



IS TRUTH A THING OF THE PAST?

Erev Shabbos Parashas Mishpatim, Parshas Shekalim, Rosh Chodesh Adar 5781

Dear Parents,

Modern society is at odds with and threatens many basic values that have sustained the civilized world for millennia. Perhaps the biggest victim of the secular, progressive assault on traditional mores is truth. When modern thinkers can justify lifestyles and concepts of justice that fly in the face of biological and empirical reality, they are in essence abandoning truth as well. Because the end goal of modern man has become self-gratification, nothing can stand in the way of its pursuit – not tradition, not morals and not even facts.

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In the face of this daunting assault on truth, what can we as parents do, to guide our children properly? The answer is straightforward, perhaps even obvious, but it takes work. It takes work primarily, in improving ourselves. We and the homes we build impart and impress our values upon our children in many ways, including unintended ones. What children observe and experience in their home when growing up carries more weight than the influence of the street. When a young child observes his mother reacting to the sight of a tiny four-legged creature by emitting extremely loud, uncontrolled screeching sounds as she catapults onto a chair, and yet her reaction to his taking his baby sister’s toy and denying it is with a gentle, calm “Moishele, that’s really not so nice,” the message is being conveyed very loudly and clearly – furry creatures are a greater threat to our wellbeing, than telling untruths.

In this week’s *Parsha*, the Torah elaborates at great length on all areas of interpersonal interactions as they relate to financial matters. This concentration on laws of damages and compensation is a clear indicator of their importance. Furthermore, the *Pasuk* states (*Shemos 23:7*) “*MiDvar Sheker Tirchak*” – distance yourself from falsehood. When it comes to integrity in business, giving testimony and in just dealing with others – it’s not enough to say “Lying is Forbidden.” Falsehood is so reprehensible, such an antithesis of *Hashem’s* will and Torah values that we are warned to stay far away from anything that hints of dishonesty.

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The story is told that *Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky zt’l*, once observed parents dealing quite harshly with a six year old for putting his feet on the *Shabbos* table. He reportedly used the opportunity to make the following observation: Parents tend to focus on childish behaviors, and yet ignore character development issues. Rest assured that this child will not be putting his feet on the table when he is 18 years old. But, if he is not acting honestly, and his parents are not focusing on redirecting him towards always being honest and forthright, then when he’s 18, he’ll turn into a dishonest person.

An important, practical approach to empower our children to develop their truthfulness is clearly stated by *HaRav Chaim Friedlander zt’l*, in his *sefer Mesillos Chaim B’Chinuch* (p. 24) where he quotes the *Shelah* (*Shnei Luchos HaBris* by *Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz 1560-1630*) as follows: “It is necessary to give a child greater consequences for telling a lie, than for any other misdeed.” He then goes on to give a very meaningful suggestion: “If a child does something bad and is denying it, tell the child that **if he tells the truth about what happened he will not be punished**. Give a warning about not doing it again, but don’t punish for the original misbehavior. If, however, the child persists in not telling the truth, then give a greatly increased consequence for the falsehood.”

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If we don’t hold on to truth, the end result could lead to a perception of hypocrisy in the eyes of our children and a rejection of the values we hold near and dear. Parents need not be overwhelmed by the outside world of falsehood and lies and temptations. Our work has to be on creating an environment in our homes that is honest and true, healthy and respectful. What is needed is a clear focus on what really matters, and prioritizing one’s efforts and emotions to those areas that will remain with the child into adulthood. From this week’s *Parsha*, we see honesty and integrity is a great place to start, and an area that has become more critical than ever. Our children’s survival as healthy, functional adults depend on it.

May the coming *Shabbos* and Month of *Adar* bring us all much *Nachas* and *Simcha*.

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