

SPEAKING TRUTH

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לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני' בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH

One should always speak truthfully; as the Torah says "*Midvar sheker tirchak*" (You should distance yourself from falsehood). Even if the lie will not cause any harm to another, it is forbidden to change a story. Moreover, one who is careful to ascertain the facts of a story before repeating it, will always have many listeners.

(אורחות צדיקים שער כ"ב, ר"ח שער קדושה פ"ב)

There was once a town called Kushta (meaning truth), where the inhabitants never veered from the truth and no one died at a young age. The *Amora*, Rav Tavus, moved to the town, got married and had two sons. Once when his wife was washing herself, a neighbor knocked on their door, and feeling that it was inappropriate to have someone come in, Rav Tavus said that his wife was not there. As a result, shortly after, his two children died. When the townspeople heard the story, they asked him to leave Kushta and not bring the *malach hamaves* upon them.

(סנהדרין צ"ז ע"א)

The Torah warns us to *distance* ourselves from falsehood, since falsehood is more disgusting than all other negative traits. One who speaks truth, follows in the way of Hashem, and merits His brachos. One who chooses falsehood invites upon himself worry, conflict and pain.

(ס' החינוך מצוה עד)

When Hashem commanded Noach to take a pair of all living creatures into the *teiva*, Falsehood, wanted to enter as well, but was stopped because he had no pair. Searching for a match, he met Tragedy and asked if he was willing to be his pair? "What will you give me in return?" Tragedy asked. "All my profits," Falsehood promised, and Tragedy agreed. After the *mabul*, when they left the *teiva*, Falsehood went around to gather his earnings, but they were all being taken by Tragedy. "Where are all my profits?" he complained. Tragedy replied, "Have we not make an agreement?" to which Falsehood had no response. Nothing is achieved by falsehood, for everything will be taken by tragedy and misfortune.

(מדרש שו"ט ז)

All the letters of the word *emes* (תמא) stand on two feet, and the letters of the word *sheker* (רקש) stand on one. This teaches us

that truth has a continued existence and falsehood does not. Additionally, the letters of *emes* are far apart in the sequence of the *Aleph-Beis*, while the letters of the *sheker* are close to one another, for keeping truthful can be difficult, while resorting to lying is easy to do.

(ילקוט שמעוני, בראשית ג)

Chazal say that the punishment of a liar is that even when he tells the truth, no one believes him.

(סנהדרין פ"ט ע"ב)

Chazal say, that the *Yidden* were sent into *golus* only because they transgressed the possuk '*Midvar sheker tirchak*', (you should distance yourself from falsehood).

The tzaddik Reb Pinchas Koritzer would tell his *talmidim* that if *Yidden* would hold themselves back from telling lies, *Moshiach* would have come long ago. The main deterrent to *Moshiach's* coming is the negative trait of falsehood.

One of his *talmidim*, the tzaddik Reb Refael of Bershah excelled in this *middah*. So much so, that if he were to walk into the *beis medrash* dripping wet and someone would ask him if it was raining outside, he would not answer, but only say, "When I was outside it was raining..."

(שערי הקדושה להרח"ו, שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 243)

A wealthy *Yid* decided one night, while saying *krias sh'ma*, that he would give twenty five rubles to *tzeddaka* every time he would say something that was not true. When the local *melamed* heard this, he exclaimed, "Then lie and provide for the poor!" Later, when the *melamed* visited Lubavitch, the Rebbe Maharash rebuked him for his advice, for one is not allowed to lie even for a good reason.

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 208)

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES

The *Amora* Rav had a wife who caused him much distress. Whenever Rav would ask for lentils, she would serve him beans, and when he would ask for beans she would serve him lentils. When his son Chiyah grew older, he began switch his father's serving, getting what he had requested. At first Rav thought that his wife had mended her ways, but then the boy told him what he had been doing. Rav was pleased at his son's wisdom, but he told him not to

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go on with it, for he is learning to speak falsely.

(יבמות סג ע"א)

Rebbi Zeira said that one should not promise something to a child and then not fulfill it, for then he will be teaching him to lie.

The *tzaddik* Reb Yechezkel of Shinova was known as the 'lover of truth.' His father, the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz once said that his son would never go back on his word, even if he'd be given everything in the world. Once, a tailor sewed a garment for Reb Yechezkel's grandchild. After trying it on, the boy refused to take it off, until the tailor promised that he would sew pockets unto the garment. The *tzaddik* then insisted that he do as he had promised, so the child not become accustomed to telling lies.

(סוכה מ"ו ע"ב, סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 208)

When one answers 'yes' or 'no,' it should be completely truthful. Even nodding, shaking one's head 'no,' or any expression should indicate only the truth.

(ספר חסידים ס"ו תתרח)

A decree against the *yiddishe* way of dress was placed on many cities in Poland, and the *rabbanim* differed in their opinions whether one had to be *moser nefesh* for this or not. The *tzaddik* Reb Avraham of Chechanov held that one must go on *mesiras nefesh*, while other *talmidei chachomim* in his city insisted that another opinion should be considered on such a vital subject. Despite the dangers of travel, Reb Avrohom decided to travel to Warsaw to the *tzaddik*, the Chiddushei Harim. When his family expressed their concern, he assured them that there was no need to worry, for he was not going to settle there (*avek-zetzin zich*). When he arrived, the Rebbe offered him a chair, but Reb Avrohom refused and stood as the Chidushei Harim cited his view, also expressing the need for *mesiras nefesh*.

When Reb Avrohom left, he explained why he had refused to sit, "I told my family that I was not going to *avek-zetzin zich* (literally "sit"), and I did not want to go back on my word, even in its literal sense."

(סיפורי חסידים זוין מועדים ע' 259)

One is allowed to change the truth for the purpose of peace. However, this only applies when relating something of the past, but not when promising something that will be done in the future.

(שו"ע אדה"ז ס"י קנ"ו)

STAYING FAR FROM FALSEHOOD

Once, in the city of the Baal Machatzis Hashekel, a dead man was found, and the *Rov's* knife, full of blood, was lying near him. It seemed that the murderer had stolen the *Rov's* knife to place the blame of killing on him. The townsmen advised the *Rov* to tell the judge that the knife was not his. At the court, the *Rov* told the truth, admitting that it was his knife, though he insisted that he had not committed the murder. In the end, the *Rov* was freed. He explained that when the *shevatim* were told by Yosef to bring Binyomin to Mitzrayim, Yehudah could have taken another child and told Yosef that he was Binyomin, but he could not bring himself to tell a lie.

(הקדמות המו"ל למוחצית השקל יורה דעה)

There was once a young man, who, since his childhood, had always done as he pleased, and committed many *aveiros*. One day, feeling remorseful, he went to Rebbi Shimon ben Shetach and told him he wants to do *teshuvah*. Rebbi Shimon told him that all he had to do was watch himself from telling lies and he would be saved from transgression. "No problem," said the young man. Rebbi Shimon had him swear, and then the young man went home.

Sometime later, the young man was in his neighbor's home, and unable to control himself, he stole all the gold and silver. As he was leaving, he thought to himself, "What will I say to the neighbor when she asks about her possessions? If I will deny taking them, it will be a lie, and what will be of my swearing?" He then returned all he had stolen, and understood the wisdom of Rebbi Shimon.

(אוצר המדרשים, ס' חסידים החדש ע' יג)

Reb Aizik of Vitebsk, was one of the outstanding *chassidim* of the Alter Rebbe. Once, when he was a young *Rov*, he partook in a *seudas mitzvah*, where he took a piece of cake from the table. One of the guests asked why he did not take the '*lekach*', since it is more special. Reb Aizik had forgotten about the '*lekach*' but was embarrassed to say so, thus he answered, "I don't eat '*lekach*'!" From that day on, he never tasted a piece of '*lekach*' again.

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 261)

The Frierdiker Rebbe heard the following story from his father, the Rebbe Rashab:

There was once a talented child, who would overly exaggerate and was known as an expert liar, to the point that his family and others kept their distance from him. As he matured, he came to recognize his negative trait, and wanted to *teshuvah*, but was unable to. Though he learned a lot of *Torah*, his lying did not lessen, and even when speaking *divrei torah*, he would exaggerate or lie.

Hearing of a great *tzaddik* who lived in a nearby city, he decided to go ask for his help. When he arrived, the *tzaddik* tested him and found him to be very knowledgeable in *Torah*, so he asked, "Don't you know that it is forbidden to lie and that those who lie do not welcome the *shechina*?" The *bochur* replied, "I know that it is a severe *aveira*, and, but I can't help myself, for I feel that I am being held back by *shamayim* from doing *teshuvah*."

The *tzaddik* asked, "Nothing stands in the way of one's will. Are you willing to accept what I tell you?" The *bochur* accepted, and the *tzaddik* instructed, "Take upon yourself, not to speak anything other than *Torah* for five years straight, and if you do speak, accept the punishment of becoming mute for five years."

The *tzaddik* then gave him a *sefer* of learning and behavior, with emphasis on saying '*Modeh Ani*' and washing *negel vasser* near his bed. For five months, he followed all this carefully, withstanding many tests. Once he awakened, thinking that someone was in his room. "Who is here?" he called out, and at that moment, he became mute and was unable to speak for the next five years. Exactly five years later, his muteness left him, and he was healed from the sickness of speaking falsehood. He later became one of the *geonim* and *tzaddikim* of his generation.

(ספר המאמרים תשי"א ע' 302)