

Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Only Words

The price of everything goes up and up. With one exception. Words. Talk is cheap and getting cheaper by the month. We live in a world where hyperbole has become the normal means of communication. I once scanned a piece of enthusiastic prose in a newsletter trying in vain to find a sentence which didn't end with an exclamation mark! Most ended with two!! Or three!!!

Wow!!!! If the most banal statements are so overpoweringly exciting, where is the emotional space for enthusiasm at something genuinely remarkable? We've already run off the Richter scale of enthusiasm and there's nowhere else to go. One of the casualties of modern life is our appreciation of the importance of words.

Judaism doesn't see words as just important; to the Jewish mind, words are fundamental. G-d created the universe with words. There is a mystical concept that the building blocks of creation are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In Hebrew, the word for "word" is *davar*. Interestingly *davar* also means "thing." To the Jewish mind, "things" are no more than the "words" of G-d. That's what physical reality consists of. Words.

There's an interesting anomaly in this week's Torah portion. Sarah laughed at the prediction of her pregnancy and said, 'Shall I in truth bear a child, though I have aged?' Then G-d reiterated the *bracha* that Sarah would have a child. In last week's *Parsha*, however, Abraham also laughs when he hears the prediction that he will have children. However, in that case, G-d does not repeat the blessing. What is the differ-

ence between the two?

The power of speech.

When Abraham heard of his incipient parenthood, he didn't verbalize his incredulity. Sarah did. Sarah by her skepticism annulled the blessing that rested on her and thus G-d gave her another blessing.

Interestingly, we can see this idea illustrated in the *haftarah* as well: When the child of the Shunamite woman dies, she doesn't say anything to her husband. She merely takes her leave with "Shalom." Even when she comes to the prophet Elisha to beseech him to revive the boy she doesn't say the boy is dead.

The Shunamite woman didn't want to say that her boy had died because she didn't want to lend her speech to making it a fact. Similarly, because Elisha's servant Gehazi stated that the "lad has not awakened" he was unsuccessful in reviving him, and it took Elisha to revive the lad.

It's only words.



“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem...”

Psalms 122

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

Judging favorably is a mitzvah that can bring a strained relationship...

Back to Normal

This past summer, a friend in Israel asked if I knew anyone coming from England who could bring a new Kenwood mixer to replace a broken one. (It is considerably cheaper in England where they are manufactured).

My sister was due to visit us in just a few days, so, I told my friend that I would ask her if she could bring one.

Shortly thereafter, I bought a fan to make my sister's stay more pleasurable in the Jerusalem heat. As I was

not going directly home that evening, I asked this friend, who is also my neighbor, if he would take the fan home for me.

My friend and I both live in a Jerusalem suburb 20 minutes away from town. We both study in a yeshiva in town and take a minibus to yeshiva. I didn't think it would be a major imposition to ask him to bring the fan home for me. He felt it, indicated towards his briefcase as if to say, "sorry, got my hands full already," and asked if I could ask someone else.

"What chutzpa," I said to myself. This "friend" expects me to ask my sister to go buy him a 13 pound mixer and shlepp it across the ocean; yet he won't do me a favor and carry a fan across the street.

The next day my friend came over to me and apologized for not helping me. He explained that around a year ago he had done his back in and had had to spend a month in bed, and that was why he had to be careful.

Response Line

O Jerusalem

Bart Epstein wrote,

Jerusalem isn't mentioned in Islam's "Koran," but it's not mentioned in the Five Books of Moses either. Why? I've heard it argued that the Koran's omission of Jerusalem shows a lack of connection between Islam and Jerusalem, but can't the same be said of Judaism?

Dear Bart,

Jerusalem is mentioned many hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible. As for the Chumash (the Five Books of Moses), it is true that the word "Jerusalem" does not appear there. Most simply because it was not yet called Jerusalem.

Under Jebusite rule and earlier, Jerusalem was divided into two cities,

the western part called Jeru (*Yere*) and the eastern part called Salem (*Shalem*). Both of these names do appear in the Five Books: "And Malki-Tzedek, King of Shalem" (*Genesis 14:18*). "And Abraham called that place...*Yere*" (*Genesis 21:14*).

Around the time of Joshua's conquest, the Amorites consolidated the two halves of the city, and they combined the two names: Jeru-salem. From this point on in history, our Bible refers to Jerusalem countless times.

Furthermore, the Chumash refers 19 times to "the place that G-d will choose" as the center for Jewish life and religion (*e.g. Deuteronomy 12:11, 14, etc.*) The Prophets Shmuel and Gad finally revealed to King David that this chosen place was Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

Another reason Jerusalem isn't

mentioned explicitly in the Chumash as the holy city is that it hadn't yet been revealed as such. Maimonides, writing around 800 years ago, offers three reasons that the Chumash does not reveal the identity of the holy city:

- If the nations had learned that this place would express the highest Jewish ideals, they would have united in an effort to occupy and prevent the Jews from ever controlling it. (Sound familiar?)

- If they had known of Jerusalem's spiritual stature, they may have tried to take advantage of its spiritual nature by making it into a center of idol worship.

- Each of the twelve tribes would have desired to have Jerusalem in their borders, and this would lead to disunity.

In conclusion, Jerusalem played a prominent part in Jewish history and writings more than two thousand years before Islam's rise and the writing of the Koran, which makes no mention of Jerusalem.