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Creating a Balanced Self-Esteem:
(Shmuz #114)
Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

The Gemara in Kiddushin says that if a person eats in the marketplace, eats a meal in the marketplace, he is equated to a dog and becomes invalidated as a witness in court. This is difficult to understand, why is this so? Rashi says since a person demonstrates that he's not civilized and he doesn't hold of himself, and doesn't care about his own honor, it won't bother him to be caught lying in court. You see, people in those times would eat their food at home, there was no fast food. Clearly if a person didn't do this, he is acting well out of the norm. Once we see this, we see that he doesn't care about his own honor. Since he doesn't care about his own honor, he will easily lie in court. There are many reasons not to lie in court, only one of them is that you might be caught. (What is a person supposed to stress when he is teaching high school boys? Teach them not to think like a goy. Do you know a high school boy today that steals? No. Ask him if he speaks lashon hara. Yes. Why is there a distinction? Because in this society there is a distinction. Since about the 4th Century, the Church has been the bastion of morality in society. The society we live in today gets its morals from the Church. But the Church never taught that there is anything wrong with lashon hara, so people do it right and left, it's ok to slander. But stealing is looked down upon. Therefore, we won't steal, but we will speak lashon hara. Our entire world view should come strictly from Torah).

Today, we are living in a clash of civilizations. Islam against the world. The Koran has harsh words for those people against Islam. Those people that carry them out are religious, not fanatics. Islam is a religion of pieces, if you don't follow it, they will cut you into pieces. How do the Muslims view us? Imagine a devout Muslim when he first visits Time Square. He doesn't have words to describe the situation, it's so foreign to him, and it's a foreign entity. We view them the same exact way. According to the Torah, if we look at American modern society, it also has no words. It's so against the Torah. The society that you live in, effects who you are. It effects your shame and self-respect.

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A person who eats in the marketplace, lacks self-respect. He is demonstrating that he lacks the social norms. So such a person can do anything because the strongest sense of morality is a person's sense of self-respect. If he lacks self-respect, he will lie in court. If you expose your child to the media today, the damage is that he will view that as normal. He will view that as the standard, morality doesn't exist, its all ok, no rules. (i.e Its ok for a man can be with many different women). There are two ways of viewing the world. A not such successful person views the world, hes timid and sunservient. Then there is the successful guy, hes boastful, a bragger. Typically we classify people into those two categories, with little in the middle. But the Torah says that Moshe Rabbeinu was more humble than anyone on the planet.

The Gemara says in Shabbat, that Moshe did three things and Hashem agreed. One, he threw the luchot when he saw the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf. (There was once a kiruv rav and a woman calls him up. Her son is involved with a non-jew and said please save him. The rabbi agrees to talk to him. The rav sees hes not looking to change his mind. He makes the man go to the aron, take out the sefer Torah, and tells him to throw it one the floor and stomp on it. The boy refuses and asks why- he says when you marry out of the faith, that's exactly what you're doing! That's was enough for the boy to change his mind.) Even to a person who is not religious, a sefer torah, is vey holy. Moshe Rabbeinu took the most holiest items ever created, and he threw it down and smashed them! He should have taken it back to Hashem! Moshe Rabbeinu made a bold and courageous act by doing this. Doesn't sound very humble. Hashem wants to destroy the Jews, Moshe Rabbeinu says no. Moshe Rabbeinu did not allow Hashem to do it, he even says that he wants to be erased from the Torah, if Hashem destroys the Jews. (Im not part of this game!) He succeeds to save the Jews. Those are not the actions of a timid and humble man. Moshe Rabbeinu was timid and humble but he was bold and courageous and that was not a contradiction. Taking a stand on an issue is not a contradiction to humility.

The reason why it's difficult to understand is because people don't really understand what humility is. (Imagine you come to a construction site and you see a large crane moving things back and forth. The crane operator is a chain smoker, 125 pounds

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over weight. You tell him to go get in shape. He tells you that he's lifting thousands of pounds. But he's not doing it, the crane is. The neshama in the human body is comparable to the man in the crane. Hashem wants us to move our bodies and put it into good use, but at the end of the day we should remember that we did not create our bodies, Hashem did.) A person must understand that all his actions can change worlds, they are extremely important. But at the same time he must realize that he's just the man operating the crane. The crane does fantastic work. The Toras Avraham says that every human should feel that they are great because that is the reality of a human. Its not a contradiction to humility as long as we understand that we are mortal human beings.

The reason we have trouble with this is because we view man as he is presented in our society. (A man was standing on the Lower East Side and Rav Moshe Feinstein comes over to him. He was calling out to his son, "Moshe, come here." Very humble) (A woman remarries after the Holocaust because she thinks that her husband passed away. She has two kids with this man. Years later, the other "supposedly dead" husband shows up on the scene. They go to Rav Moshe Feinstein to see what to do. She tells Rav Moshe her story, and he keeps telling her to repeat her story. After a couple of times, Rav Moshe stops to think, then he says, it cant be. I allowed hundreds of women to remarry, and their husbands never came back. This Rav that you are taking about, is infinitely greater than I am. It cant be that he allowed you to remarry. The woman starts to cry, she admits that she made up the whole story.) Where does a man get such strength to stand up to a person and tell them that they are lying? A very very humble man. Now that is greatness. There is a serious shortage of men nowadays. You know why there are so many addicts today? Because it takes a lot of might to say no. It takes even more to go back to fight once you fell. "Eizehu gibor? Hakovesh et yitzro".

When you see a real baal gayvah, you are witnessing a real hot air balloon. A person who is puffing himself, bigger and bigger. "I am great, there is no one greater". If you are so great, why do you need everyone's approval? Because you know that you're not. At the core of your essence you know that you are a nothing. A baal gayva is mortally afraid of you finding out a small he is, of being embarrassed. A gadol is also fearful, but its different fear. Its fear of failing, and not because you will find out, but

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because I won't be able to look at myself if I fail. I don't do this because I'm bigger and better than that. It's not fitting for me to do such an aveira, and I will fight it as hard as I can. The minute a person doesn't respect himself; he loses credibility in court because there is nothing that he won't do. There's one thing of being scared of others, but another of being scared of oneself. The essence of every great man is a very strong healthy sense of self respect and I don't do this and I don't do that because I'm better than that, bigger than that, and that's not becoming for an individual of my stature to do such a thing. I operate a very mighty crane. G-d made the crane, and this is the human being that I am and it is unbecoming of me to do this. And if I fall down and I do it, I get back up and fight because I am worth it.

When a man loses his sense of self-respect, he is a nothing in his eyes and the essence of everything that he does and stands for is eroded, he loses credibility in court because there is nothing that he won't do because he no longer respects himself. We are currently living in a clash of civilizations. In that clash, there are many repercussions. One, is understanding the world and the other is understanding from an outside view, how far off American Western society has gone. When the Muslims look at Times Square, their view is accurate and correct. It's unfortunate that we don't have the same sense, it's not abnormal to us because we are accustomed to it and we grow up to it. There comes a time during certain time periods where we have to isolate ourselves. If you want your children to be healthy well developed individuals, they have to be isolated from the culture. Because if your children are exposed and see it as normal, they will adopt it as normal. The reality is that when you see real greatness, and it's difficult to see, when you read biographies of gedolim and you see real greatness, you have to hold it up and say that the image that I want to be. The great men that our society praises are empty and hollow. Read gedolim books, see who really is great, who really is a man. That, is normal and that is greatness.

Rav Yechezkel Avromsky was a young member of the beis din in the time of the Chofetz Chaim he lived through World War II and he ended up in London and became the head of the London beis din. There was a shochet in London who began shechting not according to halacha, and the beis din called him and told him to stop. The shochet

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decided to sue the London beis din. He claimed he has every right to do it, hes not bound by their edicts. The court case starts coming to life, and at a certain point, the lawyer for the London beis din calls as a defense Rav Yechezkel Avromsky. The lawyer asks him to take the stand, and he begins questioning him. Please tell us your name, is it true that you are the greatest living authority of Torah on the Western Hemisphere. He says yes. The judge stops them and says, excuse me, doesn't it say in your Bible that you have to be humble? He immediately responds, what could I do my honor, im under oath. He knew exactly who he was, he was the greatest living authority in Torah in the Western hemisphere. He knew it and understood it, but he didn't have to brag or boast to anyone because he was a great man, and understood his greatness. The only reason he said it was because he was under oath. May Hashem grant us the ability to see the truth amongst the confusion, amen.

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