

ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְתַנּוּן אָרַךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:

Adonai, Adonai, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truthfulness ... [Exodus 34:6]

Living a life of honesty and integrity is not without challenges. We seem to be living in a society which increasingly devalues personal integrity. I was struck by a recent story on a controversy surrounding Olympic runner Marion Jones use of performance enhancing drugs in the 2000 Sydney Olympic games. I'm not talking about the inherent dishonesty on Jones' part - that goes without saying. What was more disturbing was the reaction of three of her teammates in the 400 meter relay competition. They believe that even though their victory came because their teammate cheated, they should still be considered Olympic gold medalists. Rather than be embarrassed by Jones' behavior, they are suing the International Olympic Committee to keep their medals. Apparently, to them, winning trumps integrity and honesty. True, they themselves did nothing wrong -- Jones' cheated - they didn't. However, integrity, having a *shem tov*, a good name, is a most precious commodity. Jones' dishonesty cast a shadow over her teammates, but her teammates' notion that they shouldn't bear any consequences in a team race when one member of the team is dishonest places the value of winning above the value of fair play and integrity.

Is it so difficult to live lives of honesty? Even our religious tradition acknowledges that sometimes being 100% truthful is undesirable. Sometimes, we not only shouldn't tell the truth, we should even tell a lie in its place.

The classic story in the Talmud involves the question of what to say to a bride who is in fact not good looking. The school of Shammai says, "Don't exaggerate - praise her only as you can honestly." The school of Hillel says, "Tell her she is a beautiful and graceful bride." When challenged by Shammai for violated Exodus 23:7, "Keep far from falsehood," Hillel replied, Look at her through the eyes of her husband - if he sees her as beautiful, then you ought to praise her beauty. [Ketubot 16b-17a]

When the value of absolute objective honesty and the value of honoring and respecting other human beings come into conflict, it is honesty that gives way.

Telling the truth moves from a basic and simple objective skill to one which requires a certain insight into human psychology. You need to ask yourself the questions, "Is what I am about to say hurtful? It is better left unsaid? Should I shade or hide the truth to spare someone's feelings?" Generally, the answer is likely to fall on the side of not revealing the unvarnished truth.

The result is that we become more and more accustomed to lying to spare feelings. Ultimately, our relationship to the truth becomes more and more indistinct, and we become increasingly comfortable at lying.

Does this inevitably lead to a situation where three Olympians abandon the notion of integrity in competition? Of course not, but only if we are vigilant to recognize truth and recognize when and why we are deliberately withholding it.

A recent story in New York Magazine examined the psychology behind learning to lie. It turns out that parents teach children how to lie in the most innocuous ways. We teach children how to lie by telling them to be polite and say thank you even when they are not grateful. We

teach children how to lie by teaching them not to tattle. They learn how to withhold information. It also turns out that punishing children for lying is less effective than teaching children the positive societal value of integrity, and we teach integrity through teaching positive values, not through punishments.

Researchers read a child a short story before testing how readily he or she would lie. Some children were read “The Boy Who Cried Wolf”—the version in which both the boy and the sheep get eaten because of his repeated lies. Others heard the story of “George Washington and the Cherry Tree,” in which young George confesses to his father that he chopped down the prized tree with his new hatchet. The story ends with his father’s reply: “George, I’m glad that you cut down the tree after all. Hearing you tell the truth instead of a lie is better than if I had a thousand cherry trees.”

The story which most people assume more powerfully teaches the lesson of truthfulness, “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” turns out not to reduce lying at all. However, hearing “George Washington and the Cherry Tree” —even when the story was told about an anonymous character, rather than the first president —reduced lying a sizable 43 percent.

Increasing the threat of punishment for lying only makes children hyperaware of the potential personal cost. It distracts children from learning how their lies affect others. Kids who live in threat of consistent punishment don’t lie less. Instead, they become better liars at an earlier age—learning to get caught less often.

The New York Magazine article confirmed the sense of the phrase *Torah emet nata b’tokheinu* from the second Torah blessing. The notion that “You planted within me a torah of *emet*, a teaching of truth,” is a powerful idea. The message that we have truth implanted within us means that we are inherently truthful. Lying is learned behavior that can be resisted.

The positive values that will keep us on the road to integrity are a part of the piece of Rosh Hashanah liturgy with which I began. It is known as the 13 middot, the 13 attributes of God, including the phrase *rav hesed v’emet*, “God is the source of kindness and truth.” The phrase “kindness and truth” is difficult, since we know that it is not always kind to tell the truth. This is called a hendiadys, a pair of contradictory words which teach a concept transcending the individual words. Kindness and truth are not distinct values - they are intertwined. At a high enough level, telling the whole unvarnished truth is not a contradiction of kindness, it is kindness. We, however, live our lives on a lower level, where the middot are separate. Recognizing and acknowledging the separateness, and remaining aware of the times when we sacrifice truth for the sake of kindness, will help us avoid losing the distinction so that we do not lose our integrity.

The pull away from integrity is strong, as the Olympic story demonstrates. We yearn for love, for acceptance, for importance, and for community. Our yearning comes from a holy place. Humans beings were not created to be alone. When we are recognized for our athletic or academic or professional prowess, others look at us differently. We feel closer and more connected. The yearning to inflate ourselves and feel the love is in competition with the moral obligation to live with integrity. At the end of our lives the person of integrity is recognized, but in the midst of a messy life, integrity sometimes is overlooked in favor of loudness and self-exaggeration.

The idea that “Nice guys finish last,” attributed to baseball manager Leo Durocher, is generally understood to mean that in order to achieve victory, one must sacrifice decency. What Durochner actually said in his interview with Red Barber is debated by historians; the consensus, however, is that his intention was that a team of nice players will achieve more than a team of difficult players, but the 1946 New York Giants, despite being nice guys, would finish in last place.

Last year’s induction into the Baseball Hall of Fame of Tony Gwynn and Cal Ripken, Jr. was a demonstration that success does not contradict living a life of integrity, as defined by the values of loyalty, kindness, and humility.

Those two players played 20 and 21 years, ending their careers with the same teams with which they started. They didn’t jump into free agency to squeeze out a few extra million dollars - loyalty meant something to them, more than collecting World Series rings (Tony Gwynn played in two for the San Diego Padres and lost both, Cal Ripken played in one for the Baltimore Orioles and won). This is living with integrity.

In his acceptance speech to the Hall of Fame, Tony Gwynn said:

Fans felt comfortable enough with us because they could trust us, how we played the game and how we conducted ourselves -- especially in this era of negativity.

Cal Ripken, in his speech, said:

We are the ambassadors for the future. Just as a baseball player wants to leave his mark on the game and leave it a little better than he found it, we should all try to make this world a better place for the next generation.

One measure of a life of Integrity is to live in accordance with Thomas Babington Macauley's famous aphorism, "The measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he never would be found out." [19th century British poet, historian and Whig politician]

In Jewish terms, we imagine that there is never a time when we are not standing in the presence of God, that all our deeds are recorded and known. As Rabbi Eliezer reminds us, "Know before whom you stand" דע לפני מי אתה עומד [Berakhot 28b]

Cal Ripken said:

When I realized that I could use baseball to help make life better, especially for the kids, baseball became a platform. By trying to set a good example, I could help influence young people in positive and productive ways. And some of this became apparent to me in my earliest playing days. So as my major league career unfolded, I started paying a little more attention to my actions. I remember when Kenny Singleton showed me a tape of me throwing my helmet down after a strike out and all he said was, "How does that look?" I remember learning about a family who saved their money to come to Baltimore to see me play. I got thrown out in the first inning and their little boy cried the whole game.

Our task is to remain connected with that spark of Torah Emet within us, and continually ask ourselves the powerful questions that will keep us within the bounds of integrity, such as:

- What do people think of us? Do people consider us honest and trustworthy? Do we keep confidences and follow through on promises?
- Do we treat other people with respect as we want to be treated, including such things as returning phone calls and email promptly, refraining from talking in movies or in shul, and from taking cellphone calls in libraries, elevators, meetings, or synagogue services?

Such questions will keep us centered and focused on the behaviors of a life of integrity.

I opened with a sports story in which integrity was sadly lacking - let me close with a story illustrating the kind of integrity which we should all strive to embody:

Reuben Gonzolas was in the final match of his first professional racquetball tournament. At match point in the fifth and final game, he made a “kill shot” into the front corner to win the tournament. The referee called it good, and one of the linemen confirmed the shot was a winner.

But after a moment's hesitation, Gonzolas turned and declared that his shot had skipped into the wall, hitting the floor first. As a result, the serve went to his opponent, who went on to win the match.

Reuben Gonzolas walked off the court; everyone was stunned. The next issue of a leading racquetball magazine featured Gonzolas on its cover. The lead editorial searched and questioned for an explanation for the first ever occurrence on the professional racquetball circuit. Who could ever imagine it in any sport or endeavor? Here was a player with everything officially in his favor, with victory in his grasp, who disqualifies himself at match point and loses.

When asked why he did it, Gonzolas replied, “It was the only thing I could do to maintain my integrity.”

May our lives be full of **תְּהִלָּה וְאֵמֶת**; may we live lives of integrity in our eyes, in the eyes of all who see us, and in God's eyes.¹

1. This sermon is dedicated to my father Robert Krishef, from whom I learned both Integrity and a love of sports.