



Toldot

SEE NO EVIL, ERADICATE EVIL

How to Avoid Negative Talk and Bring Out the Best in Others

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Toldot

Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years until their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the “children struggle inside her”; G-d tells her that “there are two nations in your womb,” and that the younger will prevail over the elder. Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau’s heel. Esau grows up to be “a cunning hunter, a man of the field”; Jacob is “a wholesome man,” a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew.

In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father, Abraham, and digs a series of his own wells. Over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the third well are enjoyed in tranquility. Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father’s favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau’s clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father.

Jacob receives his father’s blessings for “the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land” and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder. Jacob leaves home for Haran to flee Esau’s wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother’s brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

What if we are
accused of a
wrong that
someone else
committed?
May we tell the
truth?



TEXT 1

GENESIS 27:1

א וַיְהִי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתְּכַהֵן עֵינָיו מֵרָאִת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־עֵשָׂו
בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְנִי׃

And it came to pass as Isaac grew old and his eyes grew dim, and he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son,” and he said, “Here I am.”

Why Was He
Blind?



TEXT 2

RASHI, AD LOC.

כדי שיטול יעקב את הברכות.

So that Jacob would collect the blessings.

Why was it
necessary for
him to suffer
so many
years to
ensure that
his blessings
ended up in
the right
hands?



TEXT 3

THE REBBE, RABBI
MENACHEM MENDEL
SCHNEERSON, *LIKUTEI*
SICHOT 15, P. 216

זעט מען דערפון אויף ווי ווייט מען דארף זיין אפגעהיט פון ריידן לשון הרע: יצחק איז געווען 57 יאר "כלוא בבית" . . . אבי מ'זאל ניט ריידן אויף א אידן) אפילו אויף א ישראל מומר) לשון הרע!
און אויב בשייכות צו עשו'ן איז עס אזוי, איז בנוגע צו אידן נאך מתן תורה — נאכדעם ווי דער אויבערשטער האט געזאגט צו יעדער איד "אנכי הוי' אלקיך" (שמות כ, ב), אז ביי יעדער איד איז "אנכי הוי'" געווארן "אלקיך", זיין כח וחיות — על אחת כמה וכמה.

We learn from this how carefully we must avoid malicious speech. Isaac was confined to his home for fifty-seven years just so that ill would not be spoken of a Jew (and an apostate Jew at that). If this applies to Esau, it most certainly applies to Jews after the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. At that time, G-d said, "I am G-d, your G-d" (Exodus 20:2), telling every Jew that, "I G-d," am "your G-d"—the source of your individual strength and vitality.

If G-d went to such lengths to avoid speaking *lashon hara* about a pre-Sinai-apostate-Jew, how much more so must we go to extremes to avoid lashon hara about contemporary Jews.

CAUTION

TEXT 4A

RABBI LORD JONATHAN
SACKS, *COVENANT AND
CONVERSATION*, “THE
POWER OF SHAME,”
METZORA, 5776,
RABBISACKS.ORG

Speech is what holds society together. Anthropologists have argued that language evolved among humans precisely in order to strengthen the bonds between them so that they could cooperate in larger groupings than any other animal. What sustains cooperation is trust. This allows and encourages me to make sacrifices for the group, knowing that others can be relied on to do likewise.

This is precisely why lashon hara is so destructive. It undermines trust. It makes people suspicious about one another. It weakens the bonds that hold the group together. If unchecked, lashon hara will destroy any group it attacks: a family, a team, a community, even a nation. Hence its uniquely malicious character: It uses the power of language to weaken the very thing language was brought into being to create, namely, the trust that sustains the social bond.

Speech is what
holds society
together.



TEXT 4B

RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK
SCHNEERSOHN, *SEFER*
HASICHOT 5701, P. 65

האט דער אלטער רבי געזאגט תורה, א פירוש אויפן פסוק "לא תשא
שמע שוא" (שמות כג, א), לא תקבל לשון הרע.
ומהו הפירוש "אל תשת ידך עם רשע להיות עד חמס" (שמות כג, א)?

...

האט דער אלטער רבי געזאגט פון מגיד בשם הבעל שם טוב: יעדן
איינעם גיט מען מלמעלה א מעלה מיוחדת בירידת נשמתו למטה.
א ודאי האט זי אויך חסרונות, אבער מען גיט יעדן א מעלה מיוחדת.
איז דורך דעם וואס צוויי זאגן עדות אויף דעם חסרון וואס ער האט
געטאן, נעמט מען פון אים צו די מעלה, און דאס איז חמס.

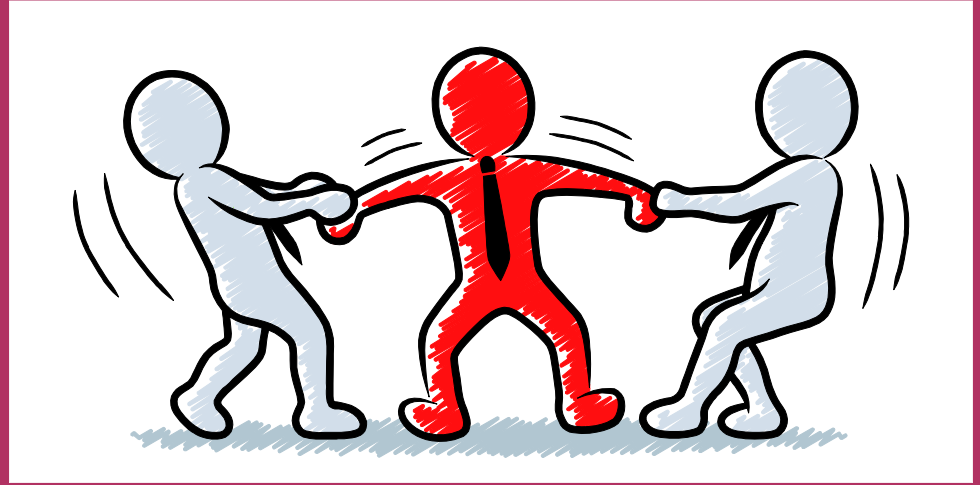
און דאס איז דער פירוש פון פסוק "לא תשא שמע שוא", לא תקבל
לשון הרע, כדי ש"לא תשת ידך עם רשע", דאס מיינט דעם יצר הרע,
להיות שנים עדים, "עד חמס", אויף חומס זיין דעם טוב און דעם
עילוי וואס ער האט.

The Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, once offered an insight into the passage, "Do not accept a false report, (Exodus 23:1). He said, "A false report" refers to malicious speech. What is the meaning of [the rest of this passage,] "Do not place your hand with a wicked person to be a violent witness"? . . .

The Alter Rebbe shared what he heard from his teacher, the Magid [of Mezeritch], in the name of his teacher, the Baal Shem Tov: In addition to our weaknesses, we each receive a special strength from Above when our soul descends to earth. When two witnesses testify to [actions that we committed under the influence of] our weakness, our strength is removed. And this is a form of violence.

Accordingly, the passage can be understood thusly: "Do not accept a false report," do not accept malicious speech, so that you "do not place your hand with a wicked person." The wicked person refers to the evil inclination [do not join with the evil inclination in accepting malicious speech because together you would be] two witnesses. "To be a violent witness"—to violently steal another's goodness and inner strength.

Don't conspire
with your wicked
self, your evil
inclination, to
violently rob your
victim of the
opportunity
to do better.



QUESTION

If G-d knows that Esav is a swindler and sees that Yitzchak is about to bless him, would warning Yitzchak about Esav be deemed lashon hara?

TEXT 5A

LEVITICUS 19:16

טז לֹא־תֵלֵךְ רֶכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ לֹא תַעֲמֹד עַל־דַּם רֵעֶךָ אֲנִי יְהוָה:

Do not walk about as a peddler among your people.

You shall not stand by [the shedding of] your fellow's blood; I am G-d.

TEXT 5B

RASHI, AD LOC.

על שם שכל משלחי מדנים ומספרי לשון הרע הולכים בבתי רעיהם
לרגל מה יראו רע או מה ישמעו רע לספר בשוק, נקראים הולכי רכיל.

Gossipmongers are called “peddlers” because those who instigate quarrels and spread gossip visit the homes of friends for the purpose of seeing or hearing something negative to share with others.

TEXT 5C

MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH
TORAH, LAWS OF
CHARACTER 7:2

ב איזהו רכיל. זה שטוען דברים והולך מזה לזה ואומר כך
אמר פלוני כך וכך שמעתי על פלוני. אף על פי שהוא אמת
הרי זה מחריב את העולם. יש עון גדול מזה עד מאד והוא
בכלל לאו זה והוא לשון הרע. והוא המספר בגנות חברו אף
על פי שאומר אמת.

Who is a gossip? One who collects information and goes from person to person, saying: “This is what so-and-so said,” or “This is what I heard about so-and-so.” Even if the statements are true, they can destroy the world. There is a much more serious sin than [gossip], which is also included in this prohibition: lashon hara i.e., sharing deprecating facts about a colleague, even if they are true.

Even if we are
blamed for
another's
faults, we are
forbidden to
out them.



TEXT 6

TALMUD, BAVA BATRA 164B

ההוא מקושר דאָתא לקמיה דרבי ואמר רבי אין זמן בזה
אמר ליה רבי שמעון בר רבי לרבי שמא בין קשריו מובלע
פלגיה וחזייה הדר חזא ביה רבי בבישותא אמר ליה לאו אָנא
כתבתיה רבי יהודה חייטא כתביה אמר ליה כלך מלשון הרע
הזה

A tied document was brought before Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Yehudah [examined it and] observed, "This document is missing a date." "Perhaps the date is hidden between the ties," suggested his son Rabbi Shimon. Rabbi Yehudah untied the document and found the date [where Rabbi Shimon predicted it would be]. Later, Rabbi Yehudah looked disapprovingly upon Rabbi Shimon [for writing a tied document]. Rabbi Shimon [defended himself and] said, "I did not write it; Rabbi Yehudah Chayata wrote it." Rabbi Yehudah replied, "Turn away from malicious speech."

TEXT 7

TALMUD, SANHEDRIN 11A

הכי הא דיתיב רבי וקא דריש, והריח ריח שום. אמר: "מי שאכל שום — יצא".

עמד רבי חייא ויצא, עמדו כולן ויצאו.

בשחר, מצאו רבי שמעון בריה לרבי חייא. אמר ליה: "אתה הוא שציערת לאבא?"

אמר לו: "לא תהא כזאת בישראל".

For example, Rabbi Yehudah the Prince was once sitting and teaching when he smelled the odor of garlic [to which he was sensitive]. He said, "Whoever ate garlic, please step out." Rabbi Chiya rose and stepped out. [Out of respect for Rabbi Chiya,] everyone in attendance also rose and left. The next morning, Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi Yehudah, asked Rabbi Chiya, "Are you the one who disturbed my father?" Rabbi Chiya said to him, "There should be no such behavior among the Jewish people."

TEXT 8

TALMUD, SANHEDRIN 11A

אמר לפניו: "רבונו של עולם, מי חטא?"
אמר לו: "וכי דילטור אני?"

Joshua said to G-d, "Master of the world, who is the sinner?"
G-d replied, "Am I then a gossip?"

TEXT 9

*MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH
TORAH, LAWS OF MURDER AND
PROTECTING LIFE 1:14*

כָּל הַיָּכוֹל לְהַצִּיל וְלֹא הִצִּיל עוֹבֵר עַל (וּיִקְרָא יֵט טז) "לֹא תַעֲמִיד עַל דָּם
רֶעֶךָ". וְכֵן הִרְאָה אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ טוֹבֵעַ בָּיָם. אוֹ לִסְטִים בָּאִים עָלָיו. אוֹ חֲזִיהַ
רָעָה בָּאָה עָלָיו. וְיָכוֹל לְהַצִּילוֹ הוּא בְּעֶצְמוֹ. אוֹ שִׁישְׁכֹּר אֲחֵרִים לְהַצִּילוֹ וְלֹא
הִצִּיל. אוֹ שֶׁשָּׁמַע עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים אוֹ מוֹסְרִים מְחַשְׁבִּים עָלָיו רָעָה אוֹ טוֹמְנִין
לוֹ פֶּחַ וְלֹא גָלָה אֶזְנֵן חֲבֵרוֹ וְהוֹדִיעָיו. אוֹ שִׁידַע בְּעֶכוּ"ם אוֹ בְּאוֹנֵס שֶׁהוּא בָּא
עַל חֲבֵרוֹ וְיָכוֹל לְפִיסּוֹ בְּגִלָּל חֲבֵרוֹ לְהַסִּיר מֵה שֶׁבִּלְבוֹ וְלֹא פִּיסּוֹ. וְכָל כִּיּוֹצֵא
בְּדַבָּרִים אֵלֵּיו.

Whoever can save another and fails to do so transgresses the commandment, "Do not stand idly by while your brother's blood is at stake" (Leviticus 19:16). . . . This also applies when we learn that non-Jews or Jewish informers are conspiring to harm others or setting a trap for them, and we don't notify them of the danger.

It also applies when we know a gentile or aggressor who has a complaint against another, and we can appease the aggressor on behalf of this other, but fail to do so. And all similar instances.

TEXT 10A

RABBI YISRAEL MEIR
HAKOHEN KAGAN, *SHEMIRAT*
HALASHON, SHAAR
HAZECHIRAH 12

כִּי כְּשֶׁבֵּא אֶחָד אֶצְלוֹ וְסִפֵּר לוֹ אֵיךְ שֶׁפְּלוֹנִי עָשָׂה לוֹ וְסִפֵּר עָלָיו כְּדֹ וְכָד, יֵשׁ
לוֹ לַחֲשֹׁב בְּדַעְתּוֹ: אוֹלֵי הַדָּבָר שֶׁקָּר מַעֲקָרוֹ, אוֹ הוֹסִיף בּוֹ מַעֲט שֶׁקָּר וְעַל
יְדֵי זֶה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַדָּבָר בְּכֻלּוֹ. אוֹ אָפְלוֹ אִם הַמְּסִפֵּר לֹא הוֹסִיף בְּזֶה הָעֲנִין
כָּלֵל, אוֹלֵי לֹא סִפֵּר כָּל הָעֲנִין כְּמוֹת שֶׁהוּא וְגֵרַע בּוֹ אֵיזָה תַּבּוּת, אוֹ אָמַר
בְּגִוּוֹן אַחֵר, וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַדָּבָר לְגִמְרִי. אוֹ לַחֲשֹׁב אֵיזָה צַד זְכוּת אַחֵר
עַל הָאִישׁ, שֶׁבִּשְׂגָגָה הָיָה הָעֲנִין.

When someone speaks ill of another, think the following: The story might be false. If it is true, the talebearer might have added a slight falsehood, or omitted a slight detail, or altered the tone of voice in which the words were said, to change the entire complexion of the story. At the very least, try to find a defense for the perpetrator, such as assuming that it was done in error.

TEXT 10B

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
HAYOM YOM, ENTRY FOR 12
KISLEV

מקובל בידינו בשם מורנו הבעל שם טוב:
כששומעים דבר לא טוב על אחד מישראל, גם אם אין מכירים אותו,
צריך להצטער צער רב. כי אחד מהם הוא בודאי לא טוב: אם אמת הדבר
שמספרים על פלוני, הלא הוא לא טוב, ואם אינו אמת, הלא המספר
נמצא במצב לא טוב.

There is a tradition attributed to the Baal Shem Tov:

When we hear an uncomplimentary report about a fellow Jew, even if we don't know the individual referred to, we should be deeply pained. For one of these two Jews is certainly in an unfavorable state: If what was said is true, he is in an unfavorable state. If it is not true, the talebearer is in in an unfavorable state.

TEXT 11

TALMUD, NIDAH 61A

אמר רבא: האי לישנא בישא — אף על פי דלקבולי לא מבעי,
מיחש ליה מבעי.

Rava said, “Although we may not believe this kind of malicious speech [in which the talebearer seeks to protect us from potential harm], we should, nevertheless, be wary.”

There are two ways to avoid lashon hara. One is to constantly resist the impulse to gossip; the other is to focus on our love for the person about whom we are about to gossip:



TEXT 12

*MAIMONIDES, MISHNEH
TORAH, LAWS OF CHARACTER*
6:3

מִצְוָה עַל כָּל אָדָם לְאַהֲבָא אֶת כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כְּגִּוְפוֹ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמָר: "וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ" (וִיקְרָא יִט, יח).
לְפִיכָךְ צָרִיךְ לְסַפֵּר בְּשִׁבְחוֹ.

We are each commanded to love each and every Jew as much as we love ourselves. This is as the Torah states, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

We must, therefore, speak positively of others.

TEXT 13

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
LIKUTEI SICHOT 27, P. 164

מס'איז דאך א כלל, אז "מדה טובה מרובה ממדת פורעניות", איז מה דאך אז דאס ריידן וועגן א צווייטנס גנות האט א שעדלעכע ווירקונג אויף יענעם, איז מכל שכן אז עס איז אזוי (און נאך מער) אין דער מדה טובה.

אז בעת מען רעדט וועגן יענעמס טוב און מעלות האט עס אודאי א גוטע ווירקונג אויף דעם וועלכן מ'לויבט, און עס גיט אים א חיזוק וסיוע אין זיין עבודה — מען ברענגט ארויס בגילוי און בפועל זיין טוב און זיינע מעלות

There is a general rule that the power of positivity is stronger than the power of negativity. Accordingly, if speaking ill of others impacts them negatively, speaking positively of them must certainly impact them positively (and to an even greater degree).

When we speak of another's goodness and virtues, it certainly impacts them, strengthening and helping them in their work [of self-refinement]. We reveal and activate their inner goodness and hidden virtues.

QUESTION

When we see the people we love commit crimes or say terrible things, how do we wrap our minds around it? Do we just ignore it?

TEXT 14

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF
LIADI, TANYA, LIKUTEI
AMARIM, CH. 30

“אַל תִּדְּיִן אֶת חֲבִירְךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לַמָּקוֹמוֹ”, כִּי מְקוֹמוֹ גֹּרֵם לוֹ לַחֲטוֹא, לִהְיוֹת פֶּרְנִסְתּוֹ לִילְךָ בְּשׁוֹק כָּל הַיּוֹם וְלִהְיוֹת מִיוֹשְׁבֵי קְרִנּוֹת, וְעֵינָיו רואות כָּל הַתַּאֲוֹת, וְהַעֵיִן רוֹאָה וְהַלֵּב חוֹמֵד, וְיִצְרוֹ בּוֹעֵר כִּ”תַּנּוּר בּוֹעֵרָה מְאֹדָּה” (הוֹשֵׁעַ ז, ד), כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ:
”הוּא בּוֹעֵר כָּאֵשׁ לְהִבָּה וְגו’” (שָׁם, ו).

מֵה שְׂאִין בֵּן מִי שֶׁהוֹלֵךְ בְּשׁוֹק מְעַט וְרֹב הַיּוֹם יוֹשֵׁב בְּבֵיתוֹ, וְגַם אִם הוֹלֵךְ כָּל הַיּוֹם בְּשׁוֹק, יָכוֹל לִהְיוֹת שְׂאִינוֹ מְחוּמָם כָּל כֶּךָ בְּטַבְּעוֹ, כִּי אֵין הֵיכָר שׁוֹה בְּכָל נֶפֶשׁ.

“Judge not others until you have placed yourself in their place” (Ethics of the Fathers 1:4), since their physical environment causes them to sin. Their livelihood forces them to sit in the marketplace all day, and they are among those who sit on street corners, and their eyes observe all manner of temptation, and “the eye sees and the heart desires.” Then their evil inclination burns within them “like a baker’s fiery oven” (Hosea 7:4), as the prophet Hosea wrote, “He blazes like a flaming fire” (Ibid., 7:6).

Life is different for those who walk about little in the marketplace and spend most of their day at home. Even if they do spend their day in the marketplace, it is possible that they are not as passionate by nature, since everyone’s evil impulse is different.

TEXT 15

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON,
LIKUTEI SICHOT 27, P. 165

דער "לימוד זכות" איז ניט נאר א טעם און ניט באשולדיקן חבירו, נאר דערמיט ווערט אויך ארויסגעבראכט דער צד ה"זכות" והמעלה פון חבירו, אז ער האט געהויבענע כוחות — גענוגענדע אפילו אויף צו בייקומען אזעלכע שווערע נסיונות. און דאס איז דער תוכן פנימי אין "והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות" (אבות א, ד) — דאס וואס א איד איז מלמד זכות אויף אים, איז ביי אים מגלה און ברענגט ארויס די באהאלטענע כוחות וואס זיינען דא אין אים, אזוי אז ער זאל קענען בפועל ביישטיין די נסיונות און עס ווערט סוף סוף בטל הגנות . . .

Judging others favorably is not just about not blaming our fellow; rather, it also triggers the merits and virtues of our fellow. [Recognizing their challenges helps us realize] that they have lofty abilities—sufficient to overcome such overwhelming challenges. This, then, is the inner meaning of the rabbinic dictum, "Judge your fellow favorably" (Ethics of the Fathers 1:4). When a Jew judges others favorably, it triggers and exposes their latent abilities, thus enabling them to overcome their challenges and ultimately end their shameful behavior. This is what Maimonides meant when he wrote that a Torah scholar "judges everyone favorably, sings their praises, and never speaks ill of them" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Character, 5:7). True Torah scholars, who judge others favorably, ultimately transform the other's degradation into a merit. Observing their fellow's extreme challenges, they see in those very challenges the incredible soul powers that person possesses. Thus, Torah scholars speak only of their fellow's strengths (including these soul powers), and never about their degradation.

G-d doesn't deal tyrannically with His creations, and only gives us challenges that we can overcome.



TEXT 16

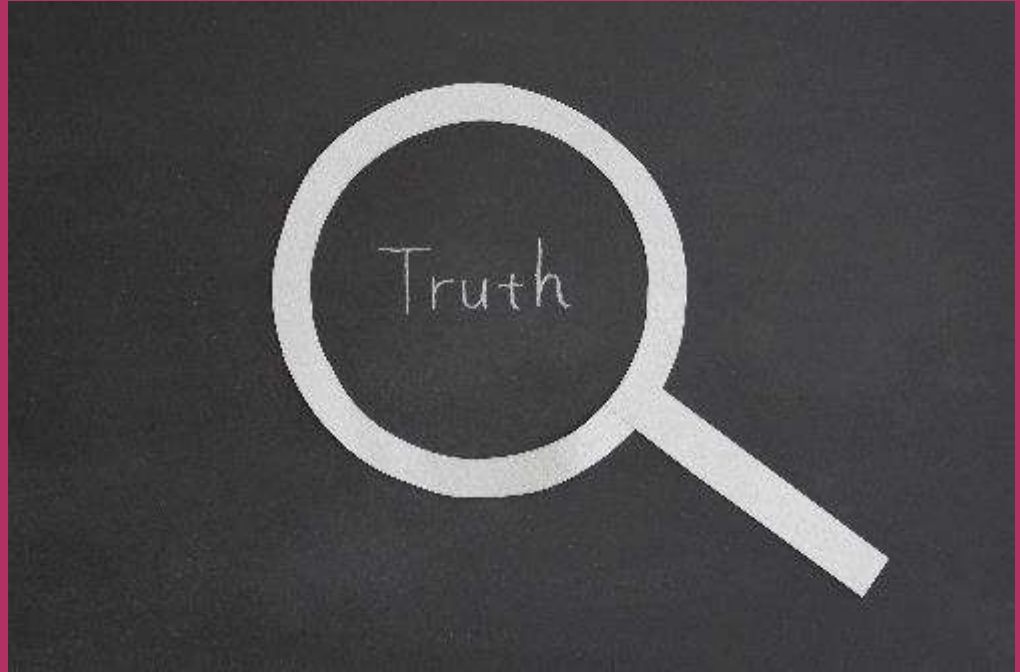
THE REBBE, RABBI
MENACHEM MENDEL
SCHNEERSON,
ADAPTED BY RABBI
ELIYAHU TOUGER,
KEEPING IN TOUCH
WITH YOUR JEWISH
ROOTS: TORAH
THOUGHTS INSPIRED
BY THE WORKS OF THE
LUBAVITCHER REBBE,
RABBI MENACHEM
MENDEL SCHNEERSON
(BROOKLYN, N.Y.:
SICHOS IN ENGLISH,
2007), VOL. 3

There was a young Jewish man in Belgium who had enjoyed a relationship with a non-Jewish woman for several years and they planned to marry. He had pangs of conscience and went . . . Sunday morning to receive a dollar from the Rebbe. After he described his situation to the Rebbe, the Rebbe responded: “I’m jealous of you.”

“What do you mean?” he replied. “Why should the Rebbe be jealous of me?”

“Every time a person is given a challenge,” the Rebbe explained, “it is because he is being given an opportunity to advance to a higher level. The extent of his advance depends on the seriousness of the challenge. G-d judges each individual and sees whether he is capable of overcoming the challenge he is given. Now look at the challenge you face. That’s why I am jealous; I have never been given such a challenge.”

He saw a person with an enormous challenge, and an even more enormous soul power to overcome it.



KEY POINTS

1. One of the reasons Isaac was blind toward the end of his life was to enable Jacob to mislead him into thinking he was Esau and, thus, receive Isaac's blessings.
2. G-d could have told Isaac that Esau was unworthy of blessing, but this would constitute malicious speech. Malicious speech is so repugnant that it justifies suffering blindness to avoid it.
3. Malicious speech causes irreparable harm to the community and the individual.

KEY POINTS

4. There are very few circumstances that permit us to publicize another's faults. Even when it is permitted, our license to speak is strictly circumscribed.
5. Speaking well of others is not just a nice habit. It brings out their inner strengths, raises the bar for them, and empowers them to live up to our compliments in the future.

