

One of the finest virtues we can ever achieve in our lives is when our word is our bond.

I will never forget when the business of one of our dear members deteriorated. He had the opportunity in civil law to declare bankruptcy but refused; instead, he ensured that every one of his creditors was paid in full. Understandably, his family opposed his decision, it took him six years to discharge his debts, and he suffered much loss-but his word was good as gold, and his integrity shone through.

Years later, at his funeral, the accolade showered upon him with much admiration by each of his children and grandchildren was that he was a man of true honour, a man of his word!

Sadly, there are too few such great individuals today, and the inability of people to keep their commitments is a great weakness of our generation.

The *Torah* declares, "You must fulfill what has crossed your lips and perform what you have vowed" (*Deut. 23:24*). Maimonides explains, "By this injunction, we are commanded to fulfill every obligation that we have taken upon ourselves by word-of-mouth". This is why in Jewish law a committed word is equal to a signed contract.

The most famous Biblical example of keeping a long-standing word was Moses' taking Joseph's bones with him at the Exodus from Egypt. Centuries earlier, Joseph had extracted an oath from his brothers, saying, "When G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here and take them with you." On the day the Jews left Egypt, Moses kept the commitment to Joseph that had been made not by him, but by his ancestors; nonetheless, the Bible tells us "he (Moses) took with him the bones of Joseph"(Exodus 13:19)

In life, when we make a verbal commitment, we must abide by it. Moreover, we should not say the opposite of what we feel. The *Talmud* teaches that among those whom G-d hates is "one who says one thing with his mouth, while meaning another thing with his heart." (*Pesachim* 113b)

It is rare that we see the construction "G-d hates". What is it about lying and being hypocritical, that elicits such a reaction?

The Kabbalists understood words not as dictionary definitions, but as living entities: every word we utter is a creative force that stands with or against us.

In *Genesis*, we learn that all of creation was brought into existence through the power of words, ("B`asara Mamrot Nivra Haolam") Chazal teaches, "The seal of G-d is truth" (*Yoma* 69b), all of life is therefore sustained by words of truth. When a person who is made in the image of G-d and is given powers that resemble the powers of the creator utilises words in falsehood, that is not only abuse of the gift but an affront to the very words that are sustaining that individual's life.

Rabbi Yosi ben Judah said, "Let your 'yes' be yes, let your 'no' be no". In other words, let your yes be honest, but let your *no* be honest too. (*Bava Mazia* 49a)

The virtue of keeping our word must begin when we are small children. The *Talmud* says one should not promise a child something, and then not give it to him, because, as a result, the child will learn to lie. (*Sukkah* 46b)

When unfulfilled promises occur often enough, our children will eventually conclude that this is how the real world works, that even when we assure someone we're going to do something for them, there's no need to follow through on our word.

There is a great legend in the *Talmud* that describes a conversation that every soul has with God before descending into this world, "Tehee Tzadik Ve al Tehee Rasha", We give our word to G-d that we will strive to be righteous and not be wicked.

At this upcoming *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* let us make a resolution to keep sacred the words and commitments that we have given to our loved ones, business associates and friends. Let us learn so to lead our lives that we fulfill our pledges and vows, especially the one that our soul gave to G-d when being granted the gift of life, so that we can say, with honor, that our word was our bond.

Lieba and I and the entire Jacobson family wish for all of our members and friends to be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life and granted G-d`s favor for good health and prosperity.

Shana Tovah Umetukah

(Rabbi Jacobson is the spiritual leader of Congregation Chevra Kadisha B'nai Jacob in Montreal)

Rabbi Asher Jacobson: Keeping Your Word
isranet-publications
Blog, September 22, 2015
<https://www.isranet.org/blog/rabbi-asher-jacobson-keeping-your-word/>
