

CAREFUL SPEECH

A prayer is a pure, exquisite offering to the King of kings. However, it cannot do what it is supposed to do if it is sent Heavenward with the grime of impure speech clinging to its “wings.” It cannot deliver its sweet melody to the Creator if it is damaged by coarseness. For a holy prayer to find acceptance at the palace gates, it must be pure. That means that the mouth that utters it must be pure, for a pure product cannot issue from an impure vessel.

When we are going to pray we should think – “I now prepare my mouth to thank, laud, and praise my Creator.” How does one prepare one’s mouth? We protect it from improper speech, permitting no falsehood, *lashon hara*, coarse or hurtful words, to come from our lips.

Improper speech is so damaging to the quality of one’s prayers that on Yom Kippur the first order of business is the reciting of *Kol Nidrei* (annulment of vows).

One who wants to ensure the sanctity of his mouth has the opportunity to seek help from the Creator Himself. Psalm 141:3 says: “Almighty, place a guard for my mouth; watch the portal of my lips” – that they should close from speaking bad. One Jewish sage said: “Forever be accustomed to speaking in a pleasant manner to any person on any occasion.”

POINTS TO PONDER

A pure prayer produced by a pure mouth will be accepted.

Lashon Hara, falsehood, and coarse or hurtful words sully one’s mouth, damaging the power of one’s prayers.

A person can pray to the Almighty for help in distancing himself from improper speech.

Job 16:11 God hands me over to an evil man, Thrusts me into the clutches of the wicked. ¹² I had been untroubled, and He broke me in pieces; He took me by the scruff and shattered me; He set me up as His target; ¹³ His bowmen surrounded me; He pierced my kidneys; He showed no mercy; He spilled my bile onto the ground. ¹⁴ He breached me, breach after breach; He rushed at me like a warrior. ¹⁵ I sewed sackcloth over my skin; I buried my glory in the dust. ¹⁶ My face is red with weeping; Darkness covers my eyes ¹⁷ For no injustice on my part and for the purity of my prayer! (TNK)