



Light Lines

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Light Insight

“Ass-inine Talk”

“And G-d opened the mouth of the donkey...” (22:28)

While the wicked Bilaam was traveling on his way to curse the Jewish People, G-d put speech into the mouth of his donkey, so it could ask why he mistreated it. What

does it mean when a donkey starts to speak?

The essential difference between Man and the animals is his power of speech. In the language of our Sages, Man is called “The Speaker.” This is the quality that epitomizes his elevation above the animals.

This power of speech is given to Man in order to sanctify the physical world, to bring spirituality into our everyday, physical lives. Describing the creation of Man, the Torah says that G-d “blew into his nose a spirit of life.” The Aramaic

translation renders this phrase as “He blew into his nose a speaking spirit.” In Hebrew, the word for “thing” — “davar” — springs from the same root as “dibur” — “word.” Speech is the interface between the world of things — the physical world — and the spiritual world. When Man uses his power of speech to add spirituality to the world, he fulfills his true purpose, he epitomizes the “speaking spirit.” He elevates both himself and the world with him. But when he degrades the power of speech by using it to curse and to denigrate, then Man becomes no more than a talking donkey.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

The Merit System

We know that G-d will not abandon His people Israel. In fact there are two different places in Tanach where it is written explicitly. Each

one, however, seems to suggest a different reason why we will not be abandoned: “For G-d will not abandon His people because of His great Name,” states one

verse (*Samuel I 12:22*). Another passage (*Psalms 94:14*) declares “G-d will not abandon His people nor forsake His heritage,” indicating that His heritage is what guarantees He won’t abandon His people.

The Talmud explains a resolution of the

two seemingly contradictory passages that reminds us both how important our land is to us, and how important we ourselves are to G-d:

If Jews in the Land of Israel should be unworthy of redemption themselves, still G-d promises not to abandon them in the merit of their land which is called G-d’s heritage (explaining *Psalms 94:14*). On the other hand, G-d does not abandon Jews that are outside of the Land of Israel so that His great Name, which is identified with the Jewish People no matter where they may reside, will not be desecrated (*Samuel I 12:22*).

.....Light Update

Ohr Somayach Odessa Opens First Jewish Orphanage In C.I.S.

Housing and caring for almost 100 orphaned and abandoned children, Ohr Somayach’s Jewish orphanage is the first in the Former Soviet Union. The children also attend local Ohr Somayach schools with a total enrollment of over 700. A fifteen minute video “Ohr - Dessa Odyssey” is available upon request.

At the Speed of Light

Ohr Somayach’s popular Web site, including history, law and philosophy as well as humor and even Jewish cartoon strips, registers over 400,000 ‘hits’ a month. The site can be accessed through the World Wide Web: www.ohr.org.il. Keep your eye out for our new High Holiday site which will include insights and practical tips for the holiday.

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The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Judging people favorably means finding excuses for others' questionable behavior, excuses which make sense to us and leave us with a positive feeling towards the person in question. When we find ourselves suspecting others of less than admirable behavior, we must ask ourselves: Are there any redeeming factors? Did I miss something? Did I jump to the wrong conclusion? For instance, take the case of...

She Always Cries at Weddings

I was at a wedding, standing with a group of friends. We were discussing clothing, shoes, bags and getting ready for a big affair.

Sarah admitted, "It took me two hours to get ready for this wedding."

I piped up, "Two hours! I could never spend two hours to get ready."

"Well," commented

Sarah "that's why I look like this and you look like that."

I turned and walked away, not knowing where to put myself or what to think. Why would she have said something like that? After replaying the conversation endless times in my mind, it suddenly dawned on me that Sarah must have felt insulted and lashed back at me for what she felt was an insensitive comment directed at her. Seeing her comment in the context of a response put it in an entirely different light.

A hurtful statement may have been a defensive response to what was perceived as a verbal push. In judging others favorably it is helpful to recognize the part we play in triggering other people's responses. When peo-

ple feel verbally attacked, they may strike back. We often don't see our comments as provocative until someone lets us know — in no uncertain terms — that they felt provoked. Others may perceive our words, tone of voice or facial expressions as hostile or derisive, even though we didn't mean them as such.

The above is an example of finding a merit for a person which, although it does not completely justify the behavior, does make the person look better. To completely exonerate the woman in the story, let's examine her words again, but this time let's interpret her words to mean the **exact opposite**: "That's why I look (bad) like this, and you look (good) like that (because you don't **need** to spend so much time getting ready, while I do)!"

Does this seem like a far-fetched interpretation of her words? Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky was once asked by his students: If everything G-d created has a purpose, what is the purpose of 'crooked' reasoning? His answer: "So we can use it to judge others favorably."

Response Line

Dov Ben Essine from 1000 Oaks, California wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Why is it that we are still saying "Next Year in Jerusalem," since any Jew can now go and live there of his own free will? Thanks for your answer.*

Dear Dov Ben Essine,

The story is told of a poor man, Shlomo, who lived

in a small village. The town-folks wanted to support him, but without making him feel like he was accepting charity. So they came up with a plan: They hired him to sit at the city gates and wait for the Messiah.

One day, a traveler approached the city and asked Shlomo what he was doing. "This is my job," Shlomo said.

"My job is to wait here to greet the Messiah." "Does it pay well?" asked the traveler. "Not really," said Shlomo, "but it's steady work."

When we say "Next year in Jerusalem" we mean that all Jews should be in Israel and in Jerusalem (not just as tourists!). We mean Jerusalem as it is ideally meant to be — with the Holy Temple, Jewish courts, and a Jewish Monarch. Unfortunately, we're still waiting. Even here in Jerusalem we say "Next year in Jerusalem!"