

“Distance yourself from a false word.” (23:7)

It is impossible for any human being to stand up to challenge the truth. Truth is an absolute which no one can circumvent. Ultimately, a person never suffers when he tells the truth. Indeed, one who lies only delays the inevitable. A person cannot elude the truth. His lies come back to haunt him. Regrettably, this is the way of the world – lie whenever it suits you; bend the truth, if that is what it takes. *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu* cites the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 19:3, “A man’s foolishness corrupts his way.” A person should be careful to act righteously and speak the truth. When he does, an angel is assigned to assist him to continue along this path. If, however, he is inclined towards evil and lying and deceit, he is assigned an angel who will mislead him. Thus, a person is led upon the path that he has chosen for himself.

There are so many examples which demonstrate the ill effect of lying and the reward of speaking the truth. The following story is one of the most compelling examples which illustrate that one never compromises himself by being truthful.

Horav David Luria, z.l., the *Radal* was well-versed in secular subjects, as well as *kol HaTorah kulah*, the entire Torah. He was proficient in several languages, including French. Once, a group of his antagonists slandered him before the government, claiming that he was a rebel who aided anti-Czarist forces. He was summarily arrested, brought to St. Petersburg and imprisoned. A few days later, he was summoned to appear before a group of government officials to confirm the charges against him. When the interrogation began, the officials spoke among themselves in French, thinking that this rabbi surely had no idea what they were saying. Hearing them converse, *Rav David* moved away. Observing this, the Chief Minister turned to him and said in a menacing tone, “Why did you not remain in the designated spot? How dare you move away!” “Your honor,” answered *Rav David* in French. “I am sorry, but I noticed that the officials were speaking among themselves in French, thinking that I did not understand them. However, as you see, I am quite fluent in French. I could not listen to their conversation while deceiving them. It just would not be proper. I, therefore, moved away.”

The officials were quite taken aback with *Rav David*’s integrity. As a result, he found favor in their eyes, and he was exonerated of all the charges leveled against him.

Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, z.l., was another great *tzaddik* who represented integrity at its zenith. In his old age, he exerted himself to refrain from weeping when learning *mussar*, ethics, or, making a *cheshbon ha’nefesh*, personal introspection and accounting. While at times tears are beneficial, he nonetheless felt that he should restrain his emotions. He explained, “An old man tends to cry. If a heartfelt cry is influenced by external factors, it has been transformed from a noble expression to a lie with strong emotional backing.”

This was the reason that *Rav Yechezkel* refused to deliver a eulogy at the funeral of *Horav Yitzchak Aizek Sherr, z.l.* Tragically, one of *Rav Yechezkel*’s grandchildren had recently passed

away, and he knew that the tears he would shed would likely be influenced by his own personal grief.

The attribute of *emes*, truth, is an absolute upon which there is no room for compromise. With truth, it is either all or nothing. One either is truthful or he lies. *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, z.l.*, notes that for this reason when a person claims, "It is true. I tell you it is true!" we suspect him of prevaricating. When he says, "It is true!" for a second time, it weakens the credibility of the first time. Otherwise, why would he need to emphasize the fact?

Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, z.l., the legendary architect of Torah in America was also known for his meticulous adherence to the truth. On one *Simchas Torah*, the students of *Mesivta Torah Vodaath* were dancing with great enthusiasm with the Torah. They spontaneously broke into a moving rendition of *B'levavi Mishkan Evneh*, "In my heart I will build a Sanctuary," one of *Rav Shraga Feivel's* favorite *nigunim*, songs. Suddenly, *Rav Shraga Feivel* stopped the dancing. The singing immediately came to a halt.

Rav Shraga Feivel later explained the reason for his actions. "I suddenly felt ill, as if I was about to faint, or G-d forbid, have a heart attack. Everything started spinning. I thought to myself, the last thing I want people to think is that he reached such an exalted state of ecstasy when he sang *B'levavi* that his body could no longer contain his soul, and he passed away. I immediately decided to put an end to the dancing."

Sefer Chassidim teaches us regarding the awesome power of he who speaks only the truth. "When a person speaks truthfully and will not contemplate falsehood, then everything he thinks or declares shall be fulfilled, even if he does not mean it." The *Chida* writes about *Horav Yosef Shmuel*, the author of the *Mesoras HaShas*: "His words are listened to in the Heavens like those of the *Rishonim*."

The *Chafetz Chaim* would often send people who were in need of a *tzaddik's* blessing to *Horav Yosef Zundel Hutner, z.l.*, of Aisheshok. When questioned in regard to this practice, the *Chafetz Chaim* explained that *Rav Yosef Zundel* was an individual who guarded his tongue from any form of forbidden speech. He was a person who was especially careful not to utter any form of falsehood. Such a person had a sanctified mouth. Blessings that emanate from such a source of purity will be fulfilled by Hashem.

In his preface to *Sefer Machtzis HaShekel*, the *Chasam Sofer* writes that the author, *Horav Shmuel HaLevi Keller, z.l.*, was so scrupulous to speak only the truth that he was prepared to die rather than utter a falsehood: Once a corpse was found that had been stabbed to death. The murder weapon was found lying next to the body. There was no question regarding the knife's owner – it was *Rav Shmuel*. The terror that gripped the community was unimaginable. The entire community was thrown into despair. Quickly, the leaders of the community went to *Rav Shmuel's* house. After notifying him of the grim details, they implored him to tell the magistrate a lie, to assert that the

knife was not his.

On the day of the trial, the judges called him to testify and asked if the knife belonged to him. He replied the following: "The truth will ultimately prevail. The knife is mine, but I did not perpetrate this evil deed."

Is it any wonder that his commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch* is so widely accepted?