



BE A WOMAN OF
Your Word

The Power of Speech
– Tisha B'Av

Written and edited by Dr. Ronit Ziv Kreger,
Momentum Director of Education and Leadership Development.



THE CREATIVE POWER OF WORDS

Speech is so singularly important that the entire world is created through God's words. In the story of Creation, God begins the process of creating the world by saying "Let there be light" and then uses speech each day to complete the Creation. When human beings are created on the sixth day of Creation, the great commentator Onkelos tells us that we humans are distinguished from all other creatures by our ability to speak. Just as God created the world through speech, we create our worlds through speech. But speech can also destroy. Proverbs (18:21) tells us: "Death and life are in the hands of the tongue." We know firsthand how negative speech can cut down, humiliate and injure others.

Our session on speech is connected to the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av – the 9th of Av. This annual day of mourning commemorates the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. But it is not just a day of mourning, an ancient and all-too-distant national tragedy. We are also invited on this day to mourn tragedies much closer to home.

What is the Hebrew word for the Temple? It is called the *Beit Hamikdash* – literally translated as 'the holy house'. The Temple stands as an archetypal symbol of home and the holiness that a home can – and should - contain. This day recognizes the fragility of that ideal structure and invites us to introspection on how we house holiness in our personal homes.

Onkelos was a Roman convert to Judaism who lived in the first century CE. Onkelos translated the Torah into Aramaic, so that ordinary Jews would have access to its wisdom following the Babylonian Exile.

What reason are we given in our tradition for why the Temple was destroyed? Not politics, nor corruption. Rather, the Temple was razed due to a type of corruption of the soul known as negative speech. Words are the invisible yet essential building blocks of our homes.

The rabbis tell us that the Temple was destroyed, because people spoke in destructive ways to each other. In our own lives, we see how a kind or thoughtful comment can lift spirits and create friendship and peace, or how a negative comment can lead to pain, hatred and jealousy. As mothers, we can be mindful of the ability of our words to inspire, build and heal. In this session, we will discuss this important topic of the power of our words. We will gain skills and strategies to use our words to bring healing and vitality to the world around us.

Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *How do I currently use my words to help my family grow? How might I use words to further spread understanding in my family, community and world?*
- *How can I deliver constructive critique (tochacha) in a loving, supportive way so that it is heard and helpful?*
- *How can understanding even a few words of the Hebrew language spiritually enrich me and my family?*
- *What are some practical strategies I can use to be more deliberate about the words that I use?*

GOOD WORDS AND BAD WORDS

As we grow older and wiser, we realize how utterly false the schoolyard song is: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Often the worst pain we experience stems from the words of others or from seeing the effect of our own words on someone else. Understanding the tremendous impact of our words compels us to use them positively. For they have a nuclear power to improve our relationships, our communities and the world.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Orot HaKodesh, Vol. 3 , p.285

As the soul is elevated, we become acutely aware of the tremendous power that lies in our faculty of speech. We recognize clearly the enormous significance of each utterance; the value of our prayers and blessings... and conversations. We learn to perceive the overall impact of speech. We sense the change and great stirring of the world that comes about through speech.

כשנשמתו של אדם מתעלה הרי הוא מרגיש ביותר את הגבורה העצומה של כח הדיבור. ויודע באמת את הערך הגדול של כל דיבור שלו, את ערך תפלתו וברכותיו ... וכל שיחותיו, ואת הערך של כל הדיבור הכללי הוא צופה, וחש הוא את תנועת העולם ותסיסתו הגדולה שהדיבור פועל.

Rabbi Abraham Kook was the Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine.

- *Can you remember a time when something someone said had a big impact on you?*
- *Can you remember a time when your words had a big impact on others?*
- *Have you seen “change and great stirring of the world” that came through speech? How did mere words have such great power?*

Leviticus Rabbah 33:1 (Behar)

Rabban Gamaliel said to Tavi his servant: 'Go and get me good food from the market.' Tavi went and bought him tongue. He said to him: 'Go and get me bad food from the market.' Tavi went and bought him tongue. Said he to him: 'What is this? When I told you to get good food you bought me tongue, and when I told you to get bad food you also bought me tongue!' He replied: 'Good comes from it and bad comes from it. When the tongue is good there is nothing better, and when it is bad there is nothing worse.' Rabi made a feast for his disciples and placed before them tender tongues and hard tongues. They began selecting the tender ones, leaving the hard ones alone. Said he to them: Note what you are doing! As you select the tender and leave the hard, so let your tongues be tender to one another.

Leviticus Rabbah is a collection of sermons and explanations on the themes or texts of the book of Leviticus, *VaYikra*. It was written in the Land of Israel, around the mid-7th Century CE.

אמר רבי שמעון לטבי עבדו: – לך לשוק וקנה לי איזה מאכל טוב! הלך טבי וקנה לשון של פרה והביאה לרבי שמעון. אמר רבי שמעון לך עוד פעם לשוק וקנה לי מאכל רע. יצא וקנה לו עוד לשון. שאל אותו רבי שמעון: – אמור לי טבי, מדוע עשית זאת? כאשר בקשתי ממך לקנות לי מאכל טוב, הבאת לשון, וכאשר בקשתי ממך לקנות מאכל רע, שוב קנית לשון? אמר לו: גם טוב וגם רע יוצא ממנו. כאשר הלשון טובה, אין דבר טוב ממנה, וכאשר היא רעה, אין דבר רע ממנה.

רבי עשה סעודה לתלמידיו, הביא לפניהם לשונות רכים ולשונות קשים, התחילו בוררין ברכים ומניחין הקשים, אמר להם דעו מה אתם עושין כשם שאתם בוררין את הרכין ומניחין את הקשים כך יהיה לשונכם כך אלו לאלו.

Ethics of Our Fathers (Pirkei Avot) 5:7

Wise people (1) do not speak excessively in the presence of those wiser than they are; (2) they do not interrupt their friends' words; (3) they do not reply in haste. (4) They do ask what is relevant, and answer to the point; (5) deal with first things first and last things last; (6) admit, "I have not heard," of what they have not heard; And (7) they admit to the truth.

חכם אינו מדבר בפני מי שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה ובמנין, ואינו נכנס לתוך דברי חברו, ואינו נבהל להשיב, שואל פניו ומשיב כהלכה, ואומר על ראשון ראשון ועל אחרון אחרון, ועל מה שלא שמע, אומר לא שמעתי, ומודה על האמת.

Ethics of Our Fathers, Pirkei Avot, is a tractate of the Mishnah that contains the ethical teachings of the ancient rabbis.



- Which of these practices do you engage in already?
- Which of these practices might be something you'd like to take on?
- What guidance on speech would you add to the seven items on the list?
- What guidance on speech would you want to live by?

LORI'S STRATEGIES TO ELIMINATE GOSSIP



Ten Pathways to Eliminate Gossip¹

By Lori Palatnik and Bob Berg

1. **Speak No Evil.** Say only positive statements. Let words of kindness be on your tongue. This means to respond instead of react. Edit your speech before you speak.

¹ From: Lori Palatnik with Bob Berg, *GOSSIP: Ten Pathways To Eliminate It From Your Life And Transform Your Soul*. Simcha Press, 2002.

Leviticus (VaYikra) 19:16

Do not go about as a talebearer among your countrymen... I am the Lord.

לא-תלך רכיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל-דָּם רַעַךְ אֲנִי ה'.

Midrash Tehillim 52

A person who slanders kills three — the teller, the listener, and the victim.

האומר לשון הרע הורג שלושה, המספרו והמקבלו והנאמר עליו.

2. **Hear No Evil.** Refuse to listen to gossip, slander and other negative forms of speech. If you're on a diet, don't bring the cake and cookies into the house. If you're ending gossip, try to keep away from conversations that may tempt you to listen or chime in. If avoiding the conversation is impossible, have another topic of "positive" interest you can quickly bring up in order to change the subject.
3. **See No Evil.** Judge people favorably, the way you would want them to judge you. If you've ever been accused of doing something for which you know you were innocent, then you know how it feels to be misjudged. Remember, if you weren't there, you don't know. Even if you were there, you may have missed the context of what actually happened.
4. **Don't Rationalize Destructive Speech.** Excuses like "But it's true" or "I'm only joking" or "I can tell my spouse anything" just don't cut it. Gossip is gossip. The fact that it is true is what qualifies it as gossip. If it were not true, it would be libel or slander, depending upon the medium.
5. **Beware of Speaking Evil Without Saying An Evil Word.** Body language even with positive speech can bring tremendous destruction.

6. **Be Humble.** Avoid Arrogance. These will be your greatest weapons against destructive speech. Take pleasure in your accomplishments, not pride. This way you recognize the Ultimate Source of your accomplishments. Those who are arrogant are so full of themselves that there is no room for God in their lives.
7. **Beware of Repeating Information.** Even positive information needs permission before being repeated. Telling someone who's out of a job that your mutual friend got a raise does not constitute proper speech.
8. **Honesty Really is the Best Policy – Most of the Time.** Be careful to always tell the truth unless it will hurt others or violate privacy. Strive for honesty in everything you do. If being honest means unnecessarily hurting another's feelings, it's better not to be so truthful. Those who boast about being “brutally honest” are usually more brutal than honest.

Midrash Tehillim 120:2

Our tongues are like arrows – once we have shot off our mouths in slander and gossip, our words proceed to destroy the victim's character and there is nothing we can do to stop them.

נמשל הלשון לחץ ולמה?... כיון שירה אותו
והלך אפילו מבקש להחזירה אינו יכול להחזיר.

Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 98:23

Out of all weapons, why are our tongues compared to arrows? For all other weapons kill up-close, but this one can strike from afar. So it is with slander; it is uttered in Rome and kills in Syria.

וימה דאיה למשולן בחץ מכל כלי זין, אלא כל
כלי זין מכין במקומם וזה מפה מרחוק, כך הוא
לשון הרע דאמור ברומי



9. **Learn to Say, “I’m Sorry.”** Everyone makes mistakes. If you've spoken badly about someone, clear it up immediately. It might be embarrassing, but get it over with quickly. Apologize, ask for forgiveness, and let him or her know it won't happen again.
10. **Forgive.** If you have been wronged, let it go. Forgive for your sake, if not for theirs. Those who can forgive live healthier, happier, and less stressful lives. Those who say they'll forgive but not forget are actually saying that they'll neither forgive nor forget.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger¹

Navigating the distinction between using speech constructively versus destructively is a balance not always simple to strike. And yet it is one that is crucial. Our words - like fire - can illuminate and warm but can also scorch.

The 9th of Av global day of introspection and fasting is an invitation to look squarely at the cost of negative speech. We can look at the price Jewish people have paid historically and the price we pay in our homes and communities. Yes, there will be conflict in our homes. The point is not to avoid it, but rather, to uplift it, through caring and care-full engagement.

The Torah tells us that we have an obligation to critique someone who does the wrong thing. In Hebrew this critique is called *tochacha*. Simply ignoring what another person does when it is off track is often not the most loving thing we can do for them. We are called to engage in critique because of our love for the other and our belief in their inherent potential.

However, the sages of the Talmud teach that we are only allowed to critique others if we think they will be receptive. Reproving someone who is resistant will only make things worse. Giving constructive critique can be very tricky. We may be hesitant about offending others, concerned they will misunderstand us, or worried about the effect on our relationship with them. When the other person is your child, it can get even trickier. How can we critique our children when we believe they are making the wrong decisions, and communicate with them lovingly and with respect?

Think about a situation in which you feel a need to reprove someone. Read through the following guidelines about how to critique another, and then jot down some talking points, or even a short draft of what you would say.

- 1. Critique must come from a place of love and respect.**
Don't attempt to reprove someone when you are still angry. Wait until you are able to approach the other from a place of support and love. Rabbi Moshe Alshich explains:



¹ Adapted from Ronit Ziv-Kreger © 2012

Leviticus 19:17

Do not hate your fellow in your heart. Reprove [or reason with] your neighbor frankly so you will not bear sin because of him/her.

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְךָ; הוֹכֵחַ
תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ, וְלֹא תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא

BE A WOMAN OF YOUR WORD

“This is the meaning [of the verse] (Proverbs 9:8): ‘Do not reprove a fool for he’ll hate you. Reprove a wise person, and he’ll love you.’ When you want to reprove your friend, don’t say: ‘You are a fool, why did you commit such a transgression?’ Because then considerable rudeness will come your way and you’ll be answered: ‘What do you know that I don’t know? Like you, I have a heart to discern between the profane and the holy. Who put you minister and judge to reprove me?’ However, if you begin by speaking well with the friend: ‘My dear and upstanding friend, how could you have done such an ill thing?’ Then s/he will not answer you rudely. And that is why it says ‘Do not reprove a fool...’ It means that if you are reproving, do not say or think such things as ‘you are a fool.’ ‘Reprove a wise person’ [thus means] say to them: ‘You are so wise, so how is it that you would do such a thing?’

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) was a rabbi and biblical commentator who was born in the Ottoman Empire and moved to Safed. He is also known as Alshich HaKadosh.

2. **Seek to clarify, listen, and be specific.** The Hebrew word for reproving is *tochacha*, which the great commentator, Rashi, says comes from the Hebrew word for proof, *hochacha*. Start with asking clarifying questions to help yourself and the other person gain a deeper understanding. Listen, without assuming you have the full picture. After clarifying, if you choose to critique, heed Rashi’s sage advice:

"Critique is always about clarifying things."² Help to clarify by being specific about what you saw, how you feel, and what you are requesting.

3. **Focus on the problem, not the person.** Beruriah, a great female sage during the second century C.E., once heard her husband Rabbi Meir praying for the demise of some troublemakers. She advised him to pray instead for the demise of the unfitting behavior. Rabbi Meir took her advice and they indeed mended their ways.³ Beruriah’s advice holds true for us today as well: focus on the problem

Beruriah (2nd Century CE) is one of several women quoted as a sage in the Talmud. She was the wife of the sage Rabbi Meir and the daughter of Rabbi Hananiah Ben Teradion, who was put to death by the Romans for teaching Torah.

² Rashi, comment on Genesis 20:16

³ Babylonian Talmud Berachot 10a

behavior rather than making statements about the character of the person.

4. **Only give critique if you trust that the other is receptive to it.** The Talmud (Yevamot 65b) says: “Just as one is commanded to say that which will be heeded, so one is commanded not to say that which will not be heeded.”⁴ Consider whether you are the right person to deliver the message, or if there is someone who can deliver the message and be better received. Also consider: When and where should you give the reproof? How should you structure it? Give this careful thought before you start the conversation.
5. **Avoid humiliating anyone.** The rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud implore us to be vigilant to avoid humiliating another person. They go so far as to liken public humiliation to killing the person, noting that humiliation can lead to blood draining from the person's face, which they see as a form of 'spilling blood.' If you critique someone, plan to speak with them privately, not in public, and be careful to guard the other's dignity.
6. **Manage your own mindset.** Even if you determine that the other person will not be receptive to the reproof, and decide to refrain from speaking to them about it, the Torah teaches

you not to hate them. The same verse that tells us to give reproof, also says: “You shall not hate your fellow in your heart.”⁵

7. **Don't avoid constructive conflict just to preserve artificial harmony.** The Midrash tells us: “Love unaccompanied by critique is not love...Peace unaccompanied by reproof is not peace.” Make the effort to deliver your constructive criticism even if it is uncomfortable for you to do so.
8. **Constructive critique is not easy to give and difficult to receive.** The Sages have said that nobody knows how to deliver reproof the way it should be done, nor do we know how to receive it well. Try your best, using these guidelines. Also consider beginning by humbly acknowledging that it is difficult, but you are offering your words with love and appreciation.

**Midrash Genesis Rabbah
54:3**

Love unaccompanied by
critique is not love... Peace
unaccompanied by reproof
is not peace.

כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁאֵין עִמָּה תוֹכָחָה אֵינָה
אֲהָבָה... כָּל שְׁלוֹם שֶׁאֵין עִמּוֹ תוֹכָחָה
אֵינוֹ שְׁלוֹם.

4 Yevamot 65b

5 Leviticus 19:17



Rachel Tzinberg
Chicago, IL USA

PRAISE: PERILS AND BENEFITS FOR CHILDRENS' SELF ESTEEM

The reward is according to the effort.

- Pirkei Avot 5:26

Many parents believe that praise can help build their child's confidence. We tell children, "you are so smart!" "you are so creative!" However, research has found that not all praise is equal. This type of praise focused on *talent*, such as the above examples, can actually undermine a child's confidence and perseverance. Dr. Carol Dweck's fantastic book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, documents research findings indicating that such praise leads to a *fixed* mindset - thinking that qualities such as intelligence or talent are fixed traits.

This bears out through Eva Pomerantz and Ellen Kempner's study of mothers and praise.¹ Through a study of 120 pairs of mothers and children, the researchers determined that mothers who praised their children's person, saying things like "You are smart," had an adverse effect on their children's desire to challenge themselves. The children did not want risk getting disconfirming evidence to "being smart" by giving something their full effort.

A study from Reed College and Stanford University shows similar findings, with students who received such praise from authority figures becoming, "risk averse and lacking in perceived autonomy."² Instead, students sought more validation from their

teachers and were reluctant to persevere through challenging tasks. People with a *fixed* mindset spend time getting assurance of or documenting their talent rather than growing it.

Dr. Carol Dweck explains, however, that praise which focuses on *effort* leads to a *growth* mindset, "In a *growth* mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening. So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow." The research she gathered shows that **it is specific praise, which is focused on effort that fosters children's positive identity.**

Parents can use language of *noticing* specific effort rather than general comments such as "great job!" speaking of the *process* and the strategy rather than focusing on the result. For example: "I saw you stuck with it, trying different ways to figure out this problem." "All the effort you put in over the year led to today's performance. Are you feeling as proud of your-self for all your hard work as I'm?"

Such comments can help your children develop a growth mindset, and an awareness which our sages taught long ago (regarding spiritual matters) that: "The reward is according to the effort." It fosters the inner confidence and perseverance which King Solomon observed: "A spiritually developed person falls down seven times and gets up each time."³

1 E.M. Pomerantz & S.G. Kempner, (2013). Mothers' daily person and process praise: Implications for children's theory of intelligence and motivation. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(11), 2040-2046.

2 Po Bronson, *How Not to Talk to Your Kids*; NY Mag: August 3, 2007. <http://nymag.com/news/features/27840/index.html>

3 Proverbs, 24:16 - often translated as "A righteous person..."

SOME JEWISH GUIDELINES FOR PRAISING YOUR CHILD

The following three suggestions, adapted from *Five Ways to Praise for Healthy Self-Esteem*, by Adina Soclof, present some ideas on how to use “good praise” in your Jewish home.

1. Naming actions that align with positive traits

Instead of: “You’re such a big girl, try: “You hung your coat where it goes. That keeps our home organized. That’s being responsible.”

2. Using the Hebrew word “*middah*” to talk about traits

To build Jewish identity you can use the Hebrew term *middah* which literally means ‘measure,’ as in ‘good measure,’ and connotes just the right balance of a certain trait. Instead of: “You are a wonderful friend!” Try: “You found a toy that Eli likes. First you tried the bird, but he didn’t want that. Then you tried the elephant. That is using the *middah* of patience.”

3. Identifying a child’s actions with Jewish values and *mitzvot*

Beyond using the word *middah* to describe a child’s traits, we can let children know when their actions align with Jewish values and *mitzvah* behavior guidance. We might choose one value or *mitzvah* to focus on for a period of time and let children know when we see that value or *mitzvah* in actions. Any one of the values in the Year of Growth could be a focus. Here are some examples:

Instead of, “You are so sweet,” try, “You got Sara a cup of juice. That is how you do *chesed* (loving kindness).”

“You used both sides of this paper; that shows the *mitzvah* of *bal tashchit* (avoiding waste).”

“You invited a new neighbor to play; that shows the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim* (hospitality).”

“You spoke up when a friend was being bullied; that shows *azut de’kedusha* (courage or holy boldness).”

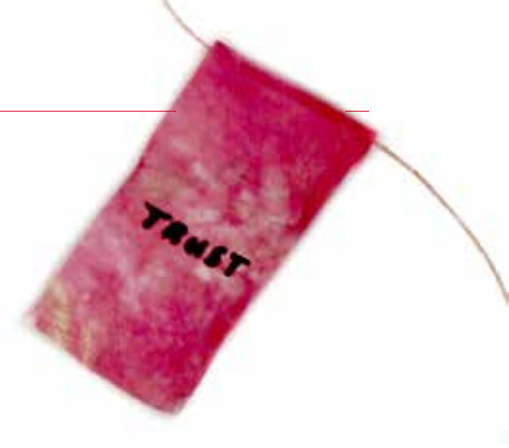
Instead of, “You are such a great boy!” try: “You got me a tissue. That shows the *mitzvah* of *kibud horim* (respect to parents.)”

Role play common situations in your home and consider what value you may choose to focus on and how you can use these guidelines to build familiarity with that value and to incorporate “good praise.”

- *What kind of praise do you usually give your children?*
- *What can you change in order to give “good praise” that leads to positive identity?*
- *Turn to the reflection/writing chart near the end of the session. Give yourself 5-10 minutes to write down your answers to the questions in the chart. Writing in silence allows your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, discuss with your sister some of the issues and ideas that came up for you in this exercise.*

REFLECTING ON OUR WORDS

By Jacqueline Serebrani-Kesner¹



Here's an idea you can for you to do as a group during your session. Alternately, women could discuss the activity in your session, and prepare bags with the materials to do at home with their families.

Begin by reflecting on words and sentiments that are especially important to you. Jot down your thoughts on questions such as the following:

- *When have your words uplifted others?*
- *What words nurture you?*
- *When have your words sparked creativity?*
- *What words foster your growth?*
- *How do your words help others to grow?*
- *About what have you spoken up to be helpful?*
- *In what ways did you use words to be an upstander rather than a bystander?*
- *In what ways did you use words to support inclusivity?*

- *What words express your hopes for Israel and the Jewish people?*
- *What are you striving towards?*
- *How might you draw more holiness into your speech?*
- *What did you mourn over this year?*
- *What are you learning from shattering experiences?*
- *What words describe your values and the values of your family?*
- *What words of Torah can you draw into your life?*
- *What new connections are you making?*

From your reflections craft phrases or key words that succinctly express your sentiments. Write the sentiments on individual flags (see illustration). Once all the flags are created, attach them to the 'string', hang them and use them as a point of conversation and inspiration.

¹ Jacqueline Serebrani-Kesner is an interdisciplinary arts educator. More about Creative Arts Enrichment can be found at www.creativeartsenrichment.org. Jacquie can be reached at jserebrani@creativeartsenrichment.org.

Materials Needed:

Scissors

Glue

Assorted paper cut into 2" x 4" pieces

"Sharpie" style markers

String, wool, ribbon or jute, for hanging the "flags"

Directions:

1. Cut a 3' length of either string, wool, ribbon, jute, etc.
2. Cut paper into 2" x 4" pieces. For 3' of string cut 6-8 pieces of paper.
3. After writing your thoughts/feelings on the flags, fold top of paper and crease. Open crease and add glue, attaching to string/ribbon/jute.



LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER: SPOTLIGHT ON ISRAEL

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda



Eliezer Ben-Yehuda at work

(Credit: www.jewishcurrents.org/tag/eliezer-ben-yehuda/)

Israel is a feast for the senses. The sights, smells, tastes, textures, and sounds of the land are embedded in the daily life of the country. One of the great pleasures to many of those who spend time there, whether as a visitor or a resident, is the sound of Hebrew, a once ancient tongue turned modern, as the national language of Israel.

The remarkable process that led to the development of Modern Hebrew was the life's work of the maverick visionary, Eliezer

Ben-Yehuda. Born in Lithuania in 1858, Ben-Yehuda dreamed of creating a Jewish national homeland and reviving ancient Hebrew to connect its people. His unwavering belief was that Hebrew would be the cement to bind and strengthen the nation.

When Ben-Yehuda arrived in Jerusalem in 1881, Hebrew had not been a spoken language since biblical times. Nevertheless, Ben-Yehuda worked in earnest to realize his vision of uniting Jews through their ancient tongue. His first test case would be a very personal one. Together with his wife, Deborah Jonas, Ben-Yehuda devoted himself to raising the first Modern Hebrew-speaking child, their own son, Ben-Zion Ben-Yehuda (later known as Itamar Ben-Avi).

Ben-Yehuda believed that if his son could be taught to speak only Hebrew, he would serve as proof of the practicality of his dream and its feasibility for the whole nation. From birth, Ben-Yehuda and Deborah strictly controlled their son's environment. A number of house rules were designed to prevent Ben-Zion's exposure to languages other than Hebrew. For example, he was not allowed to play with other children in an effort to limit his exposure to their native tongues, and when visitors came to the house that did not know Hebrew, Ben-Zion was sent to bed so that he would not hear their foreign languages.



Raising a child with a growing vocabulary required Ben-Yehuda to constantly develop new words for his son's evolving capacity. Many of Modern Hebrew's earliest words were created in response to everyday needs and the interactions between a child and his parents. As Ben-Zion's language facility grew, Modern Hebrew kept apace. With each of his son's birthdays, Ben-Yehuda and his Hebrew-speaking family increasingly became a model and inspiration for the entire nation.

Outside of their home, Ben-Yehuda worked to win acceptance of Hebrew as the language of instruction in schools while continuing his development of a vocabulary that would transform biblical Hebrew into a practical, contemporary means of communicating. He gained the support of educators, many of whom shared Ben-Yehuda's nationalistic vision. With them behind him, Ben-Yehuda's dream of Hebrew as the glue binding together the Jewish people was catalyzed. Children, arriving in their homeland speaking a number of different languages, developed together a sense of nationhood rooted in their newly-adopted common tongue.

Ben-Yehuda never stopped expanding the language. He worked tirelessly for the rest of his life, developing vocabulary in response to the growing needs of the nation. In 1910 he published the first edition of his dictionary. Work on the 17-volume set of the *Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern*

Hebrew continued by others after his death and was finally completed in 1922.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda believed in the power of language. He understood and devoted himself to the notion that it goes to the root of our identity as individuals and a community. It was the central element in his conception of a modern, united, Jewish homeland. Like the people who adopted it, Modern Hebrew is a dynamic force; specifically created to meet the needs of an ancient people pioneering a life in the modern world.

Portions of this article were adapted from:

www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/eliezer-ben-yehuda-and-the-revival-of-hebrew

www.myjewishlearning.com/article/eliezer-ben-yehuda/

- *Consider your own experience in hearing and being surrounded by Hebrew. What sort of feelings does it bring to the fore?*
- *Did learning one or more Hebrew words while traveling through Israel contribute to your sense of Jewish identity?*
- *The Ben-Yehuda family made great sacrifices to become the first Modern Hebrew-speaking household. What are your thoughts about involving a child in such an endeavor?*
- *What might be a Hebrew word (or next Hebrew word) you could incorporate into your family culture?*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER SPOTLIGHT ON HEBREW



Hebrew is among the *oldest* languages that exist, and yet after the destruction of the Temples, it had ceased for many generations from being a mother tongue for any community. So, as a spoken language it is one of the newest in the world (see story in the previous page).

Dr. Jeremy Benstein, in his beautiful new book, *Hebrew Roots, Jewish Routes: A tribal Language in a Global World*, writes: It's easy to feel daunted if we take an all-or-nothing approach to language study, and the feeling that the task is too great leaves many people with nothing. Rather than strive for all or nothing, our operative word should be *engagement*. We don't need to

master either classical textual Hebrew or modern Israeli spoke Hebrew to access the riches of Jewish life...Hebrew can be a multifaceted vehicle of Jewish culture and can open up fertile new avenues of identity and expression."

Hebrew is an exquisitely beautiful language, in which a word's root conveys deep, layered meaning. For instance, the word *mechila* מחילה means forgiveness. Surprisingly, one of the Hebrew words for dance, *machol* מחול has the same root. Why would these two seemingly very different words share the same root? It has been suggested that the act of dancing involves movement that causes the dancer to be both on and off balance.



In order to create beautiful movement, we give up control and then regain our balance. We give up predictability for the opportunity to create something new and dynamic.

Applying this understanding from dance to the process of forgiveness is illuminating. In order to forgive, we need to give up the predictability of anger, hurt and self-righteousness, to engage in internal movement to bring ourselves to regain balance in a better place. We have the opportunity to create something beautiful in ourselves and in our relationships if we allow ourselves to move out of the expected ways in which we can get stuck.

Now you try

Split into groups and examine one of the Hebrew word pairings below. Ask yourself: what are the similarities between these two concepts? How can understanding each of these words together throw light upon their deeper meaning?

- *Rachamim* רחמים & *Rechem* רחם (mercy and womb)
- *Regel* רגל & *Hergel* הרגל (foot/pilgrimage, habit)
- *Ratz* רץ & *Ratzon* רצון (running and will/yearning)
- *Ne'elam* נעלם & *Olam* עולם [Hidden, World/eternal]

Bringing a few Hebrew words into your vocabulary can be a way of engaging with the multi-layered meaning of Hebrew and the ambiguity inherent in its texts. Might it be a way our speech can further reflect the human soul's endless depth?

TRY IT OUT: PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of the power of speech, *koach hadibur*, into your family life.

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on [MomentumUnlimited.org](https://momentumunlimited.org)
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phases you could consider:
 - I use my words for good.
 - I speak no evil and I hear no evil.
 - I forgive easily.
 - I offer critique only when I trust it will be received.
 - When critiquing I focus on the problem not the person.
- Aleph Beta Academy is an online library of videos offering in-depth Jewish learning based in text. To learn more about Tisha B'Av, check out the video "How Did We Survive?" (45 minutes:) <https://bit.ly/2M5OdRi>

For Families with Children of All Ages

- We all want our children to dream big dreams. Research has shown that our mindsets are not set in stone. In other words, you can move from having a fixed mindset to having a growth mindset. But, how can we do this?
 - **Praise wisely.** Instead of praising intelligence or talent, praise the process that children engage in. Praise for effort. Praise for improvement. This will help children gain resilience and strength. If they understand that the process is important and not just the product, they will be more likely to engage in difficult activities in the future.
 - **Reward the process.** Reinforce thinking about how to tackle problems. This will eventually create more engagement for long periods of time and generally more persistence in difficult tasks.
 - **Teach children that they can change.** Show them how the brain works and how new connections are made everyday. Explain how this connects to their learning and that they

always have the ability to gain new skills and learn new things.

- **Use the words “yet” and “not yet.”** Rather than, “You didn’t do it,” try, “You didn’t do it **yet**.” This allows children to understand that they can accomplish what they hope to do; they just aren’t there **yet**. Adapted from the article *Power of Yet*, aish.com. (The article is no longer available on line.)
- Yiddish words and phrases have found their way into everyday English lexicon. To see some examples, click on the link below to read the article *English words of Yiddish origin: schmoozing, kvetching, and mentch*. <https://bit.ly/2GVBCDv>

As a family, see if you can think of other words we use in everyday English that draw upon Hebrew or Yiddish.

- In this video, Chaya Lester shares words of Jewish wisdom on how to raise happy children. Her explanation draws on a potent teaching about Hebrew words: <https://bit.ly/2KxSeL3>

- Show your children how to create acrostic poems that will warm the hearts of those they love. Work together to write one for each person in your family. To create an acrostic, follow these five easy steps:
 - Write their name down vertically.
 - Brainstorm words or phrases that describe the qualities you love about them, trying to think of some that begin with the letters in their name.
 - Place your brainstormed words or phrases on the lines that begin with the same letters.
 - Fill in the rest of the lines to create a poem.
 - Encourage your children to do this with their friends too!

For Families with Young Children

- Learn more about Eliezer Ben-Yehuda’s and his son, Ben Zion’s, efforts in creating Modern Hebrew in the new children’s book *The Language of Angels: A Story About the Reinvention of Hebrew* by Richard Michelson.

- Together, read the PJ Library book *A Sack Full of Feathers*. Debby Waldman's beautiful adaptation of this Jewish folktale, told through the eyes of a child, highlights the innocence of intention that is sometimes present in telling tales, as well as their ability to hurt. After reading, talk with your child/children about the creative way the Rabbi taught the important message of being careful with your words. *For more about A Sack Full of Feathers, visit PJ Library at <https://bit.ly/2Hx0QQj>*
- When young children imagine themselves in the specific situations, it helps to develop empathy for others' experiences. Sensitize your children to the way others may feel when being spoken about behind their backs by asking them this question: How would you feel if someone was gossiping about you or calling you names behind your back?
- Ask your children to describe some situations from school or play-dates where gossip and/or speaking ill of another person

was taking place. Role-play some similar situations so that your children can begin to develop skills for changing the topic when someone is speaking unkindly about another.

- When your family sits down for a meal together, be mindful of whether the interchange begins to slide in the direction of speaking negatively about others. Try to direct the family conversation in a positive direction, remembering that the more you do so, the easier it will become. It is important to be open with your children about how difficult it is even for adults to say only kind things about other people.
- Watch this funny yet insightful video by "Kid President." He believes the things we say can help make the world more awesome. Here he shares a special list of 20 things we should say more often. What would you add to it?
<https://bit.ly/1bebuoQ>

For Families with Older Children

- When you have some quiet time together with your older children, explore the themes of *lashon hara*, translated literally as “bad tongue.” Share Jewish teachings about gossip and speaking ill of another person. Use these prompts to spark a meaningful discussion:
 - What do you think should be the balance in the media between refraining from gossip to protect privacy, versus the people’s ‘right to know’?
 - Why do you think that some people like to gossip?
 - Is there anything wrong with merely listening to gossip, as long as one doesn’t actively participate?
- Amidst all of the reporting about Operation Protective Edge, many have been exposed to the IDF’s divisions, commands and acronyms. Behind each of these words is a larger story about Hebrew language. Below, see some everyday words whose origins began as acronyms in the IDF:
 - The acronym IDF stands for Israel Defense Forces, and the Hebrew letters stand for *Tzva Haganah Le’Yisrael*, or, quite literally, Israel Defense Army (צה"ל).
 - *Kalab, Shnatz, Sakash, Tash, Chamshush, and Bakum* are also acronyms used in the IDF. Check out this link to find out their meanings: <https://bit.ly/2Hx1kpB>
 - Create your own acronym! Use your educational environment to create acronyms in both Hebrew and English that could describe people, places, things or ideas that are important to your Judaism.
- Consider watching the following 9 minute TED talk with your teen or partner or friend: https://www.ted.com/talks/julian_treasure_how_to_speak_so_that_people_want_to_listen



Use this chart to plan and track your progress regarding the power of speech, *koach hadibur*.

Acknowledgment (*Vidui*)

Where are you with the value of the power of speech, *koach hadibur*? As you reflect on this session, what examples from your life come to mind? What have been strengths and challenges?

Vision (*Kavanah*)

How would you like it to be? What gets in the way and what can you do to reorient toward your best self?

Goals (*Kabbalah*)

What is one or more small, actionable step that you can do in your daily life, that is realistic and you could easily schedule, and will support you in growing toward your potential and vision in terms of using your speech wisely and well?

Accountability

Who can help hold you accountable on your goals? How? When?
What evidence can you collect to know you are making progress?

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session we explore the value of the power of words, *koach hadibur*.

The Guiding Questions in this unit are:

- *How do I currently use my words to help my family grow?*
- *How might I use words to further spread understanding in my family, community and world?*
- *How can I deliver constructive criticism (tochacha) in a loving, supportive way so that it is heard?*
- *What are some practical strategies I can use to be more careful and deliberate about the words that I use?*
- *How can understanding the Hebrew language help me understand the world more deeply?*

Meaning-ful Vocabulary

Power of speech	<i>koach hadibur</i>	כֹּחַ הַדְּבֹר
Constructive critique	<i>tochecha</i>	תּוֹכְחָה
Trait/measure - as in "good measure," and connotes just the right balance	<i>middah</i>	מִדָּה

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

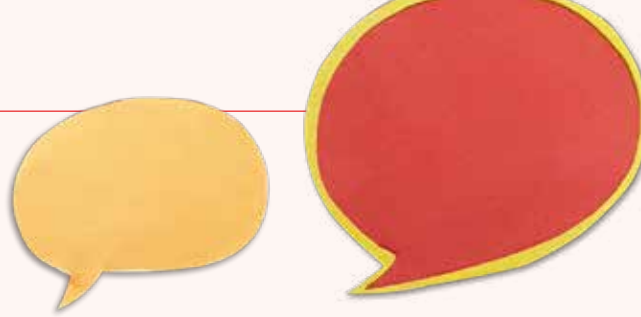
In advance, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading the session such as:

- Planning an activity to kick-off the session or accompany if (see Extras! Program Ideas.)
- Hosting the event
- Leading the Reflecting on Words artistic activity
- Co-facilitating conversation about constructive criticism and praise
- Ask if one or more of the women would like to share a way she brought home the learning from your last gathering.

****Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!**

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

You know what will best engage your participants and what are their personal and parenting goals for growth and development, so tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible.



3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, prepare the space by helping the hostess put out a spread of food and drinks. Arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need, especially if you'll include the artistic reflection, and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome & Warm- Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider, for example, tuning into elements of the natural world as part of a guided meditation, or having women pair-up and listen to each other, for 2 minutes each, as they share what's new for them.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that you are in your Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro & Inspiration

Tell a personal story — or invite a co-facilitator to tell a personal story — about a time when someone else's speech had a major impact. Explore together what it is about speech that can cause it to have such an outsized effect. Introduce the concept of the power of words, *koach hadibur*. Ask the women to reflect on

their strengths and challenges when it comes to speaking to their children; see if anyone wants to share with the group.

6. Soul Sparks Activities

There are several different activities in the session that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

Good Words and Bad Words

Review the excerpts highlighted in this session as a group and reflect on the text questions together. Ask the women who their role models are for gentle speech. What techniques can they develop to emulate their role models in challenging family situations?

Constructive Critique

Print out an enlarged version of the critique guidelines. Cut apart and place around the room at different stations. Encourage the women to walk throughout the room and reflect. Ask women to stand by one that they find they do well with. Then ask each woman to choose one that she'd like to strengthen. Invite women to group with 2-3 others and have a conversation about how they could further develop the guideline by which they stood.

This activity could also be done alternatively with Lori's teaching about Gossip.

7. Reflection & Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session and create an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection Suggestion: Ask participants to reflect on the following- possibly by writing or drawing before sharing: “What is one takeaway you’ll be going home with after our session today?” or “I would like to further bring *koach hadibur* to my family by...”

Direct the women’s attention to the “**Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families.**” These suggestions offer ideas – by age group for bringing the learning back home. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and come back next time and report on how it went. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This “**Learn with Your Sister**” activity serves as an entry points for conversations that may never otherwise happen. (See pages XXXXXX) Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

Extra! Program Ideas:

To enhance your session, you may want to consider the following:

- Combine this session with a talk by a parenting expert on how to communicate with your children.
- Consider having a mini book-club, featuring Wendy Mogel’s *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee*. Reflect on her writing together and identify which parts of the book were most meaningful and relevant to individual women, and why.



The sales of Year of Growth are used entirely to cover costs of creating, producing, distributing, and supporting the successful use of this educational resource.

Momentum Unlimited
6101 Executive Blvd, Suite 240, Rockville, MD 20852
240-747-7080 | info@MomentumUnlimited.org



MomentumUnlimited.org



Ministry of Diaspora Affairs
Creating a common Jewish future