

MISHPATIM

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

Parashas Mishpatim has a fitting name. This *parashah* is full of descriptions of *mishpatim* (laws); some laws govern interpersonal relationships, while others relate to people and property. Several rules are specific to the judicial system, regulating the just and truthful conduct of the judges themselves.

The *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim* articulates¹ the following principle: the Torah is eternal and therefore, each verse is relevant and applicable to every individual in every period of time. If we accept this principle, then how can we relate to the laws of judges if we don't serve in the legal system? Let us accept this challenge and explore how the laws of judges relate to us on a personal level.

Keeping an Open Mind

One of the verses in our *parashah* is “Do not accept a false report.”² This phrase has several different applications in *halachah*

¹ As quoted in *Shevilei Pinchas* on *Lech Lecha*.

² *Shemos* 23:1.

(Jewish law). This rule includes that “a judge is prohibited to hear the words of a litigant until his fellow litigant has arrived.”³ Judges are not permitted to hear a case until both parties are present and prepared to present their arguments, one immediately following the other. Rabbi Moshe Reiss notes⁴ that ideally both parties should tell their stories simultaneously. But since a judge is incapable of understanding two people speaking at once, the next best option is for petitioners to speak in immediate succession.

Why is the Torah so particular about a judge hearing the two accounts in immediate consecutive order? Any experienced judge understands that one account is only half of the story and any initially formulated conclusions are temporary. The judge is aware that his view of the case will change when he hears the second side. So why does the Torah insist that there be very little time between hearing the first and second testimonies?

The Maharal writes⁵ that as soon as a judge hears the first presentation, a picture enters the judge’s mind of the first argument being correct. In the judge’s effort to fully understand the first litigant’s testimony, the judge mentally validates the initial version of the story. Even if the judge subsequently hears the second side legitimately disprove the original story, it will be very difficult for the judge to listen with equal objectivity. The judge’s natural human inclination is to support his original impression. This phenomenon can be illustrated with an analogy to wet cement; the longer one waits, the more it solidifies. In the same way, the more time between presentations, the more the first opinion dominates the judge’s mind. Understanding human nature, Hashem put a *mitzvah* in the Torah that advises the judges

³ *Sanhedrin* 7b.

⁴ *MeiRosh Tzurim, Shemos*, p. 254.

⁵ *Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaDin*, chapter 2.

to hear the opposing testimonies one after the other, as close together as possible. It is a warning to prevent a first opinion from overpowering the mind and spoiling objectivity.

Returning to our original question: if we never have to judge between two litigants in court, how is this *halachah* relevant to us? Rabbi Moshe Reiss comments that this *halachah* illustrates how challenging it is to admit that our first impressions are not always correct. Once we formulate an opinion, whether about a person, a situation or an intellectual concept, we experience a mental block against rethinking it objectively. We struggle to confess, even to ourselves, that we were wrong.

Hashem realizes how difficult it is for us to abandon our initial beliefs and to open our minds to a new reality. A powerful illustration of this struggle is the story of Chi'el from Beit El. Chi'el rebuilt the city of Yericho. Years earlier, Yehoshua had cursed anyone who would do so, stating that “with his firstborn son he will build its foundation, and with his youngest son he will erect its doors.”⁶ The commentators explain⁷ these puzzling words as follows: Not just the oldest and youngest sons were cursed to die; all of the builder's sons would perish, beginning with the oldest and continuing with the next ones, one by one, until the city's completion. This curse was actualized for Chi'el. “With Aviram, his firstborn, he built the foundation and with Seguv, his youngest, he erected its doors, like the word of Hashem which He spoke through Yehoshua the son of Nun.”⁸

We naturally question Chi'el's actions. What was Chi'el thinking? He sees the curse unfolding in front of his eyes! If his children were dying one after the other, why didn't he try to end

⁶ *Yehoshua* 6:26.

⁷ Rashi, Radak, Metzudas David on *Yehoshua* 6:26.

⁸ *Melachim Aleph* 16:34.

the curse and stop building? The lesson for us is precisely here, in the actions of Chi'el. Chi'el was unable to admit that he had made a mistake by building Yericho. Rabbi Reiss explains that, if Chi'el had stopped building, it would have implied confession of his error. So Chi'el paid a dreadful price, just to avoid admitting that his original beliefs were wrong.

By contrast, the Torah teaches⁹ us about an individual named Shimon Ha'Amsoni who had a particular method of learning. He believed that every time the word *es* appears in the Torah, an additional lesson can be learned. He followed this technique until he encountered the phrase "*Es Hashem Elokecha tira* (you shall fear Hashem your G-d)."¹⁰ On this verse, he questioned his method. *What else should one fear besides G-d?* Lacking a satisfactory answer, he discontinued his original notion. Others were astounded and asked, "But, what about all the lessons you have learned thus far using that technique? Are they now null and void?" He answered simply, "Just like I was spiritually rewarded for the learning achieved with that method, so too I will be rewarded for conceding."

Shimon Ha'Amsoni was able to say, *I must have made a mistake. If my method is not consistently accurate throughout, then it can't be true. I admit that I was wrong. I'm not going to support something that is not wholly truthful in order to justify my past actions.* This action demonstrated the greatness of Shimon Ha'Amsoni. Our Sages tell us¹¹ that one of the primary traits of a wise person is this same greatness, the ability to admit the truth.

Legendary Torah geniuses were exceptional in their ability to admit error, even in the area of their expertise. The renowned

⁹ *Pesachim* 22b.

¹⁰ *Devarim* 6:13, 10:20.

¹¹ *Avos* 5:7.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk¹² was once delivering a *shiur* (Torah class) in his home. The rabbi was expounding upon an original thought related to the topic of discussion. An out-of-town visitor attending the *shiur* suddenly realized that the rabbi's reasoning could be refuted with a particular *Gemara* passage he had studied that very morning. The visitor was hesitant to mention anything, so he stated his point quietly, almost to himself. Several people in the room showed their disbelief that someone had dared to challenge the ideas of the great Rav. Rabbi Soloveitchik, however, silently pondered the visitor's position. He then responded firmly, "What I have said is definitely refuted from the passage you have recited." With those words, he, the great Rav of Brisk, closed his *Gemara* and brought the *shiur* to an abrupt end! Despite the fact that his Torah knowledge surpassed that of everyone in the room, he did not hesitate to admit that his first opinion was wrong.

Although we are not Torah giants, we often face this challenge in our own lives. Imagine one of our children observes us preparing a salad on *Shabbos*. She casually and respectfully mentions that we are possibly compromising the *balachos* of *borer* (sorting). What is our knee-jerk response? *I know what I'm doing! I learned how to prepare salad on Shabbos from an excellent teacher! I've been doing it this way for years! It's impossible that this is wrong!* A more honest response might be, *Really? Thanks for telling me. I should look into that.* How often do we choose to "save face" and stand firmly on our assumptions? Are we willing to compromise our untarnished self-view for the sake of truth?

It is often even more difficult to admit our inaccurate judgment of others. For example, a new neighbor moves into your apartment building. Before you even meet her, you hear screaming

¹² Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, *More Shabbos Stories*, p. 86.

from behind her door. What first impression do you have of your neighbor's personality? *She's an angry person with a short temper.* Your assessment is later challenged by others. You are occasionally approached by friends in the community saying, "Wow! She is your new neighbor? She's a special person, a real *tzadekes* (righteous woman)!" Analyze your internal dialogue. Does it consist of, *Oh, I must have just heard her yelling on a very bad day. That was an uncharacteristic moment?* Or rather, does it reply, *Other people don't hear the screaming that I heard. They don't know the real story like I do.* How long would you have to live in the same building with her before your opinion would be revised? What would it take to convince you that you might have been mistaken?

It's difficult to let go of our first impressions. Even judges, who constantly strive to be truthful, were given laws to prevent a biased first impression. If we recognize the challenge, we can rise to it. Instinctually, we always want to be right, and human nature is strong enough to influence our decisions, even subconsciously. If we are aware of the power of first impressions and our desire to justify them, then we can overcome them.

Consider the following two practical suggestions. First, let us prevent the possibility of the initial impression becoming a permanent one. When formulating an opinion, stop and stir the cement before it solidifies! Mix it with other possible perspectives: *Maybe she's having a bad day, maybe she just heard some bad news, maybe I heard someone else...* Hashem rewards us, as it says in the *Gemara*: "Anyone who judges others favorably will be judged favorably in Heaven."¹³

Second, that same strong desire to be correct can be converted into a commitment to honesty. When we decide that truth is more important than our egos, we will be able to swallow

¹³ *Shabbos*, 127b.

our pride and confess our errors. Moreover, admitting our mistakes will be a source of pride, because we have put our effort into the right choice, into our *avodas Hashem*. If we follow in the path of Shimon Ha'Amsoni, we will understand that just as we received reward for the effort, so we will receive reward for stepping back and renegeing.

Do the Clothes Make the Man?

Let us explore a second law from our *parashah*, one that deals with court dress code. The *Talmud* tells¹⁴ us that two people cannot appear in court dressed differently, meaning one dressed simply and the other dressed extravagantly. Either the one wearing expensive clothing must remove it and dress more humbly, or he must give the other litigant similarly expensive garments for the duration of the court case.

Why? The *Talmud* says that it's a matter of "*Midevar sheker tirchak* (distance yourself from a matter of falsehood),"¹⁵ another *halachah* mentioned in our *parashah*. The drastic contrast in garments might influence the judges to favor the finely dressed person or snub the poor person's argument. The simply-dressed litigant might feel that the judges are predisposed toward his rich opponent, as Rashi explains.¹⁶ Hashem is concerned that even an honest judge may be subconsciously swayed by the obvious financial status of a litigant.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman¹⁷ raises an obvious question. Even if both litigants indeed don the same garments during the

¹⁴ *Shevu'os* 31a.

¹⁵ *Shemos* 23:7.

¹⁶ Commentary on *Shevu'os* 31a.

¹⁷ *Ohr Yabel*, vol. 3, p. 124.

court case, the judge knows very well that it's a charade. The petitioners' dress is only a temporary costume that will be taken off upon leaving the courtroom. The Torah here is underscoring for us how strongly we are influenced by what we see. Even though this judge may be committed to impartiality, his eyes can still lead him astray. A gold button and a drape of expensive fabric hypnotize the human mind. Once you remove the visual stimuli, an objective judgment can emerge.

Visual deceptions influence us subconsciously. We know this from personal experience: how many times do we turn our heads to neon signs and flashing billboards? The whole advertising business is founded on this facet of human nature. Hashem created our human nature, and therefore, instructs us: Distance yourself from falsehood and remove any visual cues that could mislead you.

Rabbi Chasman brings a practical example to which we can relate. We walk into *shul* and notice two new faces. One is elegantly dressed and the other is wearing simple clothes and old shoes. Which draws our attention? We may believe intellectually that all people have equal value, but how do we really behave? Giving royal treatment to the well-dressed person is giving *kavod* (honor) to his gold buttons, and not to the person. If we really understood *kavod habriyos* (honoring human beings), a person's clothing would be irrelevant and he would get the same treatment as everyone else. Let us honestly analyze our subconscious reactions to externalities and distance ourselves from falsehood.

Consider the following story:

A certain *shul* in England had a particular policy of giving *aliyos* (privilege of being called up to the Torah) exclusively to people who wear top hats. There was one man who never wore a top hat. Years went by and he celebrated many family *simchas* (joyous occasions) and *yahrtzeits* (anniversaries of deaths). He was

never given an *aliyah*, simply because he refused to put on a top hat. One *Shabbos* morning, he came into *shul* wearing a top hat, and the place was abuzz. After all these years he finally had a top hat! Sure enough, he got called up to the Torah for an *aliyah*. When he approached, he suddenly took off the hat, put it down beside the *Sefer Torah*, and, turning to it, said: “Nu, say the *berachah* (blessing)! You’re the one who got the *aliyah*!” Let us ask ourselves: Are we being drawn to externalities or are we distancing ourselves from them?

Rabbi Chasman brings¹⁸ a deeper, internal interpretation of this *halachah* regarding two litigants being dressed the same in court. In reality, we judge all the time. We make internal judgments and decide how to act. Some thoughts are influenced by the *yetzer hatov* (good inclination) and some by the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). So how can we tell the difference? Here is a hint: the *yetzer hara* thoughts are usually dressed in a fancy suit! The *yetzer hara* tries to deceive us with positive external impressions: *Think how amazing life will be when you earn that extra money, even if it’s slightly dishonest... Think of how much you will enjoy it when you speak lashon hara...* By contrast, the *yetzer hatov*’s ideas never seem to look as exciting or glamorous on the outside.

Since it is often difficult to differentiate between our two inclinations, we need to dress them the same. If we let our *yetzer hara* come to court in an expensive robe, we have no hope of judging objectively. The internal litigants need to be dressed the same so that we can make rational decisions. When the *Talmud* gives¹⁹ us ways to conquer the *yetzer hara*, it instructs us to learn Torah and to accept the yoke of the Kingship of Heaven. Rabbi Chasman explains that this is how to enclothe the *yetzer hatov* in

¹⁸ *Ohr Yabel*, p. 125.

¹⁹ *Berachos* 5a.

the elegant clothing it deserves; we feel how beautiful and pleasant it is to learn Torah and serve Hashem, and then the desire to sin lessens. If that does not work, then the *Talmud's* suggestion is to remember the day of death. That is tearing off the *yetzer hara's* finery and exposing the rags that truly lie underneath. When we are able to escape the beauty and glamour that the *yetzer hara* is shining in our faces, we can then objectively choose the truth, the service of Hashem that the *yetzer hatov* represents.

Putting Falsehood in Its Place

Choosing the truth is a greater challenge for us than ever before. Rabbi Yissocher Frand points out²⁰ the rampant cheating and rule-bending of today's society. Nowadays, externalities mean more to people than actual substance. *How much money does he make? Where do her children go to school? What kind of clothing does he wear? What are her social circles?* Quoting Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, he describes the phenomenon of "reverse marranos." Marranos is the term for the many Jews who, in the days of the Spanish Inquisition, masqueraded as non-Jews on the outside but secretly observed Jewish practices. Today, he says, many people are "reverse marranos," dressing the part of *frum* (religious) Jews to the public eye, but maintaining a non-Jewish outlook and values. Their true values are usually revealed in the area of business or in the privacy of their own homes. It is difficult to stay committed to the truth in a world like this. We have to struggle to identify the truth – but we yearn for it. We want to be people of *emes* (truth) and distance ourselves from falsehood. How can we stay strong against powerful surrounding influences?

²⁰ *Listen To Your Messages*, p. 94.

Let us examine the place of falsehood in this world. Rabbi Shimon Schwab recalls²¹ the concept that Hashem created the world “*yeish mei’ayin* (something from nothing).” What is this *ayin*, “nothingness”? The Torah tells us, “*Ein od milvado* (there is nothing except for Him).”²² Hashem created a physical world out of the non-physical, all-encompassing Infinity of Hashem. But how can there be something separate from that, a *yeish* separate from the *ein od milvado*?

It is an abstract concept for our human intellect to understand. Somehow Hashem made His all-encompassing Infinity visible to the finite in a realm that appears to stand on its own. The elucidation of this concept is the topic known as *tzimtzum* – Divine self-restriction. As Rabbi David Aaron explains,²³ “G-d withdrew his Endless Light in order to create a place for time, space and finite beings.” But the reality remains *ein od milvado* – everything is still part of Hashem, yet it doesn’t appear to be so. The physical part is called the *olam* (world) – from the root word of *ne’elam* (hidden), because its true nature is hidden. It is our job in this world to reveal that which is hidden. Underneath the physical world is a part of Hashem’s infinity. The seemingly independent existence of the world is an illusion. We need to reveal the truth.

Illusion means falsehood. Falsehood means obscuring the truth. Rabbi Schwab says that the power of the *yetzer hara* is its falsehood. The *yetzer hara* tries to hide the spiritual reality and convince us that there’s something in this world apart from Hashem. This idea is all-encompassing. Even sincerely proclaiming “I serve Hashem,” reveals a nuance of falsehood. If

²¹ *Ma’arbei Lev*, p. 60.

²² *Devarim* 4:35.

²³ Rabbi David Aaron, *The Secret Life of G-d*, p. 92.

we view ourselves as independent beings, separate from Hashem, then that statement is not completely accurate. Our separate existence is only an illusion.

Exposing the Illusion

So how do we become people of truth? How can we be actively involved in exposing reality? The first step, says Rabbi Schwab, is to recognize falsehood. This is not as simple as it sounds. Consider, for example, a child crying that his Monopoly money was stolen and now he is poor. We might show him empathy and try to appease him. However, we are sophisticated enough to know that it's just a game. Monopoly money isn't real. When the child gets older, he will also understand the difference between play money and real money.

But is “real money” any more “real” in the big picture of *ein od milvado*, of what is truly of lasting value in this world? If we get upset over the loss of “real money,” is it any less ridiculous than when the child gets upset over his Monopoly money? We're adults playing the games of children, Rabbi Schwab comments. We need to develop a mature perspective, understanding the spiritual reality of this world.

One might argue, *But it's not a game! I need that money to earn a livelihood, to support myself and my family!* This might be true, but analyze your perspective on going to work: Am I working because that's what G-d commanded mankind to do? Because that's the way of the world since the sin of Adam *HaRishon*? Am I looking for every opportunity to reveal G-d's presence through my work? That is work and money from the perspective of *ein od milvado*. Or do I look at my work as an end rather than a means? Do I see the money I earn as having some independent value aside from how I can use it for *avodas Hashem*? That is how we look at our physical

efforts when we forget that *ein od milvado* perspective. The illusion of our autonomy and human effort makes us think that the physical world is all that exists.

Our Sages tell us²⁴ that “in the World to Come there is no *Gebinnom* (Purgatory). Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath. The righteous will be healed by it and the evildoers will be judged by it.” Rabbi Frand offers²⁵ Rabbi Zev Leff’s explanation that the sun in this *gemara* is a metaphor for the light of truth. In the World to Come, Hashem will make the truth clear and obvious. There will be no illusions; we will all have to face the truth. What is the real difference between the *tzaddikim* (righteous ones) and the *resha'im* (evil-doers)? The *tzaddikim* will rejoice in the truth, because their life perspective and conduct will be justified. The same light of truth will expose the *resha'im*, those who have been living a life of falsehood. They will be forced to admit the truth to themselves. The deep realization that they lived one big Monopoly game for their entire lives – that will be much more painful than any external *gebinnom* could ever be.

So how do we exit the game and enter reality? The first and most important step, as we said above, is to identify what is illusion and what is reality. Introspection is necessary in order to align our values and perspectives. Let’s not deceive ourselves. Additionally, the more we commit to the truth in all areas of our lives, the more connected we become to the global spiritual truth.

One of the important areas of focus is that of truth in speech. Rabbi Frand tells²⁶ a story about the Chafetz Chaim’s application for a passport. When the Chafetz Chaim wanted permission to travel from Poland to *Eretz Yisrael*, he had to specify his

²⁴ *Nedarim* 8b.

²⁵ *Listen to Your Messages*, p. 87.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 89.

profession. Technically, the Chafetz Chaim had never gotten *semichab* (rabbinic ordination). He had written the *Sefer Chafetz Chaim*; he had written the *Mishnah Berurah*; he was one of the leading *halachic* authorities at the time – but he had no official *semichab*. Although no one would have questioned that “rabbi” was his profession, the Chafetz Chaim refused to write it on the application. It wasn’t true; he was not officially a rabbi. So he telegraphed Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, requesting *semichab* on the basis of the *halachic* works he had written, and Rabbi Grodzinski telegraphed him back a letter of *semichab*. Only then did the Chafetz Chaim write “rabbi” on his application. Can you imagine, the author of the *Mishnah Berurah* and the universally-accepted *halachic* authority was asked to state his profession and he wouldn’t answer “rabbi”? The Chafetz Chaim would not permit even a shade of falsehood, even a minor technicality.

We have to ask ourselves, if put in a similar situation, would we be that sensitive to the truth? If the ticket price for a three-year-old is cheaper than the cost for a four-year-old, how much would you pay if your son’s fourth birthday was yesterday? The choice is ours: the money or the truth. The ticket we buy sends a strong message to our child about truth and falsehood.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin mentions²⁷ that if Rabbi Aharon Kotler had to sign a letter specifying the yeshiva’s student enrollment, he would double check the accuracy of the number. If some students had left after the letter was written but before he signed, he wouldn’t sign until the number was corrected. He never accepted the argument that “one or two doesn’t make a significant difference.” His response to such a suggestion was, “Even a discrepancy of one makes it a lie. And that is forbidden.”

²⁷ *Love Your Neighbor*, p. 202.

The Chazon Ish attended a regular early *minchab minyan*. One day, the time was approaching one o'clock before the tenth person arrived. The Chazon Ish's brother-in-law said to him, "I agreed to meet someone at my house at one o'clock. Should I stay here for the *minyan* and arrive for the meeting a few minutes late?" The Chazon Ish replied, "If you told someone one o'clock, you must be there at one o'clock, even if you have to find another *minyan*."

Would the other party have really minded if he had arrived a bit late, explaining that he had been *davening Mincha*? The Chazon Ish says that it doesn't matter. When we promise something, we do our best to keep it. If we don't make an effort to follow through, we are permitting our words to be false. How careful are we to keep our word? How many times have we told someone we'll be there at a certain time and we get there a few minutes late? We need to develop a heightened sensitivity to the truth of our words.

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander explains²⁸ that our eyes and our speech need to become partners in the service of the truth. Many times we hear two people give two entirely different accounts of the same situation. Certainly they both think they're telling the truth. What dynamic is at play here? Often, says Rabbi Friedlander, people don't confirm their perceptions are accurate before voicing their opinion. They see a few details and fill in the rest on their own. They're satisfied with "basically." *I basically saw what happened – so I'll tell you.* "Basically" is not sufficient because it is not a full understanding of the situation. We are often content with a partial understanding, and confident enough to present it to others as the whole picture. A person dedicated to truth does not accept even a shade of inaccuracy, as we saw in our examples above.

²⁸ *Sifsei Chaim, Middos ve'Avodas Hashem*, p. 19.

This occurs often in casual conversation, when topics arise that we know very little about. If everyone is involved in the discussion and expressing their opinions, we feel tempted to share our half-formed opinion. We want to join the exchange and appear equally knowledgeable. How often do we offer information that might not be true? Do we chime in with unsupported facts from unreliable sources? If we want to attach to the truth and distance ourselves from falsehood, we need to think before we speak: *Is this emes?* If we are careful to be truthful in speech, we will achieve a greater perspective of truth in every aspect of our lives.

On the other hand, there are specific circumstances in which the Torah actually instructs us to deviate from the truth. Some of the classic examples are in order to bring peace²⁹ or when praising a bride.³⁰ Certain values, usually related to fostering positive interpersonal relationships, override the need to be brutally honest. But even in those circumstances, says Rabbi Yitzchak Krieser,³¹ the Torah's commandment to "distance yourself from falsehood" instructs us to stay as close to the truth as possible. He quotes Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, who guides us in specific cases when it is permitted to stretch the truth. In those situations, he says we should try to make a statement that can be interpreted in two ways: the "false way," which is what we intend for the listener to understand, and the "true way." When we make that extra effort, we emphasize the importance of being truthful.

²⁹ *Yevamos* 65b.

³⁰ *Kesubos* 16b-17a.

³¹ *Isb LeRei'eihu*, p. 328.

A True Education

We've discussed how to elevate ourselves and become people connected to truth. On the final day when the truth is revealed to all, we will be able to stand straight and revel in it. How do we raise our children to value truth?

As is true for all aspects of *chinuch* (education), personal example is one of the most powerful methods. Our Sages tell us³² that a person should not tell a child he will give him something and then not do so, because the inconsistency teaches the child to be dishonest. Sometimes, without thinking, we say to our child, "If you help me clean up, you'll get a treat." But when the child cooperates, you forget your promise. Even if the child reminds you, sometimes the answer is, "Not now. A treat will spoil your appetite for dinner." What message does the child hear about the truth of your word? In the bigger picture, what's really more important: the child eating a full dinner on that one night or the child learning that keeping promises is critical?

Another way of imparting honesty as a value to our children is being careful with our reactions when children admit to misdeeds. Rabbi Frand says³³ in the name of Rabbi Pam that if a child is punished whenever he confesses to misbehavior, he will be motivated to conceal his actions. If a boy knows that his mother will reprimand him for poor grades, he will probably prefer to either lie about his grades or start cheating on tests. The child deduces that if he will get punished for being honest, then it doesn't pay to admit his error.

This doesn't mean that when our children act inappropriately, we have to show approval. That's not *chinuch* either. We just have

³² *Succah* 46b.

³³ *Listen To Your Messages*, p. 95.

to be careful and thoughtful about how we disapprove and instruct. Effective *chinuch* is constructive, not destructive.

The *Pele Yoetz*³⁴ explains one aspect of the appropriate balance. He says that if a parent witnesses her child's wrongdoing, she should get him to confess. Once he has admitted it, she should forgive him, encourage him and guide him to avoid repeating the action in the future. This way she can strengthen both his commitment to being truthful and to doing the right thing. But if the child is caught lying, the consequences should be more severe. These reactions demonstrate the parent's attitude toward the importance of truth and the danger of falsehood. The child will be inspired to cling to the truth.

In order to teach our children and ourselves to do the right thing, we need to act like the judges who force both litigants to wear the same clothing. We have to ignore the fancy suit of the *yetzer hara* and see through all its false promises of enjoyment. Connecting to the reality of *ein od milvado*, means forfeiting the Monopoly money for what's truly valuable. Let us open our eyes and minds to see when our first impressions were wrong; the truth is often so different from what we originally thought. If we can sensitize ourselves to the truth, look for it everywhere and live by it, then G-d willing, we will merit the privilege of rejoicing when Hashem exposes the light of ultimate truth for all to see.

³⁴ "Emes" section.