



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES



YOM KIPPUR: A DAY OF SPEECH THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

SOURCE AND DISCUSSION SHEET

Of all the methods which God could have use to create the world, He chose to “Speak” the world into existence:

The Process of Creation:

SOURCE 1: *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:1 – Creation of the World*

The world was created through ten statements.

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם

SOURCE 2: *Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1-29;*

God said, “Let there be light” (Bereishit 1:3).

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי אוֹר (בראשית א, ג)

Q: Why do you think God chose this method?

And that wasn’t the last time that God created something with speech as a core element

SOURCE 3a: *Bereishit 2:7 – Creation of Man*

And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being.

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו
נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Q: What is the unique attribute of man that separates him from the animals, who are also described as “living beings” (Bereishit 1:20, 24, 30)?

SOURCE 3b: *Onkelos, ibid. 2:7 – Speech is the power of creation which defines man*

Onkelos translates “man became a living being” as] man became a speaking being.

והות באדם לרוח מְמַלְלָא

Q: How can speech be defined as a power of creation, since it’s not truly physical/material?

A Deeper Look at Speech:

SOURCE 4: *Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei (aish.com) – The interface between the body and the soul is expressed in a person's words*

The interface between man's body and his soul is located in the power of speech and expresses itself in the spoken word. The content of human words are ideas that originate in the soul, but these ideas are packaged in words that emerge from the body. The spoken word is the force that unifies the two parts of Creation. Human words combine the spiritual with the physical and cement the two portions of reality together ...

Q: What does this imply about the nature of reality and the power of speech?

It would seem to suggest that the spiritual gives rise to the physical, and that speech is the key power behind this transformation.

SOURCE 5: *Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Chofetz Chaim: Lesson a Day, p. xxvi – Free will is most manifest through speech*

Humans are made of earth. Any human body can be reduced to a small pile of earth's minerals and elements. Yet, this seemingly insignificant entity has an exalted function – it acts as a vessel for the neshamah (soul), the Heavenly spark with which God imbued man. The mouth is the intersection of this physical and spiritual essence. It ushers man's Godly essence into the physical world in the form of the words it speaks. The ability to speak is a bridge between the physical, earth-bound human and the spiritual being. It provides man with the capacity to activate his spiritual self, and elevate his physical self. When God took the dust of the earth, formed man, and breathed into him a Godly soul, He created a unique creature containing within himself both the spiritual and the physical. It is that duality that endows man with free will. Because man lives in both worlds, it follows then that the mouth where these two worlds intersect, is where free will is most clearly evident.

Q: How do you understand the concept that speech is the battleground where free will is played out?

Speech is the place where our choices become manifest in the world and can be vehicles of elevated spirituality or coarse materialism. (or somewhere in between). Most of our mistakes are caused either directly or indirectly by the words that come out of our mouths.

Yom Kippur: Returning to God through realigning our speech with our souls

Q: The haunting melody of Kol Nidre that ushers us into Yom Kippur is really a declaration of annulling the vows and promises that we may have made this past year. Why do you think we begin Yom Kippur with this declaration instead of a more lofty spiritual concept?

SOURCE 6: *ArtScroll Machzor, Yom Kippur, p.52 – Why do we recite Kol Nidrei immediately prior to Yom Kippur?*

Kol Nidrei emphasizes for us the extreme gravity that the Torah attaches not only to formal vows and oaths, but to the general concept that one must keep his word ... Consequently, when we preface the Yom Kippur prayers not with pleas for forgiveness, but with a declaration regarding vows, we are reminding ourselves of the importance of scrupulously honoring our commitments. Thus we begin Yom Kippur with the recognition that a Jew's word is sacred... We cannot make peace with God until we absolve ourselves of the grievous mistake of violating our word.

Q: We are trying to regain our integrity, the validity of our word as we enter Yom Kippur. How does focusing on our speech help us do that?

SOURCE 7: *Rabbi Avi Shafran, "The Allure of Kol Nidrei," (aish.com) In Kol Nidrei we renounce all that is external to our pure essence.*

We are all compelled, or at least strongly influenced, by any of a number of factors extrinsic to who we really are. We make pacts – unspoken, perhaps, but not unimportant – with an assortment of devils: self-centeredness, jealousy, anger, desire, laziness ...Such weaknesses, though, are with us but not of us; Stripped of the rust we so easily attract, sanded down to our essences, we want to do and be only good.

Might Kol Nidrei carry that message no less? Could its declared disassociation from vows strike our hearts as a renunciation of the "vows," the unfortunate connections, we too often take upon ourselves? If so, it would be no wonder that the prayer moves us so.

Our words express who we are, and Yom Kippur is an opportunity to reinstate our true identity.

Vidui- Confession is the Center of the Yom Kippur Service

Q: The Vidui is the central element of teshuva (repentance) which is the mitzva of the day. Why is the essence of teshuva confession? I would think it would be stopping the bad behavior. Don't they say "talk is cheap"?!

SOURCE 8: *The ArtScroll Siddur, p. 778 – Confessing is at the core of repentance*

The confession of sins is the most essential part of teshuva(repentance). It is human nature for people to rationalize their own shortcomings in their own minds as unavoidable or even to define them as virtues. As long as someone refuses to acknowledge his wrongdoings, he cannot do teshuva sincerely.

- Vidui means "to admit". We are admitting to G-d and to ourselves that we made mistakes. We are owning our choices.
- Also, as you go through the vidui, notice just how many are focused upon how we abuse the power of speech. (more than %25)

Q: How does admitting to our mistakes complete the process of teshuva (repentance) and elicit forgiveness from God?

Conclusion:

It's very nice to be cleansed and forgiven for our mistakes on Yom Kippur, and certainly the path to this outcome is sincere confession and teshuva. However, the barometer of whether we have learned our lesson, is how we will relate to speech beyond Yom Kippur. If we commit to truly upgrading our speech this coming year (and that which gives rise to it) we are guaranteed to experience a marked upgrade in our actions and in our lives.

May we all be written and inscribed in the book of life for a good, happy healthy and peaceful year!