



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Curses!
2. Answer to Yiddle Riddle



Shira Aliza Phillips <philmam@erols.com> from Brooklyn, New York wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

If you are cursed by somebody will it really have an effect? I know that when Bilaam cursed people it really worked, but is this still true today? Will it work if the person who utters the curse is not a Talmid Chacham [Torah Scholar]? I'm asking because almost exactly one year ago, the following happened to me: A classmate made a face at me, I made one back at him, he made a disparaging comment about my maturity and I replied that he wasn't all that mature himself. He then told me, "You'll pay for this." On my way down to my locker after that very class, ironically, while asking him exactly how he was going to make me pay, I fell down the stairs and twisted my ankle badly. I was on crutches for two weeks. Are these two things correlated? Also, if you curse someone (with swear words, not like "May you grow like an onion, with your head in the ground") will that have any effect on the person? I personally have never used a swear word in my life, but a few classmates tell me that that's weird and that cursing is normal. Are there any sources in the Torah about either kind of cursing? Eagerly awaiting your reply.

Dear Shira Aliza Phillips,

Hashem created us with a very powerful gift that can have tremendous impact. When we use our mouths for good, to pray, to learn Torah, or to cheer someone up, we bring spiritual illumination to the world.

However, when we use our mouths to gossip, dispute, insult, or curse, then we spread spiritual pollution in the world.

It is a Torah prohibition to curse a fellow Jew. The root of this prohibition is to avoid causing injury with the power Hashem put into our mouths. Even though we have no ability to know exactly how a curse will effect the other person or how much power we personally have to utter a curse, however, even a simple person might be able to bring suffering and pain through a curse.

I don't think you need to correlate your ankle injury with your classmate's 'curse.' Let's understand rather that the juxtaposition of events was a Heavenly hint that the power of the mouth is something we have to relate to and work on.

As for 'curse words,' they are certainly forbidden. "One should always speak with refined language," says the Talmud. When possible, the Sages avoided saying even such words as 'defiled,' choosing 'not pure' instead. They even avoided saying the names of non-kosher animals.

Suppose the Queen of England asked you to describe the odor of week-old fish. Would you say "Very displeasing, your majesty" or would you say "Yuch! Disgusting!" The way you speak to a queen is the way you should always speak. It shows what type of person you are, and what type of person you will become.

Once, in Temple times, a certain *kohen* made a disparaging remark about the size of the sacrificial portion he received. "I only got a piece the size of a lizard's tail." Because he used a word for a non-kosher animal in connection with a holy offering, he aroused the suspicion of the Sages. They checked into his ancestry and discovered that his priestly lineage was indeed invalid, that his birth was the result of a prohibited relationship and that he was unfit to serve in the Temple.

Although 'curse words' may be common, so are mosquitoes! You should avoid both. One of the most difficult trials in life is doing that which is right when those around you are not. Keep up the good work!

Sources:

- Leviticus 19:14, Exodus 22:27
- Sefer HaChinuch 231
- Talmud, Tractate Pesachim 3a
- Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 33a

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

What holiday addition to the 'grace after meals' is it that most people don't say and hope they never have to?

Answer: *Ya'aleh Veyavo* for Yom Kippur. If a sick person needs to eat on Yom Kippur, he adds the *ya'aleh veyavo* insertion into the 'grace after meals' and mentions Yom Kippur. Even sick people rarely say this, because — if they can — they always try to

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- Pinchas

eat small amounts which don't require 'grace after meals.' Good health to everyone!


Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 618:10

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