



WOMEN'S LEAGUE SHABBAT

Devar Torah

Hiddur Mitzvah: Our Words Matter

Hiddur mitzvah traditionally means to beautify a mitzvah. We create beautiful ritual items to bring more attention and mindfulness to them.

We make them aesthetically pleasing to appeal to all our senses. In other words, *hiddur mitzvah* results in the expansion of the mitzvah so that it becomes bigger, more important and has a greater effect on those who experience it.

The primordial experience of expansion in Judaism is the creation of the world. God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1:2) The commentary in *Chumash Etz Hayim* explains, "The divine word shatters the cosmic silence and signals the beginning of a new order. 'God said' means that God created the world with His words. God's words began an expansion which continues to this day. "

Just as God's words set in motion a universal expansion, we, too, experience the expansion that can be caused by words. Kind words, loving words, words of sympathy, empathy and care cause us to open our hearts to the speaker, to expand our sense of being, trust, connection to the universe and to each other. We also have experienced the opposite reaction: harsh words, negative words, words of judgment, anger and hatred shut us down, causing constriction in our physical and emotional bodies.

We know the importance of words in Judaism – sacred words of Torah, ritual, prayer. We know the prohibition against *lashon ha'ra* because of the widespread damage it causes. We know that words can heal and words can hurt. Words create worlds and can also destroy them.

So how can we elevate our words and uplift our speech to open the hearts of our listeners, rather than shut them down? By bringing mindfulness to our interactions, attention to our conversations and a heightened awareness that what we say matters, we can create expansiveness all around us which allows others – and ourselves – to grow.

Hiddur mitzvah, then, applies not only to beautifying objects but also to ennobling our speech. If the words we speak bring blessing to our listeners, if the words we speak open hearts and expand the well-being of the people we address, then we are truly beautifying a mitzvah and extending the reach of goodness in the world.

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