



A CHILD'S BEST INTERESTS

Erev Shabbos Parashas Chayei-Sarah 5782

Dear Parents,

When acting on behalf of our children, parents must walk a fine line between actions that are self-serving and those that are truly to their child's benefit. Oftentimes, what a parent thinks is in the child's best interest, turns out to be serving a parent's need and not the child's. Insofar as we inject our needs and wants into the decision-making process concerning our child's issues, consciously or subconsciously, we fall short of Emes, truth, in handling our child's needs.

When Eliezer, the servant of Avraham Avinu, in his mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, negotiates with Besuel and Lavan for their daughter and sister Rivka, he states: (Bereishis 24:49) "And now if you will do Chesed and Emes with my master..." The Seforno explains what Emes-truth means in this context: "If you want (maximum) benefit and honor for your daughter as is appropriate for you, you will allow her to become part of Avraham's household."

Our Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Alter Chanoch Henach Leibowitz, zt'l asked: Any decision that Besuel would make could not possibly be construed as Emes, because it perforce would be a decision based to some degree on self-interests, not truth. What does it mean that Besuel could choose truth? How is that even a possibility? His choice might turn out to be the right one, but that would be more by coincidence, not the result of pursuing truth, which by definition is completely free of self-interest

The Rosh HaYeshiva explained a new dimension to truth. When one places their faith and trust in another, as a child does in a parent, it creates an obligation on the one trusted, to act 100% in the interests of the one who placed their trust. Besuel's failure to live up to that ideal, and his actions taken to prevent Rivka from going to marry Yitzchak, were a lack of Emes, truth, since he was acting in his interests, and not in the interests of the one who naturally trusted in him, his daughter, Rivka.

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How well do we do in the Emes litmus test? Do we seek the best for our children? Do we choose friends and neighbors that will best help our children grow spiritually? Do we seek help for emotional or academic challenges or do we focus on the financial impact on us, or the (perceived) social stigma on us? Do we live a lifestyle that leaves us short of resources to support our children's needs to the greatest extent possible?

These are difficult questions, because truth is most difficult to achieve. We owe it to ourselves and our children to do a serious introspection of what is at the core of our life and parenting decisions. In our heart of hearts, with all the herculean efforts we undertake in the raising of our children, is our real goal to raise children who meet their potential, or is it to be considered good parents? Do we focus on the long-range goal of raising functional, independent adults, or do we focus on the short-term of making our children look like good, successful kids?

We judge no one, because perfection is not for mere mortals. However, we are not free from the obligation to think about these questions, and to move our attitudes and actions closer to the side of focusing on our children's true needs, and recognize when they may be in conflict with our needs and wants. Just engaging in this process is an exercise in Emes and will place us and our children on the best path possible.

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With best wishes for a Shabbos of truth and Nachas,

Rabbi Baumann