



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Likkutei Sichos

Free Translation

Volume 11 | Yisro | Sicha 2

A note on the translation: Great effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time striving for readability. However, the translation carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. Feedback is always appreciated!

1. From the *posuk* in the Ten Commandments, “a Shabbos for Hashem your G-d,¹” the Jerusalem Talmud derives that we must, “rest like Hashem.” “Just as Hashem refrained from speaking, so should you refrain from speaking.”² Based on this teaching, the sages established the prohibition against **speaking** about *melacha* and the like on Shabbos: “A Shabbos for Hashem your G-d” means that a person should rest like Hashem.” Just as we must refrain from *melacha*³ because, “for six days Hashem created the heavens... and He rested on the seventh day,”⁴ so must we refrain from mundane speech, because Hashem refrained from speaking.

The Jerusalem Talmud further teaches: “A pious man went for a stroll in his vineyard on Shabbos, and saw a breach in the wall. He thought to repair it after Shabbos, but then reconsidered, ‘Since I thought about repairing it on Shabbos, I will never repair it.’” Meaning, it is a measure of piety⁵ to be careful about even **thinking** of *melacha*.

This story is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud following the teaching of “Shabbos for Hashem -- one should rest like Hashem,” and this sequence implies that the avoidance of even **thinking** about *melacha* - as a matter of piety - is related to the teaching that we should “rest like Hashem.”

Just⁶ as “the **revealed worlds** are created and draw their existence from the revelation of the hidden powers and life-forces,” which when revealed are called “utterances” and “the word of Hashem” and the “breath of His mouth,” as the letters of a person’s **speech**; so too, “the **concealed worlds** come into existence and are sustained and draw their existence from concealed powers and life-forces, as the letters of **thought** in man’s soul.” On the seventh day, Hashem desisted from all the work He had performed, even from the creation of the **concealed worlds**. (This connection between the **concealed worlds** and the

¹ Shemos 20:10

² Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbos 15:3

³ = the creative activities prohibited on Shabbos

⁴ Shemos 20:11

⁵ *Midas chassidus* in the original, being the way of conduct of a *chassid* who goes beyond the letter of the law.

⁶ The Rebbe now introduces the concept of Hashem creating spiritual worlds through His thoughts, with a quote from Tanya - “Sha’ar HaYichud v’Ha’emuna,” ch. 11

letters of **thought** serves as a basis for refraining from mundane thoughts on Shabbos).

This requires explanation: The main reason for man desisting on Shabbos from all activities in action, speech and thought is because Hashem similarly desisted from those same activities -- we are adjured to “rest like Hashem.” Why, then, are there various levels of prohibition on Shabbos? **Performing melacha** is biblically prohibited, mundane **speech** is rabbinically prohibited, and guarding against mundane **thoughts** is only a measure of piety!

2. The reason for the distinction between refraining from **performing melacha** and refraining from **speaking** of *melacha* is articulated by the Tzemach Tzedek in Ohr Hatorah: “Hashem’s refraining from speech is akin to refraining from action, for Hashem’s speech is creative....⁷ However, a person’s speech is not creative, hence, it is not considered to be action; and therefore, there is no biblical injunction against **speaking** about *melacha*, only against **performing** it. Nevertheless, the prophet says, “[refrain from] **speaking** about [mundane] things”, for after all, Hashem refrained from speaking on Shabbos, as the Jerusalem Talmud states, “Just as Hashem refrained from speaking, so too you should refrain from speaking.”⁸

But this explanation seems unsatisfactory. If we are not prohibited biblically from speaking about *melacha*, for our speech is not creative, this means that our speech cannot be equated to “Hashem’s speech, which is considered as actual action.”⁹ Why then did the sages prohibit our speech, on the grounds that we need to “rest like Hashem”?

3. We will understand this by first exploring the issue of avoiding mundane speech on Shabbos, as discussed at the conclusion of Tanya. “One must also take great care also not to engage in any idle speech at all, G-d forbid... for all *mitzvos* contain both spiritual and practical elements. The practical element of Shabbos is to refrain from physical creative activity, just as Hashem refrained from creating the physical heavens and the earth. The spiritual element of Shabbos is one’s mindful concentration during prayer and Torah study on Shabbos, to cleave to Hashem’s unity,¹⁰ as it is written, “Shabbos for Hashem your G-d,” and this is the

⁷ “Creative” in the literal sense; Hashem’s “speech” brings the world into being.

⁸ Ohr Hatorah Shemos 7:2702

⁹ Ohr Hatorah *ibid*.

¹⁰ In the original, “*Hashem echad*,” lit. “Hashem is one,” the concluding phrase of the first line of *sh’ma*.

spiritual aspect of *zachor*¹¹ -- the command to remember Shabbos. The spiritual aspect of *shamor*¹² -- the command to guard Shabbos -- entails refraining from speaking about material matters, just as Hashem refrained from the *ten utterances* through which the material heavens and the earth were created.”¹³

Based on the above, the following difficulties arise:

- In order to explain the reason for abstaining from mundane speech on Shabbos, it would seem to be sufficient if Tanya would say “the spiritual aspect of *shamor* entails refraining from speaking about material matters.” Yet from the presentation in Tanya it seems that this abstention is also related to the earlier statement that the spiritual aspect of *zachor* is “one’s mindful concentration during prayer and Torah study on Shabbos, to cleave to Hashem’s unity.” Why is this so?¹⁴
- The Alter Rebbe concludes: “...just as Hashem refrained from the Ten Utterances through which **the material heavens and the earth were created.**” Seemingly, the only reasoning relevant to our topic of discussion, refraining from mundane **speech** on Shabbos, is the general idea of “Hashem refrained from the *ten utterances.*” What benefit is there to adding, “through which the heavens and earth were created”?

On the contrary: Based on the teaching of the Tzemach Tzedek, that “therefore there is no **biblical** injunction against speaking about *melacha*” since “only Hashem’s speech is creative,” also mentioning the concept that Hashem **created** the heavens and earth through speech serves only to amplify the **disparity** between Hashem’s speech and man’s speech, negating the proof!

- Why does the Alter Rebbe emphasize the term “material” both regarding speech and creation: “...refraining from speaking about **material** matters,

¹¹ Shemos 20:8. This is the opening word of the fourth of the Ten “Commandments,” in *parshas Yisro*.

¹² Devarim 5:12. This is the opening word of the fourth of the Ten “Commandments,” in *parshas Va’eschanan*.

¹³ Tanya, Kuntres Acharon, end.

¹⁴ The structure of this passage in Tanya first discusses the **general** spiritual element of Shabbos -- mindful concentration during prayer and Torah study -- and then turns two to **specific** spiritual elements of Shabbos, *zachor* and *shamor*. That structure implies that **both** *zachor* and *shamor* are related to mindful concentration during prayer and Torah study. The question is: How does refraining from mundane speech relate to mindful concentration during prayer and Torah study?

just as Hashem refrained... **material** heavens and the earth”?

4. The solution to the above questions is as follows:

Among the three modes of expression: thought speech and action, the power of action is unique . Action involves an **act** upon an entity **outside** of oneself, while the **objective** of thought and speech is the person himself -- they express his intellect and emotions. Thought expresses the intellect and emotions within the person’s internal world, and speech expresses his intellect and emotions to others.

To explain: There is a great difference between thought and speech as they relate to action: the letters of thought¹⁵ are spiritual and abstract and don’t relate to the realm of action. Therefore, thought only exists in a person’s own inner world and cannot affect others. On the other hand, letters of speech are tangible. When breath flows through the five articulators,¹⁶ the sounds of various letters are produced, which then separate from the person. Words are one step closer to action, and therefore speech can influence action, as the sages say regarding the prohibition of *mechamer*.¹⁷ Similarly, we observe that kings conduct all matters of their kingdom by speech, as it is written, “A king rules through his words.”¹⁸

However, thought has no relationship to action. Although a person’s thinking leads him to behave in a certain way, a thought itself -- being spiritual -- has no qualitative association with his behavior.

5. This distinction between thought and speech can be found in *halacha* as well: The Talmud teaches: “If a person muzzled an animal by using his voice, scolding it when it tried to eat, Rabbi Yochanan said he is liable for violating the prohibition, ‘do not muzzle an ox when it is threshing,’ because moving one’s mouth is considered an action, and since the prohibition is violated only when an

¹⁵ Chassidus often speaks of “letters of thought” Quite simply, whenever we think, the thoughts take the form of words, and those words are composed of letters. Naturally, these letters exist only in our mind, and have no physical form. Letters of thought are therefore the most subtle and abstract sort of letters. Letters of speech are somewhat more tangible, coming as they do in the form of spoken words, and sound is more tangible than thought.

¹⁶ Torah refers to five parts of the vocal tract, each of which produces the sounds of is used to articulate the sounds of specific letters.

¹⁷ Avoda Zara 15a. This term refers to the prohibition of using an animal to perform *melacha* on *Shabbos*. The case in the Talmud involves an animal responding to its owner’s voice.

¹⁸ Koheles 8:4

action has been taken, he would indeed receive lashes. Reish Lakish said he is exempt because a mere vocal expression is not considered an action.”¹⁹

Tosfos asks: “This is puzzling, for in chapter three of Tractate Shavuos it states: ‘Rabbi Yochanan said that Rabbi Yehuda would quote Rabbi Yose Haglili: ‘All prohibitions not involving action cannot be punished with lashes, except for one who pledges and exchanges²⁰ and one who curses his fellow by invoking Hashem’s name. Now, if Rabbi Yochanan holds that moving one’s mouth is considered an action, why then would he consider these cases to be prohibitions lacking action? The answer is that Rabbi Yochanan only says that moving one’s mouth is considered action in the event that the speech **directly** causes an action, such as the above case in which the ox continues to thresh but does not eat as a result of its owner’s rebuke.’”

Now, it is quite clear in the Talmud that Rabbi Yochanan’s reasoning is simply that “**moving one’s mouth** is considered action,” but according to Tosfos the reason for liability is not the actual movement of one’s mouth, but because **speech caused the animal to perform** an action. These two approaches cannot both be correct. This difficulty must be resolved.

Regarding Rabbi Yochanan’s opinion that moving one’s mouth is considered action, Tosfos goes on to quote the following question in the Talmud : How can he claim that the prohibitions of cursing²¹ and giving contrived testimony by scheming witnesses²² don’t involve action? After all, “someone who muzzles an animal with their voice is liable according to Rabbi Yochanan!” The Talmud explains that scheming witnesses are different than an animal muzzled by its owner’s reprimand, because such witnesses can see.”²³ Tosfos explains that the Talmud’s question is not relevant to the prohibition of cursing, for cursing accomplishes nothing tangible, and cannot be compared to a person who muzzles his animal by scolding it, as he actually accomplishes something concrete by his voice. Rather, the question here concerns the rule regarding

¹⁹ Bava Metzia 90b

²⁰ One who pledges an animal for sacrificial purposes, and subsequently exchanges it, violates the prohibition of *temurah*.

²¹ Cursing Hashem, a prohibition involving speech

²² *Eidim zomemim* in the original. “Scheming witnesses” are witnesses who are disqualified as a result of the testimony of other witnesses, who contend that the original pair could not have actually seen what they claim to have witnessed. For example, the second set of witnesses claim that they with the first pair in a different city remote from the crime scene, at the time of the alleged crime.

²³ This response of the Talmud is difficult to understand. It will be analyzed and explained in the next paragraph.

scheming witnesses, “by whose words an action happens,” i.e. the defendant is convicted.²⁴

But seemingly, according to the approach of Tosfos mentioned above, that the reason that muzzling an animal by speaking to it is considered an action is not due to the speech itself, but rather because by speaking, another action is generated (similar to the scheming witnesses causing the defendant to be convicted and punished). Being that the cases of muzzling and scheming witnesses are similar in that they both cause another action to be performed, how do we understand the Talmud’s answer that “scheming witnesses are different because they can see”? Rashi explains that the basis of incriminating scheming witnesses is due to the witnesses’ testimony that they **saw** a crime happen, and sight is **clearly** not considered action! Now although sight is **not** an action, at the end of the day what they claim they saw **causes** an action to happen -- the defendant is convicted. So why is this different than an owner muzzling an animal with his voice, which is considered an action because his words *also* **cause** an action?

6. The explanation is as follows: Tosfos isn’t arguing that a person should be punished for an action that he instigated but which was ultimately performed by others. (The reason why this cannot be Tosfos’ position is that lashes will only be administered when a person’s own actions directly result in violation of a prohibition being. Therefore, in the case of verbal muzzling, where **he** did not perform an action, but only **caused the animal** to raise its head and thresh without eating, he should **not** be given lashes for the action that was done by the animal as a result of his speech).

The point of Tosfos is rather this: When a person causes an action **just** from his speech, since the **only** cause for the action is his speech, the ensuing action is an extension of his speech, and part of it; therefore, such speech is not merely speech, but contains an aspect of action within it. This is somewhat similar to the relationship between an agent’s action on behalf of the principal, particularly, according to the view that only the agent’s **action** is associated with the principal.

²⁵

This is also the meaning of Rabbi Yochanan’s statement “moving one’s lips is

²⁴ Tosfos Sanhedrin 65b, d.h. *ho’il*

²⁵ As opposed to the views that consider the agent’s hand to be the sender’s hand, or even more radically, the concept of *shlucho shel adam k’moso*, that an agent takes the place of the sender himself.

considered an action.” The power of an owner’s voice to prevent his animal from eating is considered an action of the owner. Since his voice is a result of him moving his mouth -- a physical act that is akin to true action -- the resulting action by the animal is considered to be an extension of the movement of his mouth.

This relationship only exists between speech and action. Action caused by thought, which is abstract and spiritual, cannot be said to flow from thought in the same way that an action might flow from speech, since action is entirely divorced from thought, as mentioned earlier. By way of comparison, just as action can flow from speech due to their similarity, in order to effect agency, there must exist a similarity between the principal and his agent in that they both must be Jews.

Therefore, when it comes to scheming witnesses “who can see,” although they precipitate an action by testifying to what they claim they saw, , that action is qualitatively distinct from their sight. Thus, their sight cannot be considered to be an action.

7. This distinction between thought and speech exists only for a person, whose actions take place outside of himself. Accordingly, his thoughts, which are spiritual [i.e. intangible], are not considered “close to” or linked to his actions, as is his speech.

But regarding Hashem, His thought also produces and creates; the difference is only in the process. Hashem’s concealed thoughts create concealed, spiritual worlds, whereas Hashem’s speech, being more revealed than His thoughts, creates this physical, revealed world.

We now understand that a person’s thoughts cannot be compared with Hashem’s thought, for a person’s thoughts are unable to affect someone else. But there is some comparison between a person’s speech and Hashem’s (if such a comparison could be made), because a person’s speech can compel action (as explained above in section 4).

Even though human speech is not actually similar to Hashem’s speech, for, “Hashem’s speech is considered to be an actual action for in His speech and through it, action comes about,”²⁶ and a person’s speech at best indirectly **causes another person** (or something else) to act, but no action results from his

²⁶ Bereishis Rabba 44:22

speech itself. Nevertheless, a comparison can be made as both Hashem's speech and a person's speech can induce action.

8. On this basis we can explain the reasons for the distinction between a person refraining from action, and from refraining from speech and thought on Shabbos, and the different levels of prohibition that apply to each.

The general reason for "resting" on Shabbos is expressed in the posuk, "for Hashem **created** in six days...", and therefore a person must desist from creative activity. Hence, although Hashem's cessation of creating the worlds also entailed cessation from speech and thought, nevertheless, being that in the human context thought and speech are wholly non-creative, refraining from thought and speech is not included in the prohibition on creative labor.

Even so, because there is a certain comparison between human speech and Hashem's speech, as human speech can induce action, as mentioned above, our sages, who forbid matters that **are similar to** Torah prohibitions, added and included refraining from speech in the definition of "resting like Hashem."

Yet the sages' decree to desist from speech is not just from speech that **compels** action; they also prohibited any speech about labor, and similar mundane matters. How can the latter be forbidden under the rubric of "rest like Hashem," since speaking about those topics, which does not compel action, is dissimilar to Hashem's speech?

Since a person's speech has a slight similarity to Hashem's speech based on the **quality** of speech -- that it is tangible and closely related to action -- our sages forbade mundane speech even if it does not induce action, as it is the **nature** of such speech to potentially lead to action.

[We find a parallel to this theory in Halacha (referencing the earlier theme of prohibitions that don't involve action): The Maggid Mishneh explains the Rambam's view that a prohibition that can be violated by action incurs lashes, even when violated without action. Some of the later commentaries write that this is true only as long as speech (which is considered a part-action) was involved in the violation. However, if even speech was lacking, then though there may have been an intentional thought of transgression (as in the case of one who does not remove *chametz* before Pesach, and willingly maintains it in his possession), he would not be liable for lashes.

he suggested explanation is as follows: Even when only speech is involved in a transgression, and the speech does not directly lead to an action, it is still logical to administer lashes, being that speech is “a part-action,” that is, it is within the **purview** of speech to cause an action. Such speech is considered to be under the rubric of transgressions that involve action. In contradistinction, a thought of transgression, which is completely beyond the realm of action, cannot be included under the category of transgressions that involve action. Therefore, our sages ordained that on Shabbos, we should refrain from mundane *speech*, being that we must “rest like Hashem,” as explained above.]

When it comes to human *thought*, however, which bears no resemblance whatsoever to Hashem’s thought, there are no grounds for our sages to forbid thinking about mundane matters on Shabbos. Nevertheless, a *chossid* who goes beyond the letter of the law and cleaves to Hashem, refrains from thinking about prohibited labors on Shabbos. Seeing that Hashem refrained from thought on Shabbos, and desiring to emulate Hashem and cleave to His Ways, a chassid desists from mundane thoughts as well.

9. Based on all the above, the questions in section 3 on the Alter Rebbe’s words at the conclusion of Tanya will be understood:²⁷

The Alter Rebbe’s intent is: (a) to explain the reason for the prohibition on Shabbos of “not speaking any idle chatter, G-d forbid”; and (b) to explain why this prohibition applies only to speech and not to thought, clarifying why the sages explicitly warned against only speech (and not thought.)

He therefore specifies that the spiritual aspect of *shamor* requires that we, “refrain from speaking about **material** matters, just as Hashem refrained from the Ten Utterances through which **the material heavens and the earth were created.**” With this, the Alter Rebbe addresses both of the above points: (a) The reason for the avoidance of speech on Shabbos: Since a person’s speech is **tangible**, and can therefore compel action, it resembles Hashem’s speech, so to speak. Hashem’s speech, being “close” to action, created the **material** heaven and earth. Therefore, one must refrain from speaking about material matters on Shabbos. (b) This rationale does not apply to thought. Human thought is not closely related to action, and therefore a person’s thought is incomparable to

²⁷ The first question the Rebbe asked in section 3 will only ultimately be resolved in section 13.

Hashem's, which brought about the creation of **spiritual** worlds.

10. Based on the above, a possible connection between the end of Tanya and its beginning -- the concept of "an oath is administered to him..."²⁸ -- can be understood, since "the end is wedged in the beginning."²⁹

There is a known question on the abovementioned oath: How can an oath help a soul contend with the body and the evil inclination, when this is not under a person's full control, and the soul has not yet come into the world? The Tzemach Tzedek explains that the oath serves to "reveal and illuminate the higher element of *mazal* within the lower part of the soul, that is in the body."³⁰ That is, the oath awakens hidden powers that ordinarily lie beyond a person's consciousness, bringing them to bear on the soul as it is invested in the body, and with this added strength he is able to overcome the challenge posed by the body and evil inclination.

We find that the beginning of Tanya stresses the relationship between speech and action. At issue here is a **spoken** oath which is in the realm of **action**. The oath binds man to the **actions** that are the subject of the oath, obligating him to perform those actions (as mentioned earlier regarding a king's speech.)

11. The three categories of Shabbos prohibitions spoken of previously relate to three levels of observance, described in the style characteristic of chassidic teaching. Our sages teach that, "The words of scribes are more beloved than the words of the Torah".³¹ The reason for this is as follows: The Torah contains the commandments of Hashem which we are **obligated** to observe; the service of Hashem when observing these commandments demonstrates a relationship that only goes far enough to compel practical observance of that which Hashem explicitly commanded.

The relationship with Hashem resulting from the observance of rabbinic ordinances is even deeper, for when someone is not satisfied observing only that which the Torah expressly commands, but takes upon himself safeguards and stringencies, he demonstrates that he has a deep desire and pleasure to do

²⁸ Tanya, ch. 1, Niddah 30b Tanya begins by quoting a teaching in the Talmud, that before a Jew is born, "An oath is administered to him: Be righteous and be not wicked..."

²⁹ Sefer Yetzira 1:6 This kabbalistic term is used to describe the connection between the highest level and the lowest level, between beginning and end.

³⁰ Kitzurim v'He'aros l'Tanya, pp. 48-52

³¹ Jerusalem Talmud Berachos 1:4, Sanhedrin 11:4, Avoda Zara 2:7, Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:2

mitzvos, and his connection with Hashem is therefore much deeper. At this stage, he is still quite an independent entity, yet he deeply desires to connect with G-dliness.

Higher than this is the rank of *chossid*, and particularly “the sort of *chossid* who acts kindly with his Maker... more than with himself... giving himself over to Hashem”,³² where his entire identity is devoted to gratifying his **Creator**.

Corresponding to these three levels in the service of Hashem, Hashem reveals Himself to us and creates reality in three modes, described in descending order: (a) Creation on the level of thought -- a level in which there is no possibility for any entity to exist outside of the Creator. The concealed spiritual worlds stem from this level, as they exist in total surrender to and absorption³³ within their Source. 2. Creation on the level of speech -- a level which gives rise to a form of reality that feels independent. However, the manner of creation here is such that speech descends and **transforms** into action. For although Hashem’s speech in essence allows for an “other”, its purpose is to **express** G-dliness. In order to bring about a reality that lacks **awareness** of G-dliness, the speech must be condensed and transformed into action. 3. Creation on the level of action -- this is the most superficial aspect of Divine energy, one that is so to speak **separated** from Hashem, totally enveloped within the concealment of the created worlds.

12. Based on this, we can explain the categories of human endeavour prohibited on Shabbos and the three corresponding levels of Shabbos prohibitions. The connection established with Hashem through action-based *mitzvos*, being relatively superficial, brings one to sense the superficial aspect of G-dliness. As a result, he can only relate to Hashem as refraining from **actual** creation (the superficial level of divine “rest”), and therefore all that is prohibited at this stage is actual *melacha* prohibited by Torah law.

Owing to a deeper connection with Hashem, indicated by observing the Rabbinical ordinances, the person can sense G-dliness in a more revealed manner, and he can relate to Hashem on the level of divine speech. As a result of his perception of Hashem refraining from speech, he too will refrain from mundane speech on Shabbos. [Additionally, by virtue of a deeper connection with Hashem, the rule that, “The king’s servant is akin to the king”, applies to the

³² Zohar II 114b, Zohar III 222b, Introduction to Tikkunei Zohar 1b. See Tanya ch. 10

³³ *B'teilim bim'koram* in the original

person's speech³⁴, transforming it to the status of action, along the lines of the statement of our Sages "a Tzaddik decrees (verbally) and Hashem carries it out". Furthermore, our Sages teach, "the spoken word of Tzaddikim is considered action".³⁵

A Chossid, who has totally submitted himself to Hashem, experiences an even higher level, Hashem's thought, which does not allow for the existence of any entity aside from Hashem. Therefore, he avoids even **thoughts** of melacha, owing to his sensitivity to the level at which Hashem refrains from even thinking about creation.

13. Now we will understand why at the conclusion of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe begins by articulating the spiritual aspect of *zachor*, that "it refers to mindful concentration during prayer... to **cleave** to Hashem's unity." By doing so, he adds clarity as to the reason one must refrain from speaking of mundane matters, "just as Hashem refrained from speech," though Hashem's speech is of an entirely different nature. By **cleaving** to Hashem's unity a person can experience Hashem refraining from speaking on Shabbos, and emulate Him.

Nevertheless, we are only cautioned to avoid speech but not **cautioned** to avoid thought, for Torah speaks to the majority, and the heightened level of awareness aligned with Hashem's thought on the level of *chosid* is something only select individuals can achieve.

-From a sicha delivered Yud Tes Kislev, 5718

³⁴ The Rebbe parenthetically invokes the verse previously mentioned *posuk* "A king rules through his words." Koheles 8:4

³⁵ Midrash Lekach Tov, Chayei Sarah 23:12