



Words Do Matter

By Pam Morris, Early Learning Center director

Remember the chant from the playground, “Sticks and Stones will break my bones but names can never hurt me?” Ahhh, to be 4 again. But 4 when I was 4 was much different than it is now. We have learned that words have power and they can be hurtful to those on the receiving end.

Which makes it all the more interesting (read “abominable”) when the highly revered news outlets don’t report as if they themselves haven’t been screaming, from the rooftops, about the importance of what words are used.

Those that report the news have long known the power of the words they use. Adjectives, adverbs, they can change the meaning of a statement just like that! (Picture me snapping my fingers). And because of this, wouldn’t you think that the media professionals would take extra care with what is written and what is said?

Well, I hold professionals to a high standard. If a person wants me to appreciate their experience and give them respect for what obstacles have been overcome in order to be sitting where they are, then I believe there should be a set of standards in place.

So imagine my surprise (read “not really shocked”) when I saw the post from the New York Times: an early headline stating: “Israel strikes Hezbollah in Lebanon, which fires rockets at Israel.” (Unitedwithisrael.org) What is missing from this reporting? The word “preemptively”. By leaving out that one word, the article makes Israel the aggressor (are you shocked?) and Hezbollah and Lebanon the victims.

The Los Angeles Times was no better: “Israel launches airstrikes in Lebanon against Hezbollah, which fires rockets at Israel”. And then there is CBS: “Israel launched a series of intense air strikes in southern Lebanon early Sunday in what is described as a preemptive move against the Hezbollah militant group, threatening to trigger a broader region wide war that could torpedo efforts to forge a cease-fire in Gaza.”



And now, I pause. Take a moment to let these headlines of these revered news outlets sink in. If you were a casual person reading these headlines, as most of the people who read these headlines are, what would you think?

Might these headlines make you ponder Israel's motivation? Might these headlines make you wonder if we really should be supporting Israel? The blatant disregard for the truth seems calculated. Might these headlines incite riots and violence against Jewish students on college campuses or Jewish-owned businesses or synagogues in France, like the one that was attacked this past Shabbat?

As journalists, I would like to believe that these professionals have learned the power of their words. The power these words have over people's lives. The power these words have over the narrative that is running rampant through societies across the globe.

Words do matter and the word professionals need to remember this.

Shabbat Shalom.