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On The Parsha

There are times when the full truth must be told, the (rare times) partial truth must be told, and times when the truth should not be told at all (rarer still). We will explore examples of each of these times with illustrative cases below, noting how each of the cases relate to the enhancement or maintenance of healthy self-esteem.

There is a fascinating Midrash (BaMidbar Rabbah 15:5) that suggests two reasons as to why Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah. The first reason given is that He wanted to raise the level of respect and admiration that the nations of the world had for Bnei Yisrael. This occurred when the nations of the world realized that Bnei Yisrael had the unique merit to light the Menorah and reflect Hashem's light to the world. Later, the Midrash explains that the Mitzvah of the Menorah was given to Bnei Yisrael to heighten their own sense of self-worth and self-respect.

Rav Zev Wolf Einhorn ZT"l, better known as the Maharzav (or Maharzu), provides a beautiful explanation for this Midrash based upon the concept that there are two types of Hakaras HaTov (gratitude) that you may feel when a kindness is done for you. The first type of Hakaras HaTov occurs when you certainly appreciate what was done for you, however, it is accompanied by a degree of shame or embarrassment for receiving the kindness that you may not have deserved. There is another type of Hakaras HaTov however, that occurs without this dynamic. This occurs when you know and feel that the doer cares and fully loves you – in such cases, you feel no shame and do not care if the kindness may be undeserved. Hashem, explains the Maharzav, gave Bnei Yisrael the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah to build their self-esteem by showing them the full extent of how much He loves them. He loves them so much that He gave them such a precious Mitzvah (as stated above, the honor and merit to reflect Hashem's light to the world). With this realization, Bnei Yisrael feel the second type of Hakaras HaTov, full appreciation without

any sense of shame or guilt. The above is one example, where the full truth was told (i.e. the full extent of how much Hashem loves Bnei Yisrael).

We also know that there are times when a truth can be so devastating to an individual that it should be suppressed to protect his self-esteem. The Gemara (Berachos 28a) discusses the time that they removed Rabban Gamliel from his position as Nasi (president) and appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in his place. At that time, they also dismissed the guard at the door of the Bais Medrash (study hall for Torah learning) and permission was granted for all types of students to enter. Rabban Gamliel had been opposed to this and had a much stricter policy on who should be permitted into the Bais Medrash. His policy was that any student whose "inside" was not like his "outside" meaning that they conducted themselves in a way that was not genuine, would not be allowed to enter the Bais Medrash.

The Gemara further relates that several benches were added to the Bais Medrash to accommodate the additional students that were now permitted to enter the Bais Medrash. When Rabban Gamliel saw the large number of additional students, he was disheartened, thinking, "Perhaps, Heaven forbid, I prevented [members of] Israel from engaging in Torah study." Then, Heaven above, showed him a dream which featured white jugs filled with ashes alluding to the fact that the additional students that were now allowed to enter, were quite less than ideal (and therefore Rabbi Gamliel was not

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wrong when he restricted their entry). However, the Gemara then says that this was not true – the additional students were indeed worthy enough to enter the Bais Medrash. However, the thought that Rabban Gamliel may have wrongfully prevented Torah learning would have devastated him, so the dream was shown to Rabbi Gamliel to ease his mind and protect his self-esteem.

And finally, there are times where we should only provide the partial truth to help maintain healthy self-esteem (and not lead one to hubris). For example, we find that the Torah describes Noach as a “Perfect Tzaddik”. However, when Hashem speaks to Noach directly, He just mentions that he is a “Tzaddik” and does not use the word “Perfect” to help maintain Noach’s healthy self-esteem and not lead to conceit.

The cases above are used for illustrative purposes only and one’s Rav should be consulted regarding when one may conceal the truth to enhance or maintain another’s self-esteem.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin ZT”L (1818–1898) was a leading Rav of the Torah community in Eretz Yisrael. Prior to moving to Eretz Yisrael in 1878, he served as the Rav in Łomża, Mezritch, Kovno, Shklov, Brisk, and finally, Yerushalayim. When he was a Rav in Brisk, his enemies falsely accused him of engaging in illegal activities against the Tsar of Russia. The case went to trial and a non-observant Jewish lawyer was appointed to represent Rav Diskin.

At the trial, Rav Diskin explained to the court that the allegations against him were false and fabricated to discredit him because of his efforts to uphold the strict standards of Jewish law. After Rav Diskin pleaded his case, the court proceeded to hear the evidence against him. During the course of the trial, it became apparent that Rav Diskin would not look at his own lawyer who represented him. Taking notice of the odd behavior, the judge inquired about Rav Diskin’s behavior and was told that Rav Diskin disapproved of the lawyer’s rejection of the traditions of Judaism and therefore did not want to look at him.

The judge was duly impressed. The lawyer was there to protect Rav Diskin when his very future and freedom hung in the balance. And yet, because of the integrity of his convictions to Judaism, he would not look at the very

person who was appointed to protect him. Ultimately, the judge said that there is no way that a person with Rav Diskin’s integrity and strength of conviction, even at the risk of his own freedom, could be lying. He dismissed the charges against him and Rav Diskin was exonerated.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: We always hear the view of Beis Hillel [in the Mishna in Kesuvos] that one can praise a bride to her groom - even if it is false. What about the other way around? Does Beis Hillel also hold that we can falsely praise a groom to his bride? Or perhaps in that case, does he agree to the view of Bais Shammai that one may only say absolutely true things? Also, in further examination of Bais Hillel’s opinion, who may we praise the bride to? Is it only to her groom or is it to others as well?

ANSWER: These are excellent questions. We will start with the latter one. Rav Elyashiv ZT”L limited the false praise of a bride to her groom and only to others who are likely to repeat the praise to the groom. One may not praise the bride to anyone else, because it is Sheker (falsehood) and would serve no purpose. (See Ashrei Halsh Vol. I p. 197) As for your initial question, the Ben Yehoyada states that generally, women have certain natural anxieties which encourage them to get married. These are anxieties that men, generally, do not have. Therefore, he believes that one may not praise falsely, a groom to his bride, as that is not needed as she generally wants to get married due to her anxieties. Men who do not have these anxieties need a little more encouragement so to speak to get married, and that is why one may falsely praise a bride to her groom. However, see the Sefas Emes (Parshas Tetzaveh 5662), that states that it is permitted to falsely praise a groom to his bride as well.

*“May I back out of a school carpool that I have already committed to?”
“Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?”*

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