



CONGREGATION AGUDATH ACHIM
FREEHOLD JEWISH CENTER

59 Broad Street
Freehold, New Jersey 07728
732-462-0254
www.freeholdjc.org | office@freeholdjc.org

Parshat Matot- Masei

This week we read a double portion of the Torah. They are the last two chapters of the book of Ba'Midbar (Numbers).

The first chapter opens up with the making of a vow. Promises, vows and pledges are important parts of speech that people engage in very day, often numerous times a day. Rashi and Ramban comment that this applies to anything that someone says that they "are" going to do "has" to be done.

The old saying; "say what you do and do what you say," is the best definition of "if a person makes a vow." The words one expresses are extremely powerful and effective.

While the Torah tells us, "Do not profane (abuse) your words," in the context of keeping one's vows, our sages extend this to apply to all aspects of our speech. Why would our sages extend this idea to all aspects of our speech? The answer lies in the power of speech and that this power can not be abused.

The generation of the Tower of Babel were all of "one tongue." They all spoke the same language and could understand one another. G-d "confused" their language. They no longer understood one another and their society fell apart. The power of the tongue is the greatest in the world. When someone receives a "tongue lashing," it is memorable and can result in change.

The great sage known as the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan 1838-1933) wrote books concerning the sanctity of speech. He often sold his own books. There is a story told about him going to the different towns in Europe to sell his books. He comes into the town and a man comes to buy a book. The Chofetz Chaim opens his ledger and tells the man I think you owe me from the last time I was here. The Chofetz Chaim told the man he had taken care of the bill.

The Chofetz Chaim then travelled to the next town. A man came to buy a book and when he went to pay, he said, "and here is what I owe you from the other book." The Chofetz Chaim looked in his ledger and noticed that the man earlier and this man had the same name and he mixed them up.

The Chofetz Chaim went back to the town he was at earlier and sought the man he thought owed him money. When he found the man the Chofetz Chaim asked forgiveness and gave the man a blessing of a long and healthy life.

Whenever someone asked the old man; to what do you attribute your longevity? He would tell them the story of the Chofetz Chaim and the power of his words.

What is it that separates us from animals? The answer is the power of speech and what our words mean.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

