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# THE STUNNING POWER OF SPEECH I

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## The Cosmic and Spiritual Dynamics of Speech

Speech is man's defining quality. No other creature has the ability to communicate in an articulate, creative, and sensitive manner. As we shall see, man's words are invested with an almost cosmic power to shape the universe, just as God originally brought the universe into existence with speech. Our words even have the ability to change the reality of time, people, and objects! With this in mind, we can understand why *shmirat halashon* (guarding one's tongue) is of such importance in Judaism.

This three-part series on the power of speech will cover the following:

Part 1. The cosmic and spiritual dynamics of speech

Part 2. The potential destructive impact of speech

Part 3. Suggested strategies on how to improve our speech

This class will address the following questions:

- ☞ In the grand scheme of things, are our words really significant – they are just “hot air”!
- ☞ Why is it that only humans have the ability to speak?
- ☞ What is the connection between speech and our soul?
- ☞ What does speech have to do with Creation and the ongoing creation of the universe?
- ☞ How can speech alter the reality of objects, people, and even time?

### Class Outline:

Section I. The World Was Created With Speech

Section II. Man's Physical and Spiritual Aspects are Joined Through Speech

Section III. The Dynamics of Speech and the Soul

Section IV. The Renewal of Creation is Influenced by our Words  
Part A. Words Build the World

Section V. Words Can Alter the Reality of Time, People, and Objects  
Part A. Time – Establishing the Jewish Calendar  
Part B. People – Creating Marriage  
Part C. Objects – The Concept of Neder

## SECTION I. THE WORLD WAS CREATED WITH SPEECH

In every age, man explores the secrets of the world around him. He'll pierce the limits of perception with ever more powerful looking glasses – the telescope, pointed toward outer space, and the microscope toward inner space. Now, we are striving to come to a clearer understanding of the building blocks of existence, as the following article describes.

*The Large Hadron Collider (LHC), located 300 feet below the French-Swiss border outside Geneva, is the world's biggest and most expensive particle accelerator. It is designed to accelerate the subatomic particles known as protons to energies of seven trillion electron volts apiece and then smash them together to create tiny fireballs, recreating conditions that last prevailed when the universe was less than a trillionth of a second old.*

*The day it turns on and starts producing data will be a moment of truth for CERN, which has spent fifteen years building the collider, and for the world's physicists, who have staked their credibility and their careers, not to mention ten billion dollars, on the conviction that they are within touching distance of fundamental discoveries about the universe.*

*We know things today that Einstein, Rutherford, Max Planck, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, and the rest of the great physicists of a century ago couldn't have imagined. But we're nowhere near a final theory of physical reality. Molecules are made of atoms; atoms are made of particles called protons, neutrons, and electrons; protons and neutrons (which are the "hadrons" that give the collider its name) are made of odd things called quarks and gluons – but already we're into a fuzzy zone. Are quarks fundamental particles, or made of something smaller yet? Electrons are believed to be fundamental, but you wouldn't want to bet your life on it.*

*There's one puzzle piece in particular that physicists hope to pick out of the debris from the LHC's high-energy collisions. Some call it the God particle (after The Creator) but it's known in the scientific community as the Higgs particle, or simply the Higgs, in honor of the University of Edinburgh physicist Peter Higgs, who proposed its existence more than forty years ago. Most physicists believe that there must be a Higgs field that pervades all space; the Higgs particle would be the carrier of the field and would interact with other particles, sort of the way a Jedi knight in Star Wars is the carrier of the "force." The Higgs is a crucial part of the standard model of particle physics – but no one's ever found it and this is one prime target of the LHC. (Based on Dennis Overbye, Call it the Hubble Telescope of Inner Space, nytimes.com, March 4, 2010 and Joel Achenbach, The God Particle, nationalgeographic.com, March 2008)*

Just as physicists are driven to find the basic blocks of reality, so too, Judaism urges us to understand the building blocks of reality – both physical and spiritual.

It is fascinating that in order to discover the building blocks and forces of the physical universe it requires physicists to replicate the conditions of the Big Bang. For the very principles and forces that created the universe are the same ones that drive the universe today.

In Judaism, the principle is the same. The better we can understand the spiritual forces with which God created the universe, the better equipped we are to tap into those forces and use them constructively. In contrast to the scientific community, which has yet to discover all the physical elemental particles and forces that were created in the universe, Judaism has a clear transmission regarding how God spiritually created and sustains the universe – through His speech! And as we will shortly see, this has astounding implications for what most people take for granted as a basic feature of our being a human being – our ability to communicate. Let's understand how and why ...

### 1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:1 – God created the universe through ten statements.

The world was created through ten statements.

בעשרה מאמרות נברא העולם

## 2. Bereishit (Genesis) 1:1-29; Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Rosh HaShanah 32a – The ten statements through which the world was created.

1. In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth ... (Bereishit 1.1) ("In the beginning" is also a statement of God's as indicated by the verse, "By the word of God the heavens were made" – Rosh HaShanah 32a citing Tehilim/Psalms 33:6).
2. God said, "Let there be light" (Bereishit 1:3).
3. God said, "Let there be a firmament and let it divide the waters" (ibid. 1:6).
4. God said, "Let the waters be gathered, and let the dry land appear ..." (ibid. 1:9)
5. God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation ..." (ibid. 1:11)
6. God said, "Let there be lights in the heavenly sky ..." (ibid. 1:14)
7. God said, "The water shall teem with swarms of living creatures ..." (ibid. 1:20)
8. God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures ..." (ibid. 1:24)
9. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image..." (ibid. 1:26)
10. God said, "Behold, I have given you every seed bearing plant on the face of the earth ... It shall be to you for food" (ibid. 1:29).

1. בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ (בראשית א,א). (בראשית נמי מאמר הוא, דכתיב בדְבַר ה' שָׁמַיִם נִעְשׂוּ - ראש השנה לב.).
2. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר (בראשית א, ג).
3. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מִבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לְמַיִם (בראשית א, ו).
4. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקּוּוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אֶחָד... (בראשית א, ט).
5. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים וַתֵּדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ דְּשֵׂא... (בראשית א, יא).
6. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם... (בראשית א, יד).
7. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה... (בראשית א, כ).
8. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה... (בראשית א, כד).
9. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ... (בראשית א, כו).
10. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כָּל עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע... לָכֶם יְהִיָּה לְאֹכְלָהּ... (בראשית א, כט).

Why is it significant that God created the world through speech?

According to Jewish thought, the ten Creation speeches (statements of Creation) cannot be regarded as belonging to the past; these speeches still constitute the backbone of our present existence.

## 3. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821), Nefesh HaChaim 3:11 – The words of God issued at the time of Creation are still in effect today, sustaining all existence; the universe continues only as long as these words are not withdrawn.

Each one of God's statements during Creation is the soul and life-force of the thing that was created with it. All the various species or types of

וכל דבור ומאמר של הקודש ברוך הוא במעשה בראשית, שאמר "ויהי", הוא הנפש וחיות אותו הדבר שנברא בו, וכל רבי רבבות המינים שבו, עם המזלות

that thing, as well as the constellations [*mazalot*] and angels in charge of that thing [are also brought into being with these statements].

From the moment of the original Creation throughout all of history until the present time, the word of God keeps all things in existence every moment and in all different situations ... We are not sensitive to this phenomenon, since we only see with physical eyes.

המומנים עליהם, והמלאכים המומנים על אותם המזלות ...

ומאז והלאה עוד כל ימי עולם, דברו יתברך נצב בהם להאירם ולקיימם כל רגע, בכל פרטי עניניהם ושנוייהם וסדור מצבם ... רק שעתה טח עינינו מראות בעיני הבשר איך ובאיזה אופן דבורו יתברך מתפשט בהם.

The next source explains how “the word of God keeps all things in existence.”

4. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei ([www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com)) – God’s speech allows the ideas of Divine wisdom to become reality. This speech continues to sustain the world, and is the interface between God Himself and the Creation.**

When you think about it, there is nothing mystical about this idea. Our conception of reality is backward. Because we exist on the other side of the Creation speeches that still hang suspended between God and ourselves, we perceive reality as being fundamentally corporeal. In our hierarchy of reality, bodies have the most substantial reality, words are more abstract than bodies, ideas are even more abstract than words and God exists entirely in the abstract and has no connection to the corporeal at all.

If we allow our imagination to place us in God’s chair, as it were, and we regard reality from the opposite perspective, everything is exactly reversed. Basic existence is grounded in Divinity itself; the first level of [Creation separate from God’s essence] would be the world of God’s ideas [i.e. Divine wisdom]. The words in which these Divine ideas are cloaked represent a lower reality that is even more removed, while our corporeal physical existence is at the very opposite end of the divide and represents the ultimate degree of [separation from God].

5. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, World Mask p. 89 – Words are the building blocks of Creation.**

In Torah, words express essence because words are in fact the basis for the existence of those things which they describe: the world was created by God *saying* the words which themselves became the objects of Creation. In Hebrew, the word for a “word” and the word for a “thing” are the same – *davar*; all things in the world are in fact none other than Divine words crystallized into material existence. The words are the medium of Creation, and a correct grasp of the words is a correct grasp of the elements of Creation.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:**

- ☞ The world was created through God’s speech at Creation. These words serve as the interface between God and the Creation and are the building blocks of Creation. This is hinted to by the fact that the Hebrew word for a “word” and the Hebrew word for a “thing” are the same – *davar*.
- ☞ This phenomenon is not merely historical. Rather, since Creation until the present moment, the word of God continually keeps all things in existence.

## SECTION II. MAN'S PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS ARE JOINED THROUGH SPEECH

Now let us draw a parallel between God's creating the world through speech, and man's unique ability to speak. To do this we need to explore the creation of man and understand how speech is the bridge between the physical and the spiritual worlds.

### 1. Bereishit 2:7 – The creation of man.

And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being.

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיּוּפַח בְּאַפָּיו נְשִׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.

What is the unique attribute of man that separates him from the animals, who are also described as “living beings” (Bereishit 1:20, 24, 30)?

### 2. Onkelos, *ibid.* 2:7 – The unique quality that defines man from other life forms is speech.

[Onkelos translates “man became a living being” as] man became a speaking being.

והות באדם לרוח מומללא.

Onkelos translates *living being* as “speaking being.” In other words, the infusion of the life-force contained in the breath of God blown into our nostrils causes us to speak. The force within us that constitutes our “*soul of life*,” manifests itself in our ability to articulate our innermost beings with our power of speech. We exhale the Divine breath within us in the words that we utter (Rabbi Noson Weisz).

We can highlight the significance of Onkelos' interpretation in the following thought. Existence originates in the words of God's Creation speeches, but the universe comes into *balance* through the words uttered by human beings (as well as the mitzvot they do), as the next source illustrates.

### 3. Bereishit 2:7, with Rashi – Man contains within his own being both a spiritual element (his soul) and a physical element of creation (his body). It was through the creation of man that the universe was balanced.

“He blew into his nostrils [the soul of life]” – God made man from the earthly matter and from the heavenly matter: the body from the earthly matter, and the soul from the heavenly matter.

#### Rashi

Because on the first day, the heavens and the earth were created [the heavens for the heavenly realm and the earth for the earthly realm]. On the second day He created the sky for the upper realm. On the third day: “Let the dry land appear” [Bereishit 1:9] for the lower realm. On the fourth day, He created lights for the upper realm. On the fifth day: “Let the waters teem” [ibid. 1:20] for the lower realm. He needed on

ויפח באפיו - עשאו מן התחתונים ומן העליונים, גוף מן התחתונים ונשמה מן העליונים.

#### רשי

לפי שביום ראשון נבראו שמים וארץ. בשני ברא רקיע לעליונים. בשלישי תראה היבשה לתחתונים. ברביעי ברא מאורות לעליונים. בחמישי ישרצו המים לתחתונים, הווקק הששי לבראות בו בעליונים ובתחתונים, ואם לאו יש קנאה במעשה בראשית, שיהיו אלו רבים על אלו בבריאת יום אחד:

the sixth day to create on it something made from both heavenly matter and earthly matter. For if He did not, there would be jealousy amongst the works of Creation since there would have been one more day devoted to the creation of one realm than to the other.

If we examine God's creative activities on the sixth day, they seem to be devoted entirely to completing the development of earthly life forms (Bereishit 1:24). Therefore, Rashi explains that the balance between the physical and spiritual realms was accomplished in the creation of man; the human body may belong to the earth, but the human soul originates in the heavens (Rabbi Noson Weisz).

In the next source we see that speech is the mechanism by which the physical and spiritual components in man are joined together, and thus represents his essence.

4. **Maharal, Netivot Olam, Netiv HaLashon, Ch. 2 (first paragraph) – The essence of man is represented by the power of speech, since it is a combination of the physical and spiritual sides of man.**

Since man was created as a physical being and not just as a pure, disembodied soul, his pure soul alone is not his complete essence. [In other words, neither soul nor body alone represents the essence of the human being.]

Rather, the essence of man is his power of speech [for it combines these two components], which is expressed by the physical organ of the tongue. For man is composed of both a physical [body] and a soul. Speech is unique to man, since no animal can speak. Speech is rooted in the soul [and yet is found in a physical organ] and therefore is the essence of man [since it combines the physical and the spiritual].

דע כי האדם הוא בעל גשם, לכך השכל [בלשונו של המהר"ל "שכל" הוא כינוי לנפש האלוקית – פחד יצחק, פסח, דף ס"ה] אינו צורת האדם כי אין האדם נברא שכל גמור,

אבל השכל הדברי שהוא ע"י אבר גשמי הוא הלשון והוא צורת האדם. כי האדם יש בו שני חלקים שהוא בעל גוף והוא בעל שכל ג"כ, והדבור הוא שכלי כי הבעלי החיים אין להם הדיבור רק האדם שהוא שכלי וזהו צורת האדם.

5. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei (aish.com) – The interface between the body and the soul is expressed in a person's words.**

The interface between man's body and his soul is located in the power of speech and expresses itself in the spoken word. The content of human words are ideas that originate in the soul, but these ideas are packaged in words that emerge from the body. The spoken word is the force that unifies the two parts of Creation. Human words combine the spiritual with the physical and cement the two portions of reality together ...

Even the physical appearance of a person hints to this idea, as expressed in the next source.

6. **Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *World Mask*, p. 129 – Just as the power of speech connects the spiritual and physical, so too the organ of speech is located at the connection point of the head with the rest of the body.**

In the physical structure of the body, there is a manifestation of this idea of connection which is inherent in the power of speech. It is no accident that the voice is produced in the neck. Voice is the root of speech, the power of connecting worlds. The neck is that part of the human form which connects head and body, the higher and lower domains. The body always reflects its spiritual roots.

The body-soul dynamic in man affords us the ability to exercise free will to reach our potential as human beings. This is most apparent with the mouth.

7. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, *Chofetz Chaim: Lesson a Day*, p. xxvi – Free will is most manifest through our mouth.**

Humans are made of earth. Any human body can be reduced to a small pile of earth's minerals and elements. Yet, this seemingly insignificant entity has an exalted function – it acts as a vessel for the *neshamah* (soul), the Heavenly spark with which God imbued man. The mouth is the intersection of this physical and spiritual essence. It ushers man's Godly essence into the physical world in the form of the words it speaks. The ability to speak is a bridge between the physical, earth-bound human and the spiritual being. It provides man with the capacity to activate his spiritual self. When God took the dust of the earth, formed man, and breathed into him a Godly soul, He created a unique creature containing within himself both the spiritual and the physical. It is that duality that endows man with free will. Were he bound strictly by the physical world, he would have no more free choice than the animals. Were he connected solely to the spiritual world, he would have no more free choice than the angels. Because man lives in both worlds, he has the ability to make choices. It follows then that the mouth, where these two worlds intersect, is where free will is most clearly evident.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:

- ☞ Man's defining quality, which distinguishes him from all creatures, is his ability to speak.
- ☞ The content of human words are ideas that originate in the soul, but these ideas are packaged in words that emerge from the body. The spoken word is the force that unifies the two parts of man: the body and the soul. Additionally, man's appearance on the last day of Creation served to balance the physical and spiritual aspects of Creation. For human words combine the spiritual with the physical and cement the two portions of reality together.
- ☞ As a dramatic illustration of the design apparent in Creation, it is no accident that the voice is produced in the neck. Voice is the root of speech, the power of connecting worlds. Similarly, the neck is that part of the human form which connects head and body, a person's higher and lower domains.
- ☞ The body-soul dynamic in man affords us the ability to exercise free will to reach our potential as human beings. This is most apparent with the mouth.

## SECTION III. THE DYNAMICS OF SPEECH AND THE SOUL

In the previous section we saw how speech serves as the interface between God and His Creation. We also saw how it serves as the interface between the physical and spiritual components in man.

In this section we will explore the three levels of the human soul and how they are affected by speech. The *nefesh* is the “lowest” component of the soul, and is the most connected to the physical world. The *ruach* is the next highest level of the soul, is the area where we are most conscious, and is the source of our ability to speak. The highest level of the soul is called the *neshamah* through which we are attached to God, and is the source of our wisdom and understanding.

### 1. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:14-15 – The nefesh is the lowest level of the soul, closest to the physical.

1:14 The three modes of expression: action, speech and thought correspond to the three parts of a person’s soul: nefesh, ruach and neshamah.

Actions comes from the nefesh [the lowest part of the soul] ... which is located in the blood [i.e. the physiological processes] of a person ... The nefesh gives the body its power of movement ...

1:15 The nefesh is the lowest part of the soul [i.e. closest to the physical], since it is entirely within the physical body.

שער א', פרק י"ד: ... ואלו הג' בחינות מעשה דבור  
מחשבה, הן כלל הבחינות פנימיות של האדם, שהם  
הג' בחינות נפש רוח נשמה.

כי המעשה הוא מבחינת הנפש ... שהנפש שורה  
ומתלבש בדם האדם ... הוא הנותן להם חיות התנועה  
וההתעוררות ...

שער א', פרק ט"ו: ... הנפש היא הבחינה התחתונה,  
שהיא כולה בתוך גוף האדם.

### 2. Rabbi Noson Weisz, *Word Power, Parshat Masei*, aish.com – The nefesh is the source of the human subconscious and controls the physiological processes of the body.

[Aside from our conscious actions with our limbs] the nefesh [also] contains the components of the human subconscious. We have no need to formulate our urges or drives into words. We hunger for things without the slightest need to understand why we hunger for them and we recognize the things we hunger for without articulating our longings in words. Many if not most of the activities of our lives are undertaken to satisfy these unarticulated subconscious urges. Our essential life processes are also managed by our nefesh on a subconscious level; we do not move the blood through our veins or draw breath or digest our food consciously, etc.

As we shall see in the next source, the level above the nefesh is called the ruach.

### 3. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, *Nefesh HaChaim*, 1:15 – The ruach is the middle level of the soul, and is the source of speech.

The power of speech comes from [the part of the soul called] the ruach ... As Onkelos translates the verse, “And man became a living being” to mean “a *speaking* being.” This is evident physically too, since every word which a person speaks is accompanied by a wind [ruach also means wind] and air. The primary location of the ruach is in the heart.

... והדבור הוא מבחינת הרוח ... וכמו שתרגם אונקלוס  
על פסוק “וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה”, לרוח ממללא. וכן  
נראה לעין שבכל דבור שהאדם מוציא מפיו יוצא רוח  
והבל מהפה, ומשכן הרוח עקרו הוא בלב ...

4. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei, aish.com – Humans are fully conscious only on the ruach level of the soul, and it is the source of the power of speech.**

The Gaon of Vilna provides a deeper insight into Onkelos' interpretation: where did he come up with the idea that “*living being*” should be translated as “speaking being”? The Gaon explains [Even Shleimah, Chap. 1, footnote 8] that Onkelos' use of the word ruach was right on target, His understanding finds its origins in the nature of the human soul. Life is consciousness. The power of speech is located in a part of the soul known as the ruach. We human beings are only fully conscious on this ruach level of our souls.

As we shall see in the next source, the highest level of the soul is the neshamah.

5. **Nefesh HaChaim, 1:15 – The neshamah is the highest level of the soul, and is the source of wisdom and understanding.**

Thought is an aspect of [the highest level of the soul] the neshamah. The neshamah imparts wisdom and understanding – by means of Torah study – to a person. Therefore, the primary location of the neshamah is in the brain, which is the seat of thought. The neshamah is the highest aspect of a man's soul.

ומחשבה היא בחינת הנשמה, שהיא המלמדת לאדם דעה ובינה בתורה הקדושה, לכן עקר משכנה הוא במוח, כלי המחשבה, והיא הבחינה העליונה שבהם.

6. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei, aish.com – The conscious level of ruach is between the level of neshamah (super-conscious) and the nefesh (subconscious).**

Above the ruach is the highest level of our souls called the neshamah, the portion of ourselves through which we are attached to God. We shall call ourselves super-conscious instead of subconscious on this level; the word we use to describe this level of consciousness is irrelevant; it is quite certain that we are not knowingly conscious of our attachment to God [Nefesh HaChaim 1:15].

In the middle, sandwiched between these two layers is our ruach, the only area of our awareness in which thoughts must be articulated in words in order to be effective. In this area we are self-conscious and self-aware. All the battles of life and its conflicts are necessarily decided on in this level of our beings.

Based on the preceding description of the human soul, we are now ready to understand how speech can alter a person's consciousness, as will be explained in the following sources.

7. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Ner Le'Elef, Jerusalem, personal correspondence – The ruach is not fixed in its identity, it can be associated with the nefesh or with the neshamah.**

The ruach moves “up and down.” It is able to identify with the greatest heights, or it can identify with the lowest depths.

הרוח הוא 'עולה ויורד', דהיינו הוא יכול להזדהות עם העליון יותר, והוא יכול להזדהות עם התחתון יותר.

8. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei, aish.com – Depending on how a person uses the power of his ruach to speak, his ruach will move either upwards or downwards.**

Let us remember that human words are the equilibrium point of the universe, the place where the heavens and the earth are pulled together [see Section II, Source 3]. The neshamah attempts to pull

the ruach upwards. If the neshamah is successful, we will devote our God-given ability to package abstract ideas and communicate them in words to the expression of our neshamah.

In terms of the Creation speeches that formed the universe, this use of our ruach power would be described as attaching the *living being* described by Onkelos [Section II, Source 2] to the heavenly side of the interface of the Divine words that hang suspended between the heavens and the earth. The equilibrium point is moved heavenwards.

On the other hand, the nefesh pulls the ruach down to its level. When the nefesh is successful, the communicative power of our words is devoted to the satisfaction of our physical desires. In terms of God's words that sustain the universe, this amounts to attaching our words to the earthly or bottom side of the interface and pulling the Divine words themselves downwards to become mired in the corporeal universe. The entire universe sinks to a lower level.

So now we can understand how speech affects our very souls. With the words we choose to speak we either lift our soul (ruach) heavenward, or send it downwards into physicality. Not only is our soul affected, but the entire universe is affected as well.

Indeed, every person should view himself, and consequently the speech he uses, as if the balance of the world's destiny is in his hands. His next action could bring success and happiness to all mankind or the opposite (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4). In the physical world this concept is expressed as the Butterfly Effect: a butterfly flaps its wings in Tokyo, and causes rain in New York (James Glick, *Chaos – Making a New Science*, p. 20).

The consequences of positive or negative speech can reverberate with ongoing positive or negative impacts as illustrated by the following examples of two possible permutations of a cycle of events.

*You've been away at college now for almost a whole school year. You know that your mom really misses you. You, on the other hand, are having a great time at college and wouldn't mind staying there the whole summer to be with your friends.*

*"Hi Mom! How are you and Dad?" begins your weekly conversation with your mom.*

*"Fine, Daniel. We're so looking forward to having you home in just two weeks!"*

*Uh oh. What to say. Tell her like it is, that you'd rather stay on with your friends? That all the chores at home and boring family visits are too much? Or, since you've committed to go back and see your parents over the summer just make them feel good about it?*

*"Yeah, I can't wait to be home. I want to see you guys. And what I wouldn't do for one of your home-cooked dinners, Mom!"*

*Your mother is ecstatic. There is ooh-ing and ah-ing on the other end interspersed with recipe ideas for dinner. You've made her day in under four sentences. Excitedly, she picks up the phone to call your dad.*

*"Honey, I just spoke to Daniel. He's so looking forward to coming home!"*

*"Really?!" exclaims Dad incredulously. "You know, he probably wanted to be with his friends over the summer, but he wants to make us feel good by coming home. We are really lucky to have a son like this!"*

*It's been a long time since your dad felt like he was a good father. But now that his grown son actually wants*

to come home and have a relationship with him, he feels relieved and happy. His confidence as a giver and provider has been restored. “Hey Mike, lunch is on me!” your father says to his business partner.

“What’s the occasion?”

“Don’t ask questions Mike, I’m feeling generous so take advantage! But if you really want to know, Daniel just called to say that he’s coming home during the summer, which is a big relief for my wife and I.”

“Wow, you’re lucky. My son just wants to stay with his friends. What did you do? Put your foot down and tell him that you’re not paying the bills unless he comes home?”

“No way,” says your dad, “That approach backfires. My wife and I just said we’d love to see him, but he’s an adult and it’s up to him. And if he does come home, we’ll give him as much space as he needs – no chores and boring family visits if he doesn’t want it.”

Mike is pensive. He starts thinking, reflecting on the last 18 years of fatherhood. “You know ... I always suspected I pushed too hard with Josh. I’ve tried hard line tactics to get him to come home over the summer from college, but the more I push, the more he runs away. Maybe your approach is right ...” he says to your father.

You’re sitting in your dorm room, relaxing at the end of the day. Josh, your roommate comes running in. “Daniel, you won’t believe it! My dad just called. For the first time in my life, he started treating me like an adult. Now that he let me decide what I want to do over the summer, I actually want to go home. Can you believe it! I have no idea what caused his change of mind, but one thing’s for sure – we’ll get to hang out back home over the summer!”

Your excitement doesn’t stop you from realizing what just happened. You spoke positively to your mom about the upcoming visit, which made your mom happy, who then called your dad, who then spoke to his business partner, Mike. And finally, Mike spoke to his son Josh, your roommate. The circle closes. Positivity generates positivity.

Then it hits you: words send out ripples whose effects are felt long after they’ve been said. The summer just became brighter.

What if Daniel had spoken differently to his mom on the telephone? The following story illustrates the difference.

You’ve been away at college now for almost a whole school year. You know that your mom really misses you. You, on the other hand, are having a great time at college and wouldn’t mind staying on through the whole summer to be with your friends.

“Hi Mom! How are you and Dad?” begins your weekly conversation with your mom.

“Fine, Daniel. We’re so looking forward to having you home in just two weeks!”

Oh no. You’d much rather stay on with your friends. All the chores at home and boring family visits are too much. “Mom, please don’t talk about coming home. I’d much rather be with my friends and all the chores and boring family visits are a drain. I’m only coming because Dad said I have to – I acquiesced.”

There is silence on the other end. Your mom gets the message and ends the call with a hurt goodbye. Feeling upset, she picks up the phone to call your dad.

*“Honey, I just spoke to Daniel. He really doesn’t want to come home! I think you push him too much.”*

*“It’s not my fault!” retorts your dad. “You know, he probably wanted to be with his friends over the summer, but I only told him to come home because you’d be upset if he didn’t!”*

*It’s been a long time since your dad felt like he was a good father. Too long. He doubts his confidence as a giver and provider for the family.*

*“Hey Mike, is your son coming home over the summer?” your father asks his business partner.*

*“Nope. I even put my foot down and refused to pay the bills if he doesn’t come home, and he just runs the other way,” complains Mike. “What should I do?”*

*“Tell him that he’s got chores at home you want him to take care of, and that the rest of the family want to see him. Have these kids got no sense of responsibility?!”*

*You’re sitting in your dorm room, relaxing at the end of the day. Josh, your roommate comes running in.*

*“Daniel, you won’t believe it! My dad just called. He treats me like a child. Now he says I have to come home to do chores and go on boring family visits – as if refusing to pay my bills wasn’t enough. Forget it man, I’m gonna stay here and work over the summer. I guess I just won’t see you over the summer back home.”*

*Your disappointment doesn’t stop you from realizing what just happened. You spoke negatively to your mom about the upcoming visit, which upset your mom, who then called your dad, who then spoke to his business partner, Mike. And finally, Mike spoke to his son Josh, your roommate. The circle closes. Negativity generates negativity.*

*Then it hits you: words send out ripples whose effects are felt long after they’ve been said. The summer just became colder.*

*(From Rabbi Reuven Handler, Morasha)*

### KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:

☞ The human soul has three levels:

1. **Nefesh:** this is the lowest level of the soul and is closest to the physical. It allows physical movement of our limbs, controls one’s physiological processes, and is also the source of the human subconscious.
2. **Ruach:** this is the middle level of the soul, and is the level on which we are fully conscious and gives us our sense of “I.” It is the source of the power of speech.
3. **Neshamah:** this is the highest level of the soul, located in the brain, and is beyond our consciousness. It is the source of one’s wisdom and understanding.

☞ The neshamah (the soul aspect) and nefesh (the body aspect) each try to pull the ruach to their end of the spectrum. Depending on how a person uses the power of his ruach to speak, his ruach will move either upwards or downwards. A person’s words impact himself and the whole world – either positively or negatively.

## SECTION IV. THE RENEWAL OF CREATION IS INFLUENCED BY OUR WORDS

We learned in Section I how God's words build and sustain the universe. We learned in Sections II and III how the uniqueness of man is speech, which has the ability to either be attached to God through our neshamah, or alternatively, move away from the Divine.

We will now explore the incredible potential of each person to use his words to become attached to God and contribute to the building blocks of Creation.

### PART A. WORDS BUILD THE WORLD

There is a difference between casual conversations when one discusses daily affairs, in contrast to when one either speaks about involvement in a mitzvah, or words of Torah or prayer, when one's speech assumes transcendent power. In the next source, we will describe how a person's words can "partner" with those of God in comprising the building blocks of Creation.

#### 1. **Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim 2:10 – The words of our prayers build the "upper worlds," and in this way we are partners with God in His construction of Creation.**

Every word of a prayer or blessing ascends to great heights [to non-physical planes of existence], carried there by specially appointed angels. Each word has an effect on the upper roots of Creation. In this way, the person saying the prayer becomes a partner with God in Creation, since he is able to build and influence many upper worlds ...

Therefore, the Sages referred to prayer as "*devarim* [matters or words] which stand in the highest worlds" (Berachot 6b). In other words, the *devarim* [i.e. words] themselves, the words of the prayer stand at the highest point of the worlds.

... כי כל תיבה מהתפילה, או של איזה ברכה, היא העולה למעלה מעלה על ידי מארי קלין וגדפין דנטלין לה, לפעול פעולתה בשרשה העליון המיוחד לה, והוא נעשה בזה כביכול שתפו של יוצר בראשית, לבנות ולנטוע כמה וכמה עולמות ...

ולכן קראו רז"ל את ענין תפילה, "דברים העומדים ברומו של עולם" (ברכות ו:). הינו, שהדברים עצמם, הם תיבות התפילה, עומדים ברומ העולמות.

In the next source, we will elaborate on how the words of Torah and prayer transform the universe.

#### 2. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei (aish.com) – Words of prayer do not "persuade" God, but rather build the world anew directly, as do words of Torah.**

We are accustomed to think that the power of prayer is contained in the idea of persuasion. When we pray, we persuade God to alter the universe for us by using his *His* powers; our prayers don't change the world themselves; they persuade God to change it. The Nefesh HaChaim [in the previous source] explains that this impression is mistaken. He emphasizes that not only did God create the universe with the words of His Creation speeches; any change in the created universe must still be brought about through these same speeches.

When our prayers consist of holy words that are able to connect with the Creation speeches ... [He allows us to] alter the universe ...

Torah words have even greater potency. The Zohar writes that God consulted the Torah when He created the world (Terumah, 161a). The Creation words that God actually used which still hang suspended and keep infusing us with being, are the packaging of Torah ideas. When new words of Torah issue from untainted human lips, the store of Creation thoughts that can be packaged into words increases.

These new ideas and concepts modify the old ideas behind the words of Creation and infuse the old words with new tinges of meaning; new Creation ideas translate into the ability to create entirely new universes. These new universes are considered man's creations, not God's, for it is man's own Torah words that inspired their formation. These new worlds created by us constitute our own self-created habitats. It is these new worlds that we shall actually inhabit in the phase of our existence known as the World to Come. The World to Come does not exist until we create it [by Torah study and mitzvah performance].

(See the Morasha series on the World to Come).

In the next source, we learn that even ordinary conversation can join with God's ongoing Creation speeches if someone is careful to speak properly and avoid harmful speech.

3. **Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein, Shem MiShmuel, Parshat Mattot, 5670 – A person's mouth has the potential to be like the holy vessel in the Temple: whatever is placed in it becomes holy.**

According to Rabbeinu Yonah [Pirkei Avot 1:17], if one guards his tongue and is careful about what he says, then his mouth is considered to be a holy vessel [like those that were used in the Temple]. Just like a holy vessel confers holiness upon whatever [non-holy] item is placed in it, so too all words that are issued from such a mouth are holy.

... עפ"י דברי רבינו יונה דמי ששומר פיו ולשונו נעשה פיו כלי שרת, ע"כ כמו שכלי שרת מקדש את המנחה הניתנת לתוכו, כן הדיבור היוצא מפיו הוא קדוש ובכך יכול לקדש את הדבר.

Rabbeinu Yonah compares the mouth of the person who guards his tongue to a holy chalice in the Temple. Ordinary vessels could not be employed in the Temple to offer the ritual sacrifices. Temple vessels had to be specially sanctified and ritually purified and sometimes even anointed before they were judged fit for use.

4. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei, aish.com – Words spoken from a holy mouth have the ability to connect the speaker with God's Creation words that are the source of existence.**

The Rabbeinu Yonah's metaphor [in the previous source] is clear. Just as holy objects must be served in holy containers, holy words must issue from holy mouths.

The holiest of our activities of devotion to God, Torah study, and prayer, consist of speaking words. These words are the offerings of our spirits and they serve the same function today as the Temple offerings did in their time. The sacrifices of the Temple connected us to God by fusing the human life force to the life force of the animal that was sent back to God on His altar. The words of Torah and prayer that we utter connect us to God by fusing our words to God's own holy words that hang suspended above the heavens and provide the source of all being. The connecting power is in the holy words themselves. And, since holy words must be offered in holy vessels to be acceptable, we were issued commandments forbidding all negative forms of speech, especially lashon hara. Man's mouth

is a sanctified chalice only as long as it is uncontaminated by unholy words. A sanctified mouth cannot tolerate words spoken in hatred or anger, words of disharmony, or words that express gross desires.

When the human mouth is tainted by such words, it loses its sanctity, and is no longer considered a holy vessel. Words that issue from such a mouth are defiled by ungodliness and rejected when they attempt to fuse with God's Creation words. Even words of Torah and prayer lose their effectiveness when they are packaged in soiled envelopes. They cannot fly upwards and bind themselves to the interface of God's Creation speeches, because the negative taint lent them by the "dirty" vessel they issue from renders them unfit ...

Holy vessels have almost magical powers under Torah law. The holy vessels in the Temple had the power to sanctify whatever was poured into them. Non-holy substances were transformed and became holy automatically in all respects just by being contained in the holy Temple vessels. Similarly, in the imagery of Rabbeinu Yonah [as in the previous source], when the mouth is a holy vessel, even ordinary everyday words that issue from it are automatically sanctified, and automatically connect the speaker with God's Creation words that are the source of being.

#### KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

- ☞ Words of prayer and Torah build the world anew. How so? It is not as if God needs to be persuaded to use His power to alter the universe. Rather, our words ascend to the upper worlds and God allows them to alter Creation. In this way we become partners with God in Creation.
- ☞ Additionally, just as a holy vessel in the Temple will make holy whatever is placed into it, so too a person's mouth has the same power. If he uses his mouth correctly, even his everyday speech will become part of God's Creation speeches and alter the universe.

## SECTION V. WORDS ALTER THE REALITY OF TIME, PEOPLE, AND OBJECTS

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Not only do our words have the ability to combine with those of God in sustaining the universe and building our World to Come, they can also impact the nature of time, people, and objects. For example, until the Temple's destruction, a verbal declaration based on testimony of witnesses determined the start of the monthly calendar and thereby the dates of the Jewish festivals. A blessing recited at a Jewish wedding makes two individuals sanctified exclusively to one another. A *neder* (vow) has the ability to imbue an object with a status of holiness that becomes forbidden to someone.

### PART A. TIME – ESTABLISHING THE JEWISH CALENDAR

Until the Temple's destruction, the testimony of witnesses determined the monthly calendar and thereby the dates of the Jewish festivals. Although the practice was stopped with the destruction of the Temple and a fixed calendar was established, it is a potential we still possess, although are unable to actualize.

1. **Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:1-2; 4 – God tells the Jewish people to “designate sacred times” in the yearly calendar.**

God spoke to Moshe (Moses), telling him to speak to the Israelites and say to them: “There are special times that you must designate as sacred holidays to God. The following are My special times ...”

“These are God’s festivals that you must designate as sacred holidays at their appropriate times ...”

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ  
אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה  
הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי...  
אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם  
בְּמוֹעֲדָם:

It is significant to note that the last verse of the previous source is part of the Kiddush on festival mornings. The next source describes *how* the sacred designation of time was performed.

2. **Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 2:5-7 – The verbal declaration of the first day of the month determined when the sacred holidays would occur.**

There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem known as Beit Ya'azek, to which all the witnesses [of the new moon] gathered. The Beit Din (court) questioned them there ...

How would they question the witnesses? The pair that arrived first was questioned first. The elder of the two was brought in and they asked, “Tell us, how did you see the moon: facing the sun or away from the sun?” ... Then they would bring in the second witness and question him. If their testimony coincided, then their testimony was valid ...

[To declare the new moon and thus the dates of that month’s sacred holidays] the head of the Beit Din said, “It is sanctified!” And all the people responded after him, “It is sanctified! It is sanctified!”

חצר גדולה היתה בירושלים ובית יעזק היתה נקראת,  
ולשם כל העדים מתכנסים, ובית דין בודקין אותם  
...שם

כיצד בודקין את העדים זוג שבא ראשון בודקין אותו  
ראשון ומכניסין את הגדול שבהן ואומרים לו: “אמור  
כיצד ראית את הלבנה, לפני החמה או לאחר החמה?”  
... ואחר כך היו מכניסים את השני ובודקין אותו אם  
נמצאו דבריהם מכוונים עדותן קיימת...

ראש בית דין אומר: “מקודש!” וכל העם עונין אחריו  
“מקודש, מקודש!”

It is the verbal declaration of the head of the Beit Din that causes the first of the month to take effect. This in turn affects on which day the holy days will occur.

**PART B. PEOPLE – CREATING MARRIAGE**

1. **Masechet Kallah 1:1 – The recital of the sheva berachot completes the spiritual union of a couple in marriage.**

A bride is forbidden to her husband until the seven blessings [sheva berachot] are said.

כלה בלא ברכה אסורה לבעלה.

2. **Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, Chofetz Chaim: Lesson a Day, p. xxvi – The 121 words of the sheva berachot complete the bond of a man and wife.**

Words are the means by which a person can draw holiness down to earth ... The pronouncement of 121 words constitutes the key part of creating a holy bond of marriage between a man and a woman.

**PART C. OBJECTS – CONCEPT OF NEDER**

The idea of a *neder* (vow) may be familiar from the Kol Nidrei prayer that we recite on the eve of Yom Kippur nullifying any vows we might have undertaken during the past year. (See the Morasha class on Yom Kippur). In the following source we will explore the power of a vow to alter the status of any object.

1. **Bamidbar (Numbers) 30:2-3 – The source of taking a vow (*neder*) and not violating it.**

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying, “This is the thing that God has commanded: If a man takes a vow to God or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not violate his word. According to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do.”

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה  
הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'. אִישׁ כִּי יָדַר נֶדֶר לַה' אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע  
שְׂבָעָה לְאַסֹּר אֶסֶר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ כְּכֹל הַיָּצֵא  
מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה:

2. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Word Power, Parshat Masei, aish.com – Words stated as a vow do not simply create a moral obligation to make them true, but possess the power to alter reality itself. How is this so?**

This passage [above] introduces the Jewish law of *neder*, a phenomenon that has no secular equivalent, but could be roughly translated as a “vow.” Let us attempt to convey the flavor of a *neder* by looking at a classic specimen. If someone says, “Apples should be forbidden to me in the same manner that other objects are forbidden,” apples become as forbidden to him by Torah law as pork; if he transgresses against such a vow and eats an apple, he commits a sin of the same gravity as eating pork and is liable for the same punishment.

A *neder* has such enormous strength that it overpowers the obligation to perform other Torah commandments. If he phrases it correctly, a person who utters a *neder* forbidding sitting in tents is not allowed to sit in a tent even on the Succot holiday; the power of prohibition contained in his *neder* overrides the Torah commandment that enjoins him to sit in the Succah [Mishnah Nedarim 2:2].

The phenomenon of *neder* introduces a novel idea: words do not simply create a moral obligation to make them true but possess the power to alter reality itself. The object upon which a *neder* is placed becomes a forbidden substance just like pork. What is more, this is a phenomenon that is not restricted to the individual who utters the *neder*; a *neder* has the same power to affect other people.

According to the *neder* laws, I have the power to transform my apples into forbidden objects even for other Jews by wording the *neder* on my apples in a way that forbids their consumption to other people as well. The point is clear: *neder* and the idea of keeping promises have nothing in common; there is no way a promise can bind anyone besides myself. The principle is established: a *neder* transforms the object upon which it is placed into a forbidden substance. The words of a *neder* take on a tangible reality that binds them to the objects on which they are placed and alters their essential nature.

3. **Ibid. – If words have the power to reshape the universe, all the more so they have the power to alter the status of individual objects.**

From what source do words derive such power? The common perception regarding the power of words that prevails in the world is exemplified by such statements as: “words are cheap,” “sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never harm me;” the notion that “the pen is mightier than the sword” has nothing to do with the power of words per se, but relates to the ideas that words convey; words themselves are just so much empty breath. Is there any way we can understand how words become invested with such potent power? If human words have the power to reshape the universe [as we saw in the previous section], they also have the power to transform ordinary objects and render the object untouchable by investing them with special holiness ...

Although discussed in a separate Morasha class, it is important to mention another manifestation of the power of words – the concept of a blessing before eating, which operates in the opposite way from a neder. In contrast to a neder, which imbues an object with a status of holiness forbidden to someone, a blessing before eating transfers a given food from the “jurisdiction” of God to that of man (See the Morasha shiur on Berachot).

It is meaningful to conclude this class with the lesson that one derives from a neder which applies to our speech in general: why we begin Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, with the recitation of Kol Nidrei.

4. **ArtScroll Machzor, Yom Kippur, p.52 – Why do we recite Kol Nidrei immediately prior to Yom Kippur?**

Kol Nidrei emphasizes for us the extreme gravity that the Torah attaches not only to formal vows and oaths, but to the general concept that one must keep his word ... Consequently, when we preface the Yom Kippur prayers not with pleas for forgiveness, but with a declaration regarding vows, we are reminding ourselves of the importance of scrupulously honoring our commitments. Thus we begin Yom Kippur with the recognition that a Jew’s word is sacred.

The importance of keeping one’s word will be explored further in the Morasha class, Power of Speech III.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:**

- ☞ Our words can alter the qualities of time, people, and objects. For example:
- ☞ Time – a verbal declaration by the head of the Beit Din at the Temple in Jerusalem used to determine the start of the monthly calendar and thereby the dates of the Jewish sacred holidays.
- ☞ People – the pronouncement of 121 words constitutes the key part of creating a holy bond of marriage between a man and a woman.
- ☞ Objects – The cosmic effect of our words is visible on a smaller scale too. For example, words stated as a vow can make an ordinary object forbidden to everyone in the world, the same way that eating pork is forbidden. A vow does not simply create a moral obligation to make the words said true, but possesses the power to alter reality itself.

## CLASS SUMMARY:

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### IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS, ARE OUR WORDS REALLY SIGNIFICANT – THEY ARE JUST “HOT AIR”!

On the contrary, man's words are invested with an almost cosmic power to shape the universe, just as God originally brought the universe into existence with speech. Our words even have the ability to change the reality of time, people, and objects! With this in mind, we can understand why *shmirat halashon* (guarding one's tongue) is of such importance in Judaism.

### WHY IS IT THAT ONLY HUMANS HAVE THE ABILITY TO SPEAK?

From a physical perspective, man has a body just like an animal. However, he has a unique soul that has a connection to its Divine Source. It is this soul that enables humans to speak. Speaking is an expression of the essence of man, since it combines both his soul (which is the source of the ideas) and his body (his mouth, which is the tool of expression).

### WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SPEECH AND OUR SOUL?

The human soul has three levels; speech emanates from the middle level, called the ruach. The ruach, which provides us with our sense of self, can be influenced to ascend by expressing words related to the neshamah (the highest level of the soul), or descend to the level of the nefesh (which controls the physical processes of the body).

### WHAT DOES SPEECH HAVE TO DO WITH CREATION AND THE ONGOING CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE?

The world was created through God's speech at Creation – for example “And God said: Let there be light.” These words are the building blocks of Creation. This fact is hinted to in that the Hebrew word for a “word” and the Hebrew word for a “thing” are the same – *davar*. From the beginning of Creation until the present moment, the word of God continually keeps all things in existence.

### HOW CAN SPEECH ALTER THE REALITY OF OBJECTS, PEOPLE, AND EVEN TIME?

Words of prayer and Torah build the world anew. How so? It is not as if God needs to be persuaded to use His power to alter the universe. Rather, our words ascend to the upper worlds and God allows them to alter Creation. In this way we become partners with God in Creation. If words have the power to reshape the universe, all the more so they have the power to alter the status of objects, people, and time.

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

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### SECTION II.

Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), *Derech Hashem* (The Way of God) 1:3:2 – To enable man to have free will, he is composed of a body and a soul which are constantly pulling in opposite directions.

*Chidushei Agadot, Arachin* 15a, s.v. *nimtzah ha'mer*

### SECTION III.

Rabbi Ben Tzion Epstein, *Commentary on Sefer Nefesh HaChaim* 1:14, para. 8 (*Hakdamot v'Sha'arim*) – the ruach can be inclined upwards toward the neshamah, or downwards toward the nefesh.

*Bereishit Rabbah* 14:9 – The soul has five parts: nefesh, ruach, neshamah, yechidah, and chayah.