

He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:3)

For the most part, the idea of “keeping one’s word” is ethical in nature. I gave my word; someone relied on my word; it is only right that I keep my word. Our *parsha* teaches a new dimension in “word keeping”: our words are sacred. If one breaks his word, as in a promise to pay back a debt, to perform a specific endeavor, etc., he is not just acting unethically, but he is actually desecrating his word. Words are holy.

We are used to thinking that *kedushah*, holiness, is relegated to space, time, objects. We view sanctity as innate. Something is either holy from the get-go – or it is not. The Torah teaches us that holiness can be created, manufactured at will. When one consecrates an object, animal, or even money, it becomes holy. The object that had once been mundane is now sacred. Why? It has been sanctified through the medium of someone’s word.

The Torah goes even further. Not only does holiness attach itself to words which are designated for the purpose of sanctifying something, but even ordinary speech, whose goal is not to create holiness, is inviolate once it exits the mouth. When a person makes a vow and abrogates it, the Torah refers to it as an act of desecration. He has profaned his word. The act of breaking one’s word is an act of desecration. Why should “mere” words be holy if their purpose is, in fact, mundane?

The **Nesivos Shalom** cites *Rabbeinu Yonah*’s commentary to *Pirkei Avos* 1:17, in which he compares the Jew’s mouth to a *keli shareis*, ministering vessel, used in the *Bais HaMikdash*. These vessels have a significant role in the Temple service. For example, a *Korban Minchah*, Meal-offering, achieves full *korban* status as soon as it is placed in a *keli shareis*. The vessel endows its contents with *kedushah* – just by being there. Likewise, a Jew’s mouth becomes a *keli shareis*, since it is used for so many functions of service to Hashem. If the mouth is holy, its contents – the words that exit from it- are, by extension, holy.

Why would the mouth more than any other organ of the body achieve *keli shareis* level? Do we not serve Hashem with every fiber of our being? True – but the mouth exemplifies service of Hashem more than any of the other organs of the body. It is with our mouths that we pray, which is a conversation with G-d. We study Torah, recite *Kiddush*, and articulate our remembrance of specific *mitzvos*, such as *Shabbos*, erasing the name of Amalek, and the exodus from Egypt. It is with our mouth that we chose to become Hashem’s Nation with the seminal declaration, *Naase v’Nishma*, “We will do and we will listen.”

Our power of speech is the ministering vessel which transforms our mouths into a *keli kodesh*, holy vessel. Thus, when a Jew does not keep his word, it is a much more egregious sin than simply an ethical character deficiency. It is a disgrace, for he has profaned the holy ministering vessel – his

mouth.