

Devarim

Our parsha begins the last of the five books of Moses opening with a timely message. “These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of the Jews” (Deuteronomy 1:1). Deuteronomy contains the recounting of all the events that the Jews experienced throughout their forty years in the wilderness. Moses’ life was drawing to an end and he wished to instill in the Nation a passion to continue on their journey of true service of G-d. Let us focus on the first verse which opens this communication and draws out Moses’ lesson.

Two Ideas

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (Chid”a, 1724 -1807, traveling Talmudist and Kabbalist) points out that there are two concepts being hinted from this verse. The word “אלה, these”, stands for אבק לשון הרע, borderline evil slander. The Talmud (Bava Basrah 165a) states that everyone commits this sin! The next words in the verse, “אשר דיבר משה”, which Moses spoke”, hints to the greatest words taught by him, the holy Torah. Hence, the verse is hinting to two areas which need conscience effort. They are how one speaks about others and the importance of Torah learning and application!

Deeper

I would like to point out one more hint found in the verse and then show a common theme present here. The next three words are, “אל כל ישראל”, to every Jew”. This hints to the goal of achdut, unity, that the people should all be together! Let us develop this.

Eve

The first woman that G-d created was named ‘Chava, Eve’. This name stems from the word L’Chavot, to verbalize, hence, her name means ‘talkative’! Additionally, the sages in Kidushin (49b) tell us that women possess nine out of ten measures of chatter the world! Before anyone takes offense, please let me explain this beautiful concept which the Torah is expressing.

Humans are superior to animals. They have intelligence, freewill and the ability to talk! They are termed “midaber, speakers”. What does this mean? Speech is the greatest tool of connection and communication. When two people speak, they are able to connect to each other. Even alone, when one speaks out his ideas, he connects to them better. The sages summarize man’s job in this world as, “to speak before Hashem in words of Torah and prayer!” Hence, we see the power of talking! When we speak in Torah

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and when we pray to the Master of the World for His assistance and care, our speech is the conduit which bridges the gap between us and builds true bonds.

Now I ask you, who more than women understand this ability to connect emotionally and deeply through the medium of speech?! This is their greatness when used in the right context. To be able to talk signifies the focus on building a deep relationship and bond with other people and with Hashem. When a woman talks with love to her baby, or chats with her friend who is in need of an ear, or converses with her husband or family member seeking her counsel, she is forging a deep union and connection!

With the great potential and power of words comes great danger as well. Improperly used words can cause great harm! Moses wanted to stress to the Jews the importance of properly used speech. Hence, the entire book is called, Devarim, words! Moses opens his lesson with three hints which are one. Please speak carefully, do not speak borderline slander. This consideration will help build unity. Please use your speech for Torah, the ultimate connector to Hashem.

Conclusion

Indeed, in the rebuke that follows, Moshe lists off all of the Jew's sins that revolve around improper speech. They are shown how their words were misused for expressing complaints and questioning Hashem, the Spies slanderous report, Korach's negative words, and the Golden Calf where blasphemous words of the idol-worshippers persuaded many to sin! Thus, Moshe stressed to them the proper usage of words and its great benefit in building their relationship with Hashem and their fellow people.

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will..... emotionally scar me for life!" This is the Torah perspective. Words are powerful! Moses begged the Jewish people to dedicate themselves to utilize their words for the great task of positive construction and harmony! Words connect us to Hashem and to each other.

Shabbat Shalom

The JSN Team

