

# TAKING TRUTH TO HEART II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

*When his [Yosef's] brothers realized that their father loved him more than he loved the other children, they began to hate him. They could not say a peaceful word to him. (Bereshith 37:4)*

Although these words are not complimentary to Yaakov's children, there was a very positive side to their actions. Yaakov's sons certainly entertained ill feelings toward Yosef, yet truthfulness was so much part of them that it did not allow them to say anything to Yosef that was contrary to the thoughts they bore in their hearts.<sup>(1)</sup> This level is called tamim (perfect), and indicates that there is no contradiction between one's inner feelings and one's external actions - that one's actions are in perfect harmony with the feelings in one's heart.

It is often difficult to harmonize one's heart and one's actions; therefore this praise is reserved only for the truly righteous.<sup>(2)</sup> King Dovid described this behavior when he wrote, "Speak truth in your heart."<sup>(3)</sup> This level of truthfulness is very exalted indeed, and is found only among those who truly fear God.<sup>(4)</sup>

Nevertheless, there are times when it is better not to speak the truth that is in one's heart in order to spare another person from embarrassment. After all, King Dovid said, "Speak truth in your heart." He didn't say, "Speak the truth that is in your heart." Rav Safra and Rava once took a walk together outside the city limits. As they were walking they met Mar Zutra on his way to visit the city. Mar Zutra, mistakenly thinking that Rav Safra and Rava had come especially to greet him, told them that they should not have troubled themselves to do so. Rav Safra responded that they had not been aware that Mar Zutra was on his way to town; they were simply out walking, and had not intended to greet him.<sup>(5)</sup>

Rava was of the opinion that under such circumstances it would have been better not to "speak the truth in one's heart," but rather to keep quiet. Since Rav Safra and Rava had not known that Mar Zutra was approaching the city, if they remained silent and let Mar Zutra assume that they had come to meet him they would not have been deceiving him. They would just have been leaving him to his own assumptions - if anything he would have "tricked" himself. Since it would embarrass Mar Zutra to know that they had not come to greet him, Rava felt that they should not have informed him.

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1. Rashi on Bereshith 37:4.

2. Rabbeinu Bachyeh on Bereshith 37:4.

3. Tehillim 15:2.
4. Bava Bathra 88a.
5. Chulin 94b.

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