

דרכים בפרשה דברים

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אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל

Many years ago, I had the privilege of meeting Harav Mordechai Zuckerman זצ"ל, one of the youngest remaining talmidim of the holy Chafetz Chaim. During our conversation, Rav Mordechai shared with me a memory from his years in Radin that is almost impossible to forget.

By that time, the Chafetz Chaim no longer davened in the yeshivah. Every morning, a small group of bochurim would be chosen to leave the beis medrash and make a minyan in the Chafetz Chaim's home. One would imagine that such an opportunity would have been the greatest privilege a bochur could receive. Who would not want the zechus of davening alongside the Chafetz Chaim himself?

But Rav Mordechai smiled and told me something I never expected.

"Actually, everyone hoped someone else would be chosen."

I looked at him in disbelief.

"The Chafetz Chaim," he explained, "was a tremendous shmuzer. We were young bochurim, and we thought it was bittul Torah."

Then he paused and shook his head. "Can you imagine? We thought it was bittul Torah."

Years later, Rav Mordechai looked back and realized how mistaken they had been. The Chafetz Chaim had not spent his life guarding his tongue in order to become silent. He had spent his life refining himself, until he learned what it means for a Jew to speak.

Perhaps this is the deeper meaning of the transformation we find in Moshe Rabbeinu. When Hashem first appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe said: **לא איש דברים אנכי** "I am not a man of words."

Yet the final sefer of the Torah begins with: **אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל** "These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Yisrael."

The same Moshe who felt that he was not a man of words became the one whose words became an entire sefer of Torah. What changed?

The Sfas Emes explains that Sefer Devarim has a unique quality. Until this point, the Torah describes the transmission of Torah with the words: **וידבר ה' אל משה** - Hashem speaks, and Moshe conveys His words. But in Sefer Devarim, Moshe himself speaks.

How can the words of a human being become Torah?

The answer is that Moshe Rabbeinu had spent forty years refining himself completely. He had become so connected to the will of Hashem that his own words were no longer

separate from Torah. His speech had become a vessel through which the Torah was revealed.

Moshe did not simply become a better speaker. Moshe became a different person.

The Seforim Hakedoshim explain that this is the deeper meaning of speech. Words are not merely a way of communicating information. They reveal the person behind them. Shlomo HaMelech expresses this idea with the words: **נפשי יצאה בדברי** "My soul went out when he spoke."

Speech is not merely the expression of thoughts and ideas. It allows the פנימיות of a person, the deepest part of who he is, to become revealed.

This is the unique power of dibbur. What is hidden inside a person eventually finds its way into his words. His thoughts, feelings, and very essence can become revealed through speech.

That is why Moshe initially hesitated. He understood that speech is not simply about choosing the right words. Speech reveals the person himself. But after forty years of serving Hashem, Moshe's inner world had become so refined that his words themselves reflected the ratzon of Hashem.

And now we can return to Rav Mordechai's story.

The bochurim in Radin thought they were missing Torah because they were listening to conversation. They did not yet understand that with the Chafetz Chaim, there was no such thing as ordinary conversation. Every word reflected a lifetime of Torah, humility, and love for another Yid.

The Chafetz Chaim's greatness was not only that he knew which words not to say. His greatness was that after a lifetime of refining himself, the words he did say revealed who he had become.

This message carries special meaning during these days of mourning the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. Chazal teach that the Second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* between one Jew and another. When the heart becomes filled with division, it eventually finds its way into our words.

But when a person refines himself, those same words can become a source of connection, healing, and kedushah.

Perhaps this is why Rav Mordechai's memory from Radin is so powerful. The bochurim thought they were missing Torah because they were listening to conversation. They did not yet understand that when a person spends a lifetime refining himself, even his ordinary words can become Torah.

"Can you imagine?" Rav Mordechai said. "We thought it was bittul Torah."

They thought they were stepping away from Torah. In truth, they were sitting in the presence of a person whose every word revealed Torah.

Good Shabbos, מרדכי אפפל