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Exaggerating: When Our Speech Becomes Inaccurate

We continue to here to discuss the element of wind. We are currently discussing **earth-of-wind**, which is the source of words of falsity. Now we will discuss, with the help of Hashem, words of falsity which come from **fire-of-earth-of-wind**.

Wind is the root of speech, and earth-of-wind (its downside) refers to false speech. Fire spreads pasts its boundaries. Thus, **fire-of-earth-of-wind** in the soul is the source of words that go past their true boundaries, causing a person to exaggerate.

This is not to be confused with one who brags about his praises, which stems from **fire-of-wind**. Here, we are not dealing yet with fire-of-wind; here we are dealing with fire-of-earth-of-wind, which is when one goes beyond the bounds of truth in what he is saying. This is termed by Chazal as "**sefas yeser**" (extra talk), in the words of Rashi. It is also called **guzma** - exaggerating.

There are different forms of exaggerating. A child often exaggerates, and this stems from the imagination, which is very dominant in a child. Some people grew up with a tendency to exaggerate because they had a big amount of imagination when they were children, and they might even remain that way when they are adults, so they can continue to exaggerate even when they are children (adults).

Others exaggerate in the form of exaggerating their praises, which is really a form of *gaavah*\arrogance, but we will not discuss this here; we hope to discuss it (it) later, with the help of Hashem. Here, we are speaking about *sefas yeser*, which stems from fire-of-earth-of-wind.

How An Impaired Mind Affects Speech

Most people, when they talk, are not being precise with their words. Why is it that most of the time people are not careful with the precision of their words?

It is really because the thinking process of one's mind is often impaired. When one's thoughts are off-base, this will also affect the words coming out of the mouth, and thus the words coming out of his mouth will be off as well.

The words a person speaks are stemming from what he thinks and feels. Thus, if the thoughts and feelings of a person are off-base, so will the words will also come out imprecise.

This is the first reason why people are not precise.

How Emotions Affect Speech

There is also another reason why people tend to be imprecise with their words (besides for arrogance, which we will address later).

As we said, we speak either from our thoughts or from our feelings. When a person speaks calmly, usually he is talking from his thinking intellect. When a person is yelling or shouting, usually it's because his emotions have overtaken his intellect. He still has his intellect of course, but for a temporary amount of time, the emotions have overtaken his intellect, and therefore the words he speaks will be stemming from his emotions and not from his thoughts.

Now that we have explained that, we can now proceed to understand the following. When it comes to intellect, most people know how to articulate their words to be in line with what they're thinking. But when it comes to emotions, most of the time, a person does not know how to talk accurately from his emotions. With most people, the intellect and emotions are off-base; this is the natural way of the world.

Inaccurate Speech When It Comes To Intellect and Emotion

A Torah scholar is usually very precise with his intellect, and he can speak clearly from his intellect. He can know how to give a good shiur which makes sense and is said with clarity. (Some people are better at expressing their thoughts than others can).

However, it can happen that a person is very bright when it comes to learning Gemara, but when he has dealings with others in worldly matters, his brilliance fails him, and he isn't able to express with precision from his intellect. One simple reason for this is because he can be a "*Talmid Chochom*" when it comes to learning Torah, but not when it comes to worldly matters. He can be very smart in what he knows, but when it comes to worldly matters, his intellect is not that different than people from the street.

Even if one has a precise intellect both when it comes to his Torah learning as well as when it comes to worldly matters, when it comes to verbalizing their emotions, most people cannot express them accurately.

(There are also people who don't learn Torah but they know how to express themselves in a precise manner, because it is part of their personality to be precise, and not because they have worked on themselves to refine their precision).

It is thus possible that a Torah scholar might not be precise when it comes to worldly matters, because his intellect has only been refined with regards to learning Torah, and not when it comes to dealing with worldly matters.

And even if he can express himself precisely from his intellect as well as when it comes to worldly matters, it's still possible that his emotions are off-base. For example, when he gets emotional, like when he feels a powerful love for Torah, his emotions might overtake him so much that it warps his intellect a little bit, when he's in that "emotional" mode.

If someone didn't work on his *middos* yet, his emotions are usually off-base, and as a result, he cannot express his emotions accurately.

There are some people who don't have the problem of not expressing their emotions with accuracy.

This can be for either one of two reasons. Either this is because they worked on their *middos* and therefore their emotions don't overtake them, thus they can express their emotions precisely. Others, though, are able to express their emotions precisely because they have a strong amount of the element of earth in their souls, and therefore they can contain their reactions very well. In particular, when one perfects his element of earth, which provides stability of the soul, even when he gets emotional he can speak from his intellect, because he is very good at being precise; he knows how to cool off and contain his emotions.

These are two kinds of people who are precise in their emotions and can contain them, and therefore when they speak from emotion in themselves, they know how to express their emotions accurately. But most people, as we said, when they are in an emotional mode, do not know how to speak accurately from the place of emotion in themselves.

Summary

So we have described here three kinds of people:

- 1)** Those who do not speak with accuracy, both in describing their thoughts and emotions.
- 2)** Those who are immersed in Torah and they have a precise intellect when it comes to their Torah learning, but their intellect is weak when it comes to worldly matters, and therefore they can't express themselves with precision when it comes to dealing with the world.
- 3)** Others are precise in their intellect both in Torah and in worldly matters, but their emotions are unrefined and therefore the words they speak when they are in an emotional mode do not come out accurately.

Lack of Awareness To One's Speech

There is also another kind of expression that does not give an accurate description of what's going on inside the person: there is a kind of a person whose speech is disconnected from his intellect, as well as from his emotional awareness, as he's speaking.

When a person says something that doesn't make sense, we can see clearly that he simply didn't pay attention to what he's saying, because he just talks and talks and talks. But even when a person does speak from his intellect, sometimes he is disconnected from his thoughts as he's talking; he loses track of his thoughts because of what he's saying, and he has to heavily strain his mind in order to get back his train of thought.

Why does this happen? Sometimes, it's because a person is focusing too much on the next thing he's about to say. This is linked with the imagination, because imagination can cause a person to become too focused on a certain point and disconnect him from his thoughts. Even when a person is calm and he's not in noisy surroundings, internally he can still have "noise" in his thoughts, and this is when imagination takes over.

Sometimes, however, it is because a person is so concentrated on what he's saying that he becomes very focused, to the point that it becomes difficult to have constant thought.

The Solution: Resting The Mind In The Midst of Speaking

The solution to this problem is that the mind needs to be given rest as a person is talking, so that the thoughts won't dominate too much and throw a person off-balance of what he's saying.

When a person is speaking to the public, his mind might weaken and he's disconnected from what he's saying. Some speakers know how to immediately return to their previous thoughts even after this happens, and the listeners might be aware of this or they might not be, but either way, it happens to all speakers: the thoughts fly around.

The Problem of Disconnection

Another problem that can exist, which is more subtle, is that as a person is speaking, he can be disconnected from his thoughts and emotions. He might lose awareness of his thoughts or emotions as he is speaking. Most people are indeed weak when it comes to conscious awareness of their thoughts and emotions.

The results of all the issues we have described here is that the lack of accuracy in one's speech causes a person to say things that have nothing to do with the previous words he was just saying.

One part of the problem, we explained, is that a person disconnects from his emotions or thoughts as he is speaking, and this is the more subtle point of the problem; it causes a person to say things that are disconnected from what he said previously.

But the more obvious part of the problem, which is what we are discussing, is that it can cause a person to speak falsity. Since we are discussing how to fix the trait of speaking falsity, we will focus the discussion here on how to rectify this area.

When a person is not exactly aware of what he is saying, his words will be imprecise. He will say things that have nothing to do with what he just said and this causes him to speak words that are inaccurate.

This is the reason behind why people tend to say things that are inaccurate.

The Solution To Disconnection From Intellect and Emotion

To give the general outline of the solution, if someone has (an) impaired intellect or emotions, the solution is clear: he must learn Torah in-depth to develop his intellect and then he'll be able to learn how to express his thoughts properly, being that he has refined his intellect through the power of Torah study, which sharpens the mind. In addition, he must learn how to refine his emotions.

Verbalizing The Thoughts

When it comes to the area of refining the intellect, the Ramban says that one should think what he says before he talks. This will teach him how to be aware of what he says.

The superficial solution which people use for this is to learn how to speak slowly, which helps a person gain some conscious awareness of what he's saying. This is a superficial solution, though - why? It is because when a person is saying words of Torah, he is limiting his words as he does this, which hampers his learning.

Although we can make use of this superficial solution to a certain extent, we will mainly need a method that is more inner and spiritual. If one wants to make his intellect more precise, the inner method is that he should learn Torah in-depth and, in addition, he should also think before he talks when it comes to worldly matters.

Verbalizing Emotions

And if one wants to learn how to express his emotions precisely, he should learn how to refine his emotions, which is a broad work in and of itself.^[1] And he can also talk more slowly, as a superficial method to help himself.

Remaining Connected To Your Thoughts And Emotions As You Are Talking

But we need to add on the more inner aspect of the solution: get used to remaining connected to your thoughts and your feelings as you speak.

When the average person speaks, either he thinks about what he will say before he talks and then he talks (but he doesn't think that much as he's talking, because he's so focused on getting the words out), or, a person will think as he's talking, but he's very focused on his talking and not on his thoughts. For this reason, most people, when they talk, lose their thought process as they are talking.

So as a person is talking, he can think to himself, "What's the main thing here? What I'm saying, or the fact that I'm thinking?"

Most people feel that the main thing when they speak is the words and not their thoughts. But an inner person knows that as he's speaking, he reminds himself that his thinking process is the main thing, as opposed to the words coming out of his mouth. He puts more emphasis on his **thoughts** as he's talking rather than on the **words** he is saying, and this in turn will cause his words to be more precise.

The same goes for emotions. When a person is focused on his emotion rather than on his words, he is connected to his emotion, and therefore the words will express his emotions more precisely than if he would be more focused on the words coming out of his mouth.

A person who exercises this is one who rectifies the trait of falsity (particularly fire-of-earth-of-wind), and he is one who lives an inner kind of life even as he's among this world of superficiality. Most people as they talk lose their innerness as they talk. It is indeed written, "*My soul leaves when I speak with him*". But an inner kind of person makes sure to remain focused on his thoughts or emotions even as he's talking. This is a very inner kind of life to live.

The more a person refines his mind, he refines his imagination, and then the imagination doesn't affect his speech as much, and his words become more precise.

Some Examples

For example, when a person is giving a *shiur* and people ask him questions in middle, how can he return to his previous thoughts? It's a very subtle matter to know if one should focus more on the question or if he should return to his thoughts, because he shouldn't compromise on his exertion in Torah learning, so it's hard for him to discern what he should immerse his thoughts in. So it's impossible to say how to act in such a situation. Nor is it possible to give exact guidance in this matter when it comes to any scenario, because we cannot be 100% inaccurate in how we speak.

Let's give a very practical example, though, which helps us understand how to apply the concept. A person goes home at the end of the day. Assuming that he is a more emotional kind of person (and most people are more emotional than intellectual), and he is told of things that awaken his emotions, what happens? His emotions simply react to what he's told, and they will be uneven reactions. The emotions will overtake him and he won't be able to express his words properly.

What, indeed, should a person do if he wants his words to be more precise as he's in middle of emotionally reacting? One should try to become aware of his thoughts and emotions as he's reacting. Awareness to what you're thinking and feeling will slowly refine your intellect and emotions, and then the words coming out of your mouth will be a more accurate description of what's going on in your thoughts or feelings.

This is a subtle inner kind of work. If one isn't used to working with his inner world, all of the words here will seem strange to him.

The point of all of this is: to get our words to become more accurate.

[1] It is recommended for this to see ***Getting To Know Your Feelings*** and the ***Understanding Your Middos*** series and the ***Fixing Your Earth*** and ***Fixing Your Water*** and ***Fixing Your Wind*** series of the Rav.

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