



# A Few Words

Adapted from a Shmuess by Rabbi Stulberger

Parshas Vayeira

By Elan Perchik

In Parshas Vayeira, we learn about the story of three angels appearing in the image of Arabs visiting Avraham Avinu. Upon seeing Avraham, they ask him, “*Ayei Sarah ishtecha*” –“Where is Sarah, your wife?” Listening to such a question, Avraham responds, “*Hinei ba’ohel*” –“Behold, she is in the tent.”

Rashi explains that Avraham’s comment intended to convey that Sarah is very modest and does not wish to publicly appear in front of guests. She possessed a high degree of sensitivity and holiness. But, Rashi further asks, why would these Arab wayfarers wish to know where Sarah was located? Being that they were *malachim* and certainly knew where she was, what point was there to inquire about her whereabouts?

Rashi answers that the angels were in fact not interested in knowing where Sarah was. However, they wished to make Avraham himself aware of something valuable. The *malachim* acted in such a manner “*Kdei le’chaveva al baala*” –“In order to endear Sarah upon Avraham.” The question of the *malachim* followed by the response of Avraham would engender within him a sense of love and appreciation for Sarah. He would think to himself, “My wife is a modest and sensitive woman; she possesses proper dignity and etiquette! She is very special.” The affection which would result from Avraham realizing this was what the *malachim* wished to engender.

What is particularly difficult with this insight of Chazal is what the angels truly thought they would achieve. Avraham and Sarah had been married for quite some time by now and assumingly knew each other’s character very well. What therefore would be added to Avraham’s already deep love for Sarah by being reminded how special she was? Didn’t he already know her exemplary qualities and recognize that she was a modest woman of valor?

But that is the very point. Although Avraham was more than well aware of Sarah’s character, forcing him to think of her in such terms would certainly add to their already beautiful marriage. Bringing such an idea to mind would increase his emotional appreciation for her. And although any increase in esteem for Sarah may have been so ever slight, the *malachim* understood that the constitution of a human being is fine-tuned and sensitive to every little matter. Focusing on another person’s positive qualities significantly enhances one’s feelings towards them. Such is the impact of even a few subtle words.

The same is true on the contrary. Even a couple words can be hurtful and send negative vibes. This is evident as well from later in our Parsha. When Avraham approaches the

city of Gerar, he is met by the inhabitants who inquire, “Is this your sister or your wife?” In response, Avraham says, “There is no fear of Heaven in this place!” What prompted such a comment? Rashi explains that considering that the men of Gerar’s first question concerned Sarah instead of food and lodging provisions it was clear where they placed their focus and priority. Lust occupied the center of their attention, a clear indication that they lacked *yiras shamayim*. It was those few words which said much about their character.

This idea is applicable to words in general. What we say and how we say it makes for all the difference. A sincere, kind word can uplift another and put a smile on their faces, while a hurtful or improper comment can leave one uncomfortable and with an unpleasant feeling. We would most certainly be wise to choose the former attitude of using our wonderful gift of speech to inspire and compliment our fellow Jews.

When Rav Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz zt”l, one of the previous eminent leaders of our generation, was in his nineties, he and his rebbeztzin decided to take a little break. Looking for a place to reside, an American Jew who owned an apartment in Yerushalyim offered for the *gadol hador* and his wife to remain there. And so they did.

After a short break and resuming back to normal life, Rav Lefkowitz invited the man who had so kindly opened his home to stay with him for a Shabbos. As they had just begun the meal, Rav Lefkowitz turned to the man and in a voice slightly louder than usual so his wife could hear said, “Have you ever tasted such delicious challah in your life?”

While Rav Lefkowitz had most certainly tasted his wife’s challah many times before as they had enjoyed a long marriage, making a kind remark was not something he deemed unworthy. Sometimes after many years of marriage, as was the case with Avraham and Sarah, complimenting one’s spouse for the food which has been eaten numerous times or the like may seem unnecessary; but the truth is quite to the contrary. It is specifically after so many years of day in and day out interaction and conversation where complimentary remarks are most appreciated and beneficial. Every husband and every wife can always use hearing a nice word, no matter how small. In this regard, the dictum of Chazal (*Menachos* 110a) is most apropos: “Whether one does a lot or a little, as long as he directs his heart to Hashem.” The same is true of life in general, and marriage in particular: whether an ornate bouquet of flowers or a small “Thank you very much for your delicious challah,” that little display of gratitude and endearment goes a long way.