Rabbi Shimon Gruen

# Torah Lessons for the Home

{ Vayeishev 5780 }

## Brutal Honesty

### Problematic Honesty

In this week's Parshah, we learn that due to their deep-seated aversion, "The shevatim were unable to greet Yosef or wish peace upon him". Rashi says, that despite the fact that this is not complimentary of the state of affairs between the brothers, it does tell us of a commendable trait that the brothers had. Their steadfast honesty. They did not say what they did not mean.

But actually, this Rashi is difficult to understand because we know that although honesty is indeed a beautiful ideal, it is sometimes permissible and even necessary to bend the truth. This week alone, we learn of several of our forefathers doing exactly that. Yaakov Avinu dismissed Yosef's dreams as flighty when he knew that they were in fact true, so as not to antagonize the brothers… Yitzchok mourned along with the family when they heard the news of Yosef's death, despite his prophetic knowledge that Yosef was still alive… Reuven suggested that Yosef be sold into slavery, when in reality all he wanted was to buy time…

Perhaps the wrongdoing of the shevatim was not so much that they couldn't bring themselves to greet Yosef, but rather that they didn't lie. So essentially, even their honesty was not praiseworthy. Sometimes, being truthful is not the right thing. Sometimes, it is necessary to smile, to greet someone and ask them how they're doing, even though it is the last thing you would want to do to that particular person. Sometimes, being intent on being truthful doesn't come from good middos. On the contrary, it might come from some pretty undesirable character traits.

It's important to mention that we are discussing the Shivtei Kah, holy, G-d fearing men whose stature we cannot even fathom. So when we make this discussion, it's just so we can glean life lessons and try to become better people, never to judge or condemn the actions of our forefathers chas veshalom.

### When Honesty Hurts

We are not obligated to say everything that we feel. When someone calls us and we're really not in the mood to talk to them at that moment, being truthful would mean answering the phone with a grunt, "Yeah, what do you want? I'm really not in the mood to talk to you right now."

In this case, sharing the truth will only hurt your relationship. Answering with a smile and a cheerful hello, despite your lack of enthusiasm, will not only prevent hurt feelings and future disagreements, it will actually promote happiness, unity and peace.

## Compliment and Gain

When was the last time you complimented your wife? Hasn't she been doing anything commendable? Why don't you just tell her how tasty the supper was, or how neat the kitchen counters look? Some people might say: "I can't say something that I don't really feel". Now, it's not that I don't value honesty, but when it comes at the expense of telling your significant other something nice, it is out of place.

If you can manage to squeeze out a compliment out of the most mundane action that you notice your wife doing, chances are she will do more of the same, and as time goes on she will give you many more reasons to compliment her.

You don't always have to be so honest. Why won't you smile at your husband when he walks through the door in the evening? "Well, I had the most awful day ever, the kids were home sick, the cleaning lady didn't show, and the supper got burnt. How can I smile when I really don't feel like it?" The answer is, "Fake it!" When your husband sees your smile, that you're happy to see him, chances are his spirits will be lifted and he might actually pitch in to help.

## The Name of Harmony

For the sake of harmony, Hashem has given permission for His name to be erased. Do we need a bigger proof for how much He wants us to get along? Furthermore, our seforim tell us that peace between husband and wife, and between our fellow men, IS Hashem's name. So if we can avoid erasing Hashem's name, (by being just a bit dishonest) we will be promoting marital harmony, and essentially not erasing anything at all!

You have the power to uplift another person's spirits, to brighten his mood, to enhance his day, and to improve his self-image, just by saying something nice! How often have you come home to find the situation tense, the atmosphere taut, the nerves on edge? Instead of criticizing everyone, and demanding to know why things have not been done the way you like them, try unearthing a compliment. About anything! Even if it is not necessarily completely true. See how that changes the whole atmosphere in the house.

## Fake It Till You Make It

If there is absolutely no way you can come up with something nice to say, the problem might not be with someone else. The problem might be with you. If you try hard enough, you can find something pleasant to say about everybody. Sometimes, we are just so emotionally entrenched in a situation that we have no way of seeing past our own pain and grievances.

But just like Emunah; the more we talk about it, the more we believe it, the better chance we'll have to see it come true. So even if at first you bluff your way through with the compliments and praise, you will be surprised to find that many times they will actually become true. The fact is, that when you make someone feel good by complimenting their actions, it makes them want to repeat them, if only to please you and get your acknowledgement again.

A tiny bit of light pushes away so much darkness. It is worth the effort! In Rabbi Elimelech's tefilla we actually pray to be able to see our friend's good traits. It's not always easily or readily apparent, but it pays to search for them!

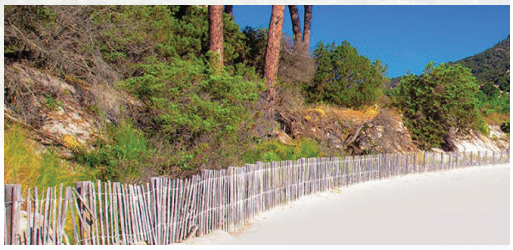
## Chinuch: Keep Praising

If this is true between husband and wife, who are two mature adults, how much more so can we see the amazing benefits of kind words when it comes to dealing with our precious young children? Parents who made an effort to find things for which to praise their children reported that their entire relationship has changed. Their whole household has become more positive and upbeat.

Even though you think your child does not deserve it, make today the day when you will catch your child doing something good and comment about it! Start taking note of things that he has been doing for a while and you never thought of mentioning them. We are often afraid that if we praise them for what they're already doing, they won't be motivated to become better. This couldn't be farther from the truth! Let's say he made a bracha nicely, don't mention the fact that he forgot to bentch, compliment him on the nice bracha he just made! That will encourage him to keep doing the right thing. The good feelings this will garner inside of him, will make him search for more ways to get your approval.

A grown man in his upper twenties was telling me how he remembers trying to get his parents' approval as a child. Whatever he tried was never enough, and all he could hear from them was criticism and how he should have done things better. This man is a battered shell of a human being and struggling with many different issues. Being constantly told off and criticized makes a deep impact on a person's psyche. He is left feeling like a total disappointment and sorely lacks self-esteem.

Let's take a page out of our forefathers' playbook. Let's look away from the negative, polish up the truth, and find a reason to say something nice to the people in our lives.



## Q&A

Please feel free to send any questions, on this topic or any topic to RabbiGruen@Lehair.org



**QUESTION:** I don't have a better way to describe it, but my wife is addicted to her phone. Whenever I try to talk to her, or when the kids need her, she always finds herself checking her notifications or responding to another friend's message. I have tried asking her, begging her, cajoling her, and even ignoring her, but so far nothing has worked.

**ANSWER:** Keep it positive! Stop trying to control her; make it about yourself. Tell your wife how much "you" value your time with her, how much it bothers "you" that she uses the phone so much. When you say it enough times, calmly, lovingly, and gently, she will see that you really mean it and try to make you happy.

Don't forget, that dropping a habit such as this, as well as any other ingrained habit, is very difficult! Don't expect it to happen overnight. Don't lose your patience with her. Understand that you might have to mention it several times to see a change, but keep those messages consistently gentle. When we ask something from someone nicely, and then immediately switch to nasty, we are not only hurting them, we are also ruining our chances of getting through to them when we revert back to being nice.

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