

Dear Friends,

Times are challenging right now. Many are home with children who aren't used to being home endlessly and we may be working at the same time. We have health worries and financial worries and just a huge question of what will be. We're thinking about Pesach and we're thinking about after Pesach. We may be thinking of our parents and grandparents. And we are all davening for critically ill people we know.

This past Shabbos, we said *mevarchin hachodesh* (for most of us) in our homes with emotions running high. The month of Nissan is almost here. **Each of the Jewish months is associated with a different physical power, and Nissan is connected to the power of speech.**

Speech, as we all know, can be an immense power for good—we can speak words of Torah, of love, of friendship. Speech can also wound, hurt, and even destroy lives.

Now let's jump to the events which we commemorate in Nissan. In *Mitzrayim*, *klal Yisrael* had to do backbreaking work. *Avodas Perach*. *Perach* can also mean *Peh-rach* – a soft mouth. Weak speech. Why? Because they lost their ability to speak, to verbalize, to express themselves. And that was part of their terrible *galus*.

It's only when we give an experience words that the swirling, confusing mess inside of us gains some kind of order. Words give it a name. We compare it with other experiences—"It was like that...", or, "It felt like that time when..." When we talk, we can start to understand what we're going through. We can start to process and make meaning of it. What's inside is externalized. **And that's the sense of relief we experience when we share difficulties.** When we can articulate an experience, we can acknowledge what we're going through.

Speech is the seed of redemption. Because it's only when we can examine something on the outside that we can say, what am I doing about it? How can I change this experience and how can I change *from* this experience? And then we

can ask, so, what kind of reality do I want to be living in? Through speech, we can start to expand our inner horizons.

Right now, we're all in straits. We're in the meitzar of Mitzrayim, even in 21st century America. **In this month of Nissan, we need to find the words—whether from the siddur or in our own words—to call out to Hashem.**

Rav Matisyahu Salomon talks about how when we daven, we can work on articulating the details of our experiences. For example, it's easy and natural to say (whether in the context of formal tefillah or not), "Hashem, help me with the kids today." But when we give the details, "Hashem, help me that today, Yitzchok shouldn't provoke Dovid, because then Dovid takes it out on Rivky and I just lose it with all three." Bringing out the details of our requests, verbalizing our experience, not only externalizes it, it is using speech to forge a real connection to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. A connection that doesn't just cover the generalities of our lives, but even the small details. **It is using speech to plant the seeds of redemption from the difficulties we are enduring, individually and as a klal.**

Speech has another power. Let's think about this together.

How many thoughts go through our minds each minute? How many each hour? Each day?

Scientists estimate wildly. They say **we may think anywhere between fifty and seventy thousand thoughts each and every day.** That's a lot.

How many of those thoughts become speech? Words? Conversations? We certainly don't have fifty thousand conversations each day. We don't even have five thousand.

We're hugely selective in which thoughts we choose to share. Our challenge today is to become even more conscious about which thoughts become our speech—because our speech becomes our reality. **When we talk positive, we feel positive.** On the other hand, when we focus—and talk about worry and despair, then we are living in that zone.

When we look around us, which stories are people choosing to share? Some are sharing about difficult cases. Statistics. Government measures. But people are sharing other stories, too. There are stories of kindness. Of recovery. Of people using this time to do fantastic projects with their children, to reconnect with those closest to them. **This is using the power of Nissan – speech- to build us and our families, and to actually shape the reality in which we’re living.** Things are indeed upside down, but if our speech is about hope and optimism, if it’s about the meaning and change we’re experiencing, then we can create and live in a place of beauty even in our current dire straits.

True, right now we’re in bewilderment. We’re in a meitzar; we’re struggling. We don’t have to only share the butterflies and rainbows. We should be real and honest. But we also need to be aware that we can choose what to talk about. We can choose which part of thought and inner reality gets concretized and put into the world. In doing so, **we’re choosing which reality we’re going to live in.** If we highlight bitachon, we’re going to be living in a place where we feel Hashem’s presence. If we highlight optimism, we’ll be living in a place of hope.

We’re coming up to Nissan. We have the feminine strength to articulate, express, connect through speech. Let’s think about how we can do that in a way that leads us out of constriction, and into expansiveness.

Our two takeaways we can all try for today: We can inject our tefillah or our running dialogue with Hashem with the details of our lives, needs, and wishes. We can think about the content of the conversations we’re having with our families and friends. Are we going to focus only on the difficult stories? Or are we going to verbalize those thoughts—however fleeting—that are whispering of the significance of this time? Today, we can choose bitachon and hope.

May we have the ability to fuel our thoughts and express our words in ways that lead us to closer connection with Hashem and that create uplifting and meaningful days.

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