

CREATE A POSITIVE SPIRAL

By: Rabbi Yosef Vogel

To speak out or to be silent is a question with which faces us regularly. Is there ever an imperative to speak.

In taking even a casual look into the Ethics of our Fathers - one of the greatest masterpieces of Jewish sacred writings – we would be inclined to answer in the negative. “Say little and do much” seems to be the overriding guidance that our sages suggest. To put it more succinctly, words are dangerous at worst and futile at best.

It is therefore surprising that this week’s Torah portion is named “*Emor*” which means “Speak”. Even though this word “*Emor*” appears in the context of a particular verse, being that this word alone is also the name of the entire portion, it must therefore have significance on its own. In other words the Torah is telling us that at certain times it is not only permissible to talk but indeed an imperative to do so.

In looking for some guidance into human ethical behaviour from a Jewish perspective, we can gain some profound insights from the *Laws of Character Traits* by *Maimonides* in his seminal work the *Mishneh Torah* (certainly worth a glance).

In describing the behaviour of a wise man, he writes, that he “speaks favourably of his fellow man”. The wise person does not only refrain from talking negatively about others but is also actively engaged in speaking positively about people.

It is with this sentence that *Maimonides* is teaching us that we are not living in a static world but in a very dynamic environment where each and every individual plays a powerful role in shaping the society in which we live. This is achieved not just primarily with good deeds but also with words, both positive and negative.

It is crucial in our lives to avoid saying something derogatory about people because of the destructive effect it has on an individual and which also leads to a reciprocal response resulting in a downward negative spiral. So too is it vital that we should have a positive impact on the people around us - both the people we know or don’t know -by speaking favourably about them. This will also create a mutual feeling of respect and good will resulting in an upward positive spiral mutually beneficial to all.

This is true not just with the people we know but even and especially with the people we don’t know. Let us remember that words are very powerful for they are capable not only of destroying but also in building friendship and goodwill between all mankind.