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Chizuk - Inspiration

The Rebbe Rashab of Chabad was known as a man of complete Emes (truth), earning the profound respect of the great Rav Chaim Soloveitchik ZT"l. His teaching on integrity was clear and uncompromising: "Truth is the middle path. An inclination to the right - to be overly stringent with oneself and find faults with oneself that are not really there; or an inclination to the left - to be overly lenient with oneself, rationalizing one's faults and being overly lenient and ignoring the demands of Avodas Hashem (service to Hashem) out of self-love — both of the above are pathways of falsehood."

In 1903, the Rebbe had been suffering from paralysis in his arm and when conventional treatments failed, he learned of a revolutionary new approach being pioneered in Vienna by Dr. Wilhelm Stekel, working in consultation with Sigmund Freud. This experimental treatment called "psychoanalysis" was virtually unknown in religious circles. The Rebbe decided to undergo psychoanalysis and was cured.

Rather than hide this unconventional medical decision, the Rebbe was completely transparent with his followers and openly admitted undergoing the treatment. With the attitude of, "If it is good enough for the Rebbe, then it is good enough for me," many sought help and were healed through the new methods of psychoanalysis and its corollary methods.

Dr. Stekel published the case history in 1908, maintaining the Rebbe's anonymity and cited, "a forty-two-year-old rabbi" who suffered from occupational neurosis that was cured through psychoanalysis. The case became notable in psychoanalytic literature as the first documented and successful treatment of a Jewish religious leader. Later, both his son (the 6th Lubavitcher Rebbe) and the last Lubavitcher Rebbe openly spoke about it – thus making psychoanalysis and seeking help from mental health professionals socially acceptable which encouraged many in the community who

needed help from mental health professionals to seek it.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I have heard that there are leniencies about lying to enable one to perform a Mitzvah when it is not otherwise possible to perform the Mitzvah. To do so, one says something, "that can be interpreted in two ways." Meaning, one says something in a way that may be deceptive which is what is intended, but also in a way that is technically still truthful. However, isn't this just using a loophole that undermines the importance of telling the truth and should therefore be forbidden?

ANSWER: To respond to your question, it may be helpful to provide a couple of illustrative examples. In the introduction to the Nefesh HaChaim of Rav Chaim Volozhin ZT"l, the greatest student of the Vilna Gaon, it states that we are here on Earth to help others. With that in mind, let us say you know of an older, stubborn single who will not date a girl that you know of, because she is thirty and he only wants to date girls that are below that age. However, in all other respects, you know that this girl is a perfect match for him. In such a case, you can lie to make the date happen (See Taanis 28a regarding the evil Roman decree against Bikkurim). However, Chazal (the Sages) are concerned that you can, Heaven forbid, become used to lying. Therefore, they recommend that when one must do so, it should be done in a way that minimizes the actual lie to be told – precisely so that one will not fall into a horrific habit of lying.

A second example: Rivkah was well aware of the possibility that the birthright of Torah could be placed in the hands of the wicked Eisav, if Eisav were to receive the better Bracha from Yitzchak that is reserved for the first-born. Accordingly, Rivkah insisted that Yaakov deceive his father into giving him the Bracha that his father had reserved for Eisav, the first-born. However, to minimize the lie, Yaakov said something, "that can be interpreted in two ways." When Yitzchak asked him who he was, Yaakov placed a subtle pause in his three-

word statement to his father Yitzchok. He said, “Anochi (pregnant pause) Eisav Bechorcha” – which was meant to deceive Yitzchak as he would most likely interpret it as, “I am Eisav your oldest son.” However, the same statement could still be interpreted truthfully as, “I am here, Eisav is your oldest son.”

There are three important notions to keep in mind. Firstly, lying for a Mitzvah may only be done as you stated in your question, when the Mitzvah will not otherwise be performed. Secondly, according to Rav Yavrov ZT”L in his Niv Sfasayim, the leniency of lying for a Mitzvah may only be used by people that are generally honest in all other situations. Finally, when one is permitted to lie, one should extend efforts to minimize the lie – for example, he or she could minimize the lie by employing the recommended “two ways to interpret” leniency that you asked about. This method is recommended not because as you stated in your question, “it undermines the importance of telling the truth.” Quite the contrary, it works to bolster the importance of telling the truth because it serves as a reminder to the individual that even when one is permitted to lie, it is so distasteful that one should still say something that can be interpreted a second way (i.e. in a truthful matter).

On The Parsha

In the beginning of Parshas Massei, the Torah lists the forty-two stops of Bnei Yisrael’s journey in the wilderness. Rashi provides a profound explanation for why the Torah records every single stop. He explains as follows:

“Why are all these stops recorded? To make us aware of the kindnesses of the Omnipresent, namely, that although He decreed upon Bnei Yisrael to have them move around and wander in the desert, you should not say that they were wandering and being pushed from place to place the entire 40 years without rest. For there are no more than 42 stops stated here; deduct from them 14, all of which were in the first year after leaving Egypt before the decree... Furthermore, deduct from them 8 journeys that were after Aaron's death – from Mount Hor until the plains of Moab, in the 40th year. It follows that in the other 38 years they made only 20 journeys.”

Without Rashi's explanation, we might have understood this lengthy list of stops as evidence of Bnei Yisrael’s unsettled

existence – always wandering from place to place and the related hardships that likely ensued. The very word “wandering” conjures up images of endless and restless days and nights. We might have thought that Hashem's punishment was relentlessly harsh, with Bnei Yisrael never finding stability or peace during this time. However, Rashi corrects the record so-to-speak – more than half of the journeys took place in two years where they did indeed move around a lot, however the other 38 years in the desert, they were settled and did not travel that frequently.

The truth about Bnei Yisrael’s wilderness experience was more nuanced than the narrative on its face would suggest. Yes, they were punished and had to wander. But no, they were not in constant, frantic motion without rest. There was a more complex reality - one that included both divine punishment and divine mercy.

When we perceive our own experiences, we often fall into the trap of “totalizing the narrative” - we perceive entire periods of our lives or the entirety of a relationship in purely negative terms. We say things like “that was the worst year of my life” or “I never caught a break” when that is not entirely true.

We should be honest and not minimize real suffering. However, we should also be honest and not overlook positive aspects of an experience. Just because we had a legitimately negative experience does not mean it was completely negative.

Everyday Emes requires us to tell others and ourselves complete and truthful narratives about our experiences, even when a partially truthful story would be more convenient or fit our preconceived notions.

*“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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