

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

Rashi defines *Lo yacheil d'varo*, "He shall not profane his word." While he does not necessarily profane his word, the mere fact that he does not use his G-d-given speech/word for a purpose imbued with sanctity is considered profanity. When a person uses his G-d-given speech, it should be elevating, sanctifying, complimentary, obligating himself in higher, more consecrating endeavors. Even a mundane conversation which wastes time that could have been used to improve and enlighten is, by omission, a form of profaning. If we want Hashem to listen to our words, we must see to it that they have value and significance. When we assume responsibility, it should be with, and for, purpose. It goes without saying that such purpose must sustain a spiritual connotation in some manner.

The following well-known vignette, cited by *Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita*, underscores this idea. *Horav Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, zl*, popularly known by his *magnum opus*, *Pnei Yehoshua*, was a premier Torah giant who led a number of *kehillos*, congregations, with distinction. He was mentor to many, with his *Pnei Yehoshua* becoming a classic commentary used by every student of *Talmud*. While it certainly requires a scholar with a brilliant and encyclopedic knowledge to author such volumes of commentary, it equally demands extraordinary diligence and commitment to think, write, edit and see these volumes to fruition. How did it happen? What motivated the *Pnei Yehoshua* to accept upon himself such a responsibility?

It was *Kislev 3, 1703*, in the city of Lvov, and the *Pnei Yehoshua* was teaching a group of students. Suddenly, they heard loud noises, like shooting or fire crackers. This was followed by an explosion that set off a conflagration that destroyed a large part of the Jewish community. Apparently, the army had stored kegs of gunpowder which exploded. Miraculously, although the house in which the *Pnei Yehoshua* was teaching was demolished, he and his students were spared. His wife, daughter and thirty-four members of the Jewish community were not as fortunate. In the midst of the wreckage that had once been his teaching room, the *Pnei Yehoshua* took a vow that, if he managed to survive, he would spend his days and nights in ceaseless Torah study. He was twenty-three years old at the time. He survived, and, shortly thereafter, he commenced writing his *sefer*. The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, attested to the fact that the *Pnei Yehoshua* had completed *Shas*, the entire *Talmud*, thirty-six times before he wrote his commentary. The *Chasam Sofer* said that, from the time of the *Rashba* (a *Rishon*), no *sefer* had achieved the eminence and distinction of the *sefer* of the *Pnei Yehoshua*.

The *Pnei Yehoshua's* learning was so intense that he could sit in the cold and not notice. One day, his students could not leave their homes due to the bitter, frigid weather. When the sun came out in the afternoon and it warmed up enough to go outside, the students found the *Pnei Yehoshua* still wrapped in his *Tallis* and *Tefillin*, learning – with icicles hanging from his beard. After the *Chida* visited the *Pnei Yehoshua*, he remarked, "I was *zocheh*, merited, to be *mekabel* the *Pnei*

HaShechinah; his visage is like that of a *Malach Elokim*.”

Returning to our *pasuk* (from which we digressed), we derive from here that, if one is in dire circumstances such that he feels that it behooves him to make a vow for therapeutic reasons, it should be for a commitment to a *davar she'b'kiddushah*, holy undertaking (as did the *Pnei Yehoshua*). He should not make a vow abstaining from an aspect of materialism (such as, he will not eat steak, etc.). It should be to undertake to learn a specific study, such as: *Mishnayos*, *Gemorah*, *halachah*, etc. or to involve himself in a Torah or *chesed*-related endeavor. His vow should be about elevating the sanctity of his life – not profaning it. A vow that focuses on materialistic abstinence, as opposed to elevated sanctity, is *chillul devaro*, profaning his words.