikvah. The reason is that even though the non-kosher hot dogs may not be in the pot at the moment, the flavor of those past meals have been absorbed into the walls of the vessel. That is why cooks always use wooden spoons when stirring food, for metal spoon absorb and give off flavors. It takes away from the taste of the dish.

The same applies by thoughts of a sin. Even if a person does not follow up on a thought of sinning, the notion naturally makes an impact on his inner self, and may eventually return in an external form sometime in the future (*chas veshalom*). Just as we hold that “*ta’am k’ikur*”, the taste is an equal concern in such issues, we hold that “*hirhur kemaaseh*” - thoughts are like actions. Chazal similarly express this concept as, “*Hirhurei aveirah kashim mei’averiah*, thoughts of sinning are harder than a sin itself.” This is because evil thoughts take root deep in a person when he doesn’t consider it to be a serious matter. Yet when the thoughts eventually lead to an action - it is too late to stop. The bad *middah* has already become part of his person.

Now one can perceive the dangers involved in thoughts of doing *aveiros*. Let us go even further and understand how much effort the soldiers put into ridding themselves of their sinful thoughts. Perhaps their intentions can be brought to light by answering our second question. What was the reason for bringing these items of jewelry as listed in the Torah? I will therefore present the following.

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*vasikin minyan*, and asked him if there was a special reason he was there? The Gaon replied, "I closed the *gemora* to go to sleep and went over to close the blinds. I saw that dawn had already broken."

- In the summer of 5745 (1985), the Steipler took ill, and his body greatly weakened. All his life he had tried to never ask anyone for help with his needs, and it greatly pained him that during this time he needed constant assistance. Still, he tried to limit how much people needed to attend to him. One such example is using a straw so he could drink without someone having to hold the cup for him.

- One morning while the Steipler was still lying in bed, someone began putting his *tzitzis* on for him. The Steipler – who couldn't see the ends of the garment – cried out, "What is this you are giving me; these *tzitzis* are *pasul* (not kosher)!" The person removed the garment, and sure enough, the *tzitzis* on one corner had become torn.



- That night at around midnight, Reb Kanievsky stated, "I have around three more hours to bear this pain." A short time later, the Steipler burst out, *Ribono Shel Olam! Perhaps I have sinned by giving someone wrong advice,* and with that he broke into tears.

- Three hours after his declaration, the Steipler lost consciousness. Doctors tried to find some way to gain some reaction from him, and asked the family what particular food he enjoyed - the family replied that food meant nothing to him. His

grandson then had an idea, "There is one thing which my grandfather loves – Torah." They began to learn *mishnayos* aloud, and the Steipler's face took on an expression of utter peace. It was only when someone mispronounced a word that his face looked pained.

- In *Maseches Kesubos* [140:], Chazal teach us that if someone leaves this world with a content look on his face, it is a very good sign for him.

Such was the expression on Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky's face when he passed away on Shabbos Parshas Eikev, 23 Av 5745, at the age of 87.

- Some two hundred thousand mourners filled the streets on Sunday morning for the *levaya*, which took place during a terribly hot and humid day. The only one to eulogize the Steipler Gaon was HaRav Eliezer Menachem Man Shach *zt'l*, who declared in a voice choked with tears, ". . . His Torah was pure and unblemished; from his lips came forth nothing but words which were sacred and untainted."

- The Steipler was laid to rest in the Zichron Meir cemetery, next to his esteemed brother-in-law, the Chazon Ish. Mere moments passed before the grave was covered and people began davening that this *tzaddik*, who had helped and guided them while he was alive, should continue to be an emissary on behalf of Klal Yisroel from his place in Gan Eden. In his *zechus*, may we truly merit protection and leadership towards our ultimate salvation, *bimeirah biyameinu*.

We know that *hirhurim* have an affect on the inside of a person, 'within his walls'. Therefore, the soldiers worked vehemently to take all sections of their *penimiyus* (inner being) and cleanse them. The jewelry represents different aspects of a person; a bracelet represents our giving over to other people, an act that the *yetzer hara* tries to direct towards the purpose of honor. The ring represents personal ties, and the anklets represent the lower and uninteresting things a person comes across. The earring represents the person's personal nature i.e. likes, dislikes, idiosyncrasies, etc. The men truly gave, to purify every aspect of their character.

This leads us to the big question. While it is true that thoughts are effective - look at the situation! These men were on a life or death battlefield! With so much death, and war around them, it is utterly astounding that there was not any slight sin concerning the Midyanite women, except thoughts of sin! That is a miraculously commendable feat! If so, what more did Hashem want? Could they have done any better and not thought of sinning?

The Chiddushei HaRim explains, "There is a great mistake on the part of the world. They say - when one cannot go through, it is necessary to around. I say - when one cannot go through, it is necessary to go through!"

This is what the Hashem wanted! This is the lesson. Even at this point, where it seems that the men must sin and not to think of sinning would be impossible - it is not. Hashem was saying - No! You can do it! Destroy the sin completely!

We see how much Hashem wanted them to go to atone for this seemingly slight sin by a very interesting Medrash and halacha. The Midrash states that even *Bedek Habayis*, an object consecrated to the Beis HaMikdash to be sold for money is like a sacrifice. How so? The Torah Temimah explains that they are similar in the aspect of *pidyon hekdes*; the concept that if one donates an animal as a

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sacrifice and has a change of heart, i.e. he wishes to get it back, he can redeem it for the price that would be paid for it on the market, plus twenty percent of its market value. This law also applies by *Bedek Habayis*, donations of objects or animals for money – except over here. The Torah Temimah explains that Hashem very well might *not* have wanted the soldiers to turn back. Although the situation looked Herculean, and destroying every piece of their evil inclination was a gargantuan task - Hashem was telling them, “You can do it. You will do it.” This is the same by all tough tests. The world says, “Avoid it, or go back”. We say “No! If we came this far we will not stop now and we will succeed.” As the saying goes, -“ If Hashem brought you to it, he’ll bring you through it.”

May we merit the strength to conquer all challenges sent our way, thus granting us the ability to go higher (and higher!) in our *avodas Hashem*, truly meriting the *geulah shleimah, bimheirah biyameinu*.

## STORIES OF TZADDIKIM

Controversy broke out in a certain Torah institution, and along with several other prominent *gedolim*, Rav Sholom Schwadron *zt'l* – much against his will - was forced to become involved.

“One day, during the month of Elul,” an acquaintance recalls, “I drove Rav Sholom back home from that institution. Rav Sholom was sitting silently beside me [from Rosh Chodesh Elul till Motzei Yom Kippur, Rav Sholom always held a *taanis dibur*]. I decided to seize the moment to denounce a certain talmid chacham who was part of the controversy. I began with soft terminology, but my words soon turned harsh. Rav Sholom signaled sharply for me to stop speaking in this vein about a *gadol baTorah*, but I persisted in explaining my position anyhow.

As a rule, Rav Sholom Schwadron was soft as butter. This time, he hardened like a rock. With a motion of his hand that could not be misunderstood, he let me know that he wanted me to stop the car. ‘I’m getting out,’ he stated. I stopped.

Rav Sholom lifted himself up with some difficulty, stepped out of the car, and began to walk. I drove after him, trying to persuade him back into the car. It was clear that walking was not easy for him. Pity overwhelmed me and I regretted ever having brought up the subject – but it was no use. Rav Sholom walked all the way home.”

RABBI RABINOWITZ (continued from page 3)

humans. There are numerous strongly worded consequences for one who defiles his mouth with utterances of curses and improper language. It is because of this explanation that if we, the children of Hashem violate vows, then *מדה כנגד מדה*, the voices of children are silenced. It is because of the opportunity of Speech and the commensurate severity of its abuse that we have multiple opportunities to disavow ourselves in front of a Talmid Chacham or their judges. This is at our core and it comprises three essence. And so we stand in fear, awe and trepidation at the onset of the holiest day of the year as the chazzan begins Kol Nidrei.

Many years ago I had the tremendous privilege of driving the late Bluzhever Rebbe *zt'l* from Hunter, NY to Brooklyn, NY, during the week of *Parshas Matos*. At the conclusion of the trip he treated me to an amazing Chassidic insight into the third verse of the thirtieth *perek*. When one makes a promise to Hashem or swears an oath to establish a prohibition on himself *לא יחל דבר* - he - the person shall not

desecrate his own words. The Rebbe *zt'l* then first pointed to his own mouth and then upwards to heaven as he recited the final words of the *pasuk*. If indeed man will not desecrate his own words then *ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה*, whatever request a man makes – *יעשה* Hashem will fulfill! If we are careful with what we say and how we say it we are demonstrating our awareness of the source of the power of speech. If we do that, “The Source” will answer our prayers.

We now leave the month of Sivan which was highlighted by the verbal proclamation of “*Naaseh V’Nishma*” – our total commitment to accepting the Torah at Har Sinai. We now enter

the month of Tammuz during which time our sins brought about the breaking of the two tablets upon which the “*Aseres HaDibros*” – the ten verbal commandments were written. We must verbally plead with Hashem that we merit to rededicate ourselves to verbal control, to verbal sanctity, and in turn hope that Hashem answers our prayers for a speedy redemption.



Picture taken at our yearly Shabbaton at Camp Romimu  
(l to r) Moti Levy, Rabbi Leibe Wolf, Rabbi Shlomo Drebin, Rabbi Sam Rudansky, Yudi Akerman, Moshe Kleinman, Dani Gottlieb, Avi Lieberman, Rabbi Baruch Rabinowitz.  
(Bottom) Nir Alalouf, Yaakov Ozzy Sonnenblick

# אמת ליעקב

Weekly Insights from Moreinu HoRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l

In this week's *parsha*, we read about the war that Bnei Yisroel fought with the nation of *Midyan* in order to take revenge for causing Bnei Yisroel to sin. After the Jewish People had wiped out the *Midyanim* and collected all the spoils of the war, they took off a certain percentage of the spoils, and set them aside to be used for *hekdesh*. Interestingly, this is one of the few wars that Bnei Yisroel fought where we find that a portion of the spoils was sanctified for Hashem.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l offers an explanation on why there were times when Bnei Yisroel were allowed to keep the spoils for themselves, and times when they were obligated to donate them to the *mishkan*. Through all the wars that Bnei Yisroel fought, there was clear *hashgacha pratis* in their victories. However, some wars were fought in a natural way, and all the miracles that took place were hidden beneath the shroud of nature. On the other hand, there were other wars that were won with open miracles. The war with the *Midyanim* was one that was won with *nissim geluyim*, open miracles that no one could fail to recognize. In fact, during the duration of the war, Bnei Yisroel did not lose a single soldier. As such, Bnei Yisroel could not derive benefit from the spoils of this war until they had set aside a percentage for Hashem.

Rav Yaakov points out that this concept is not limited to the war with the *Midyanim*, but rather is a pattern that is noticeable throughout *Tanach*. When Avraham fought the war with the four kings in order to save Lot, he refused to take any of the spoils. This was clearly a miraculous victory, as Avraham with only three hundred and eighteen people was able to wipe out the four most powerful armies in the world. Similarly, when Bnei Yisroel fought against the city of *Yericho* upon entering Eretz Yisroel, they were forbidden from taking any of the spoils of the city, and rather everything was set aside for use in the *mishkan*. Once again, there were open miracles involved in this war, when the huge walls of *Yericho* sank right into the ground.

Despite the distinction of *nissim geluyim*, it is important not to lose focus of the hidden miracles that take place in our lives every single day. If we look carefully at the events of our lives, we can often see how the *Yad Hashem* is always there. May we be *zoche* to recognize the *nissim nistarim* in our lives, and ultimately merit the *nissim geluyim* that will take place with the coming of *Moshiach, bimheirah biyameinu*.

Rabbi Dovid Morgenstern of Yeshiva Darchei Torah relates how one Erev Rosh Hashana, Rav Avraham Pam zt"l was leaving the mikvah when he heard someone call out from inside. He returned to find out what this person needed, and asked, "Is there anything I can do?"

The man – not knowing that he was speaking to the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath – asked him for a towel. Rav Pam replied that if the man could wait a few minutes, he will return with one for him to use. With that said, the Rosh Yeshiva walked the few blocks to his home, obtained a towel, and returned to the mikvah. Upon returning, however, Rav Pam saw that the person had already gotten a towel, and was almost on his way out. Yet when he realized who he had asked to get the towel, the man apologized profusely for having asked the Rosh Yeshiva to do something for him altogether. "If I would have known I was speaking to Rebbe, I would have never asked him to get me a towel!" the man stated. "Nevertheless, someone else already gave me a towel - I thank you very much."

Rav Pam replied that he didn't mind whatsoever, and proceeded to leave the mikvah. However, The Rosh Yeshiva was spotted afterwards standing in the hallway of the Yeshiva, clutching the towel in his fist as soft tears slid down his cheeks. As he lifted the towel, Rav Pam turned his eyes heavenward and sighed, "For some reason, I lost out on the opportunity on Erev Rosh Hashana to perform a *chesed* for another *Yid*."

May we merit such outlook, such desire, and such opportunity.



Photograph by Hillel Engel  
Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky *shlit"l* at this year's Agudah Convention. Next to him is Rav Aharon Shechter *shlit"l*, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Chaim Berlin

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