

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

PALACE DECORUM

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A few years ago, Rabbi Avi Shafran received a video of a shul custodian. "Now understand," the man said. "When they come to the synagogue—15 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, one hour, whatever—it's for the G-d, not for the phone. Somebody call? 'Oh, wait, G-d! Somebody call me.'" The non-Jewish janitor adjured his listeners to turn their phones off in shul, or at least to refrain from answering them during tefillos.

The Mishnah Berurah cautions us to avoid lashon hara in a shul. "These are severe sins," he explains, "[and] the sin is magnified in a holy place, for it is an affront to the honor of the *Shechinah*. There is no comparison between one who sins in private and one who sins in the palace of the King."

Potential chillul Hashem is a major concern. When a palace visitor shows lack of respect, his crime is not only his attitude toward the king, but his dishonoring the king in others' eyes. In the king's domain, people expect his subjects to be on their best behavior. If they are not, they tarnish the image of royalty.

It is logical, then, that actions that are not inherently wrong but are not in keeping with proper decorum should be eschewed in a *shul* or *beis midrash*. For instance, a number of *poskim* prohibit smoking in a *shul* on the grounds that non-Jews refrain from smoking in their houses of worship, as well as in courthouses.

The same is true of cell phones. Even if it is not *halachically* prohibited, it stands to reason that a person should refrain from using such a device out of respect for the shul's special status



gem

OF THE WEEK

WORDS LIGHT THE PATH

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.

At the beginning of our journey in the midbar, Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to bring forth water from the rock with a blow from his staff. This water was their guarantee for the entire duration of their stay in the wilderness. It demonstrated to the people that, while in the desert, they could expect the direct intervention of Hashem's miraculous power to save them from all trouble and distress, and to provide for their urgent needs.

Now, at the end of their journey—at the edge of the desert and the beginning of habitable lands—the mode of Hashem's guidance was about to change. Neither the staff nor any visible, physical action would guide them any longer; instead, words would be their guide.

Words would serve as their guarantee for the era just beginning. From this point forward, they would lead their lives under normal, natural conditions. There would no longer be a need for direct intervention or open miracles. They would no longer require Moshe's staff, relying instead on his word to find the path of life and salvation.

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powerful
PRAYER



HASHIVA SHOFTEINU:
SORROWS AND SIGHS

In this *bracha*, we ask Hashem to remove from us *yagon v'anacha*, sorrow and sighs. What sadness are we referring to, and what does it have to do with the return of the Sanhedrin?

The Torah is our guide for life, Hashem's gift to us so that we know exactly how to succeed in accordance with His Will. When we have confusion in *halacha*, we endure "sorrow and sighing" as we struggle to understand what the Torah asks of us. During the days of the Sanhedrin, however, we always had absolute clarity on all issues.

Adapted from Biur Tefillah (Ani Maamin Foundation)

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HEARING THE MESSAGES

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

Although we are in the middle of a series about teaching emunah, we will digress this week to the subject of *shivah asar b'Tamuz*. The Three Weeks in which we now find ourselves are the saddest part of the year. We mourn the loss of the Beis Hamikdash, the destruction of our once-glorious nation, and the beginning of a 2,000-year galus. Though we have every reason to believe that we are nearing the tail end of our exile, and we await daily the *geulah* and the coming of *Mashiach*, until that great day comes, the trials of *galus* are still with us. What is it that we are supposed to accomplish in the Three Weeks? Surely the ultimate purpose is not merely the fasting and *aveilus* for past tragedies.

Let us hear the words of the Rambam: "It is a positive commandment to cry out and blow the trumpets [in the Beis Hamikdash] over any distress which will come upon the community. As it says, 'for the *tzara* which distresses you, you must blow the trumpets.' This means that whenever there is a travail such as drought, plague, locusts or similar, cry out [to Hashem] and blow [the trumpets]. This is one of the ways of *teshuvah*. For when the *tzara* comes and they cry out and blow the trumpets, they will know that this bad thing has come because of their evil deeds...this is what will cause the distress to be removed. But if they do not cry out and blow the trumpets, but rather say that this *tzara* 'is the normal conduct of the world, and it just happened [randomly], this is a way of cruelty, which will cause them to cling to their evil deeds and cause additional *tzaros* to occur.'"

It is easier to review our past and attribute ancient tragedies to the sins of those generations. It is a lot more difficult to turn the same critical eye to our current difficulties, accept the blame for them, introspect with honesty and make change. We live in a time when antisemitism grows by the minute. In some areas, people are afraid to walk in the streets with an obviously Jewish appearance, especially a *chareidi* one. Government laws once again interfere with *chinuch*. The unrest in Eretz Yisrael and the hatred being fomented against our *frum* brethren all ought to give us food for thought. Nothing happens in this world by chance. What messages is *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* sending us?

Rav Elchanan Wasserman writes, based on a statement from the Vilna Gaon, that when antisemitism increases in the world, it is a reflection of grave heavenly accusations being made against *Am Yisrael* on high. Let us utilize these Three Weeks for their true purpose: to do *teshuvah* and make the changes that each of us needs, both on an individual and national

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This path would be discovered through Hashem's gifts, which are hidden within the natural order of the world. This truth is demonstrated by the sharp contrast between the incident at *Kadesh* and the incident at *Rephidim*. The deaths of Moshe and Aharon, which are directly connected to the *Kadesh* incident, only clarify this reality further. When *Am Yisroel* reached the border of the Land, Moshe and Aharon's missions were complete.

Hashem had sent them to perform great deeds among the people and to enlighten their minds, accustoming them to a divine way of life. This mission had been fully accomplished in a way was sufficient for all time. There would no longer be a need for the open miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* or the visible revelation of *Mattan Torah*. Moshe and Aharon could now be gathered to *Olam Habah*, while the people remaining in this world would preserve the work and uphold the Torah that Moshe and Aharon had brought and taught them by Hashem's command.

From now on, following their deaths, "*lo bashomayim hi*," but rather "*ushmartem vaasisem*." Safeguarding and fulfilling the Torah is now our task, a task for which we can always be sure of Hashem's help and blessing. It was Moshe's word, not Moshe's staff, that was intended to bring forth water from the rock at the border of the Land. However, this demonstration was nullified by the sin of Moshe and Aharon.

Yet, their deaths at the border of the Land expressed this fundamental truth even more clearly. This may provide the true explanation for why the Torah uses the word "*kaasher*" to compare the deaths of Moshe and Aharon with their sin.

Fittingly, one of the last prophets in the era when prophecy ended said: "Your fathers, where are they? And will these prophets live forever? But My words and My decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, have surely become your fathers." (Zechariah 1:5-6)



wonder WORLD

HIGHER ORDER OF THOUGHTS



Is seeing and hearing the same thing?

When the brain processes visual stimulus, it relies heavily on the mirror neuron system, mapping the observations directly onto the viewer's region of the brain which executes voluntary movement. This creates an immediate, reflexive form of learning. However, witnessing action remains a largely receptive, visual experience.

In contrast, hearing and repeating words demands a massive shift that actually reshapes the brain. Auditory verbal input passes through the area for decoding, routes through the area for motor planning, and finally engages vocalization. This auditory-to-motor loop requires deep cognitive synthesis, active memory retrieval, and precise coordination.

While seeing an action triggers transient visual imitation, the cognitive cycle of hearing and speaking words rewires the brain's semantic and linguistic structure. It forces the brain to internalize meaning and construct abstract thoughts, transforming language into a permanent biological reality. This transition from passive physical observation to active verbal internalization represents a major leap in cognitive complexity, shifting from automatic reflexes to higher-order of attention and decision making.