

FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE III

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Yosef's brothers began to realize [the implications] of their father's death. "What if Yosef is still holding a grudge against us?" they said. "He is likely to pay us back for all the evil we did him." They instructed messengers to tell Yosef: "Before he died, your father gave us final instructions. He said, 'This is what you must say to Yosef: Forgive the spiteful deed and the sin your brothers committed when they did evil to you.' Now forgive the spiteful deed that [we,] the servants of your father's God, have done." (Bereshith 50:15-17)

From these verses the Gemara derives that one may for the sake of peace deviate from factual integrity, for Yaakov never suspected Yosef and had given them no such command.¹ The above verses teach us that one may initiate such a remark even if nothing has yet directly happened to threaten the peace.² Although the brothers had sold Yosef into slavery, that had happened many years before, and during the many years that had passed since they had been reunited, Yosef had not shown any sign that he would harm them. Nevertheless, since the brothers feared that Yosef might have been restraining himself for Yaakov's sake, they were permitted now that their father had died to say whatever they thought necessary to preserve the peace.

A common application of this principle is that a woman may make flattering remarks about the beauty of a bride even if no one has asked for his opinion. One might think that it is better simply to keep silent if one does not see the bride's beauty, however the Sages felt that silence in such a case would detract from the couple's joy at their wedding. However our Sages established that in such a case one should only say "the bride is charming and beautiful", because there is an element of truth to it.³ Every bride is beautiful in the eyes of her husband, for if this were not the case, he would not be marrying her.⁴

Seen from a different angle, there can be no harmful consequences to saying that she is beautiful, and furthermore, this is an accepted figure of speech.⁵ For these reasons, a bride is to be praised for her beauty and charm even if one personally does not consider her beautiful.⁶

1. Rashi on Bereshith 50:17.

2. Aruch L'Ner Yevamoth 65b.

3. Masecheth Kallah Rabbathi Ch. 10.

4. Maharsha Ketuvoth 17a; Taz, Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 65:1.
5. Responsa Zacher Yosef 1:70.
6. Tosfoth Ketuvoth 17a, Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 65:1.

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