**Keeping Your Word:**

**It’s Easier Said Than Done**

**#1**

**Pirkei Avos 1:15**

*Shammai says: Make your Torah (study) a fixed practice; say little and do much; and receive everyone with a cheerful face.*

**Rashi**

*This maxim follows the example of Abraham when he was visited by the three angels. He offered them only a morsel of bread, yet he took cream and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and placed these before each of them. (Torah, Bereshis 18:5,7)*

*The Sages teach us that the righteous say little but do much, while the wicked make huge promises, but don’t do even a little. Ephron son of Zohar is the prototype of the wicked; he originally promised to give Abraham the cave of Machpelah and the field around it as a gift, yet he later demanded an exorbitant payment. (Torah, Bereshis 23: 10-16).*

**Questions:**

**(a)****What is the connection between the 3 parts of the Mishnah? What is the common denominator between them?**

**Tiferes Yisrael(’s connection)**

*These three statements correspond to the three statements of the Mishnah in*

**Pirkei Avos 1:2**:

*‘The world stands on three things - on the Torah, on the service [of G-d], and upon acts of loving-kindness.’*

**(b) How are these Mishnahs connected?**

**(c) What does our Mishnah (1:15) add to (1:2)?**

**(d) We can understand that one should do much, but what is the value of saying little? Why not say what you intend to do? One should not overstate his intentions, but what really is wrong with simply being accurate?**

**(e) Why should one say anything, why not just to act without promises?**

**#2**

**Questions:**

**(a) Is there a difference between merely saying we'll do something and actually promising?**

**(b) Why do people like to promise?**

**(c) Why don't people keep what they promised?**

**#3**

Upon seeing the long lines and inefficient method of adjudication that was transpiring on a daily basis while the people waited for Moshe Rabbeinu to hear their disputes, Yisro recommended the institution of a judicial system — not unlike what we have today — to streamline the process and allow for disputes to be resolved in an appropriate and efficient manner. Yisro suggested a type of appellate system whereby more straightforward matters would be handled at a lower level and more difficult matters would be brought to the higher level courts, ultimately reaching the ears of Moshe himself.

The judges were to be:

*G-d fearing, men of valor, and men of truth who despise corruption. There were to be judges for a thousand people, judges for a hundred people, judges for fifty people, and judges for ten people.* **[Torah, Shmos 18:21]**

**Rashi**

**Men of truth:** *These are people who keep their promises, upon whose words one may rely, and thereby, their commands will be obeyed.*

**Question:        Why does Rashi say that in order to be a man of truth you specifically have to show that you keep promises? Isn’t a man of truth someone who says truth?**

**#4**

**Talmud Taanis 8a**

*Rabbi Ami points to the story of those who believe in the ‘chulda u-bor’ – the well and the weasel– arguing that if you believe in them, certainly you can believe in G-d.*

**Arukh, Rabbi Nasan ben Rabbi Yechiel**

*The story begins with a girl from a noble family who loses her way and, having fallen into a well while drinking, cannot manage to extract herself. A passerby hears her cries and shouts. After a lengthy conversation he agrees to save her, on the condition that she will marry him. Upon lifting her from the well he wants to consummate the marriage immediately, but she objects, arguing that a Jewish man surely wants to marry according to the Jewish law and would not be interested in simply fulfilling animalistic urges. They agree to marry and appoint the well and a passing weasel as witnesses to their pact.

Upon returning home, she scrupulously kept her agreement, refusing the entreaties of all suitors. He, on the other hand, soon forgot the agreement and married another woman, who bore children – the first of whom was bitten by a weasel, the second of whom drowned in a well. Seeing that her children died under unnatural circumstances, she demanded an explanation from her husband, who admitted that he had promised another that he would marry her. They divorced and he searched for the woman who he had saved and promised to marry. When she refused him – as she did all others – he told her of the honest witnesses -* the well and the weasel *- that brought him back to her. In the end they married and had many children, proving the passage in Tehillim (Psalms) (101:6) that G-d’s eyes are upon the faithful who merit a close relationship with Him.*

**Bava Metzia 44a**

*He who punished the generation of flood … will punish him who does not keep his word.*

**Questions:**

**(a) Why is it so important to keep our word?**

**(b) Why are there such strong consequences for not keeping one's promise?**

**#5**

**Question:        What method would you propose in order to fulfill your commitments?**

**#6**

**Question:        Does keeping/ not keeping resolutions, commitments to yourself affect your relationship with others? Explain!**

**#7**

**Question:        What's your takeaway from today's discussion?**