

THE RIGHT CONNECTION

[In *Parshas Mishpatim* the Torah says מדבר שקר תרחק to keep a distance from falsity. There is a *middah* called *sheker* (falsity), and Rav Chaim Vital writes that it comes from the bad side of our *yesod haruach*, the “element of wind” – the root of all our speech. Rav Chaim Vital lists the traits of falsity, flattery, idle speech, and bragging to others as the bad traits which come from the “wind” in the soul. There are traces of all 4 elements found in each of the 4 elements, so that earth will also contain earth, water, wind, fire and so will water contain earth, water, wind, etc. The bad side to “wind” (speech) is when a person either lies or speaks dishonestly, when he flatters others, when he talks too much, or when he brags about himself. False speech is the “earth” aspect of the wind, flattery is the “water” aspect of the wind (false forms of connection to others), idle speech the “windiest” part of the wind (airy, excessive conversations), and bragging to others is the “fire” aspect of wind (because it resembles *gaavah*/conceit, which is a fire-trait). Here we will discuss the particular kind of falsity that is known as *chanufah*, flattery. There are several kinds of flattery, and here we will discuss a particular form of flattery.]

The *Gemara* describes a certain kind of flattery called “*egrofah shel chanufah*,” (lit. “the fist of flattery” (*Sotah 41a*)). The *Gemara* says that ever since people began to have *egrofah shel chanufah* - flattering the government - the *Beis Din* no longer has that much power, and because of this, people were able to start doing as they pleased, without having to worry about being judged in *Beis Din*. And because *Beis Din* did not have power, people cannot rebuke others properly. Without the power of *Beis Din*, there is less fear from *Beis Din*, and therefore, rebuking people was no longer as effective as it used to be. What exactly is the concept of “*egrofah shel chanufah*”? It is about flattering someone who has power, to form connections with one who has power so that you can get what you need from him. The *Gemara* says that the *Chachomim* tried to flatter King Agrippas, a descendant from the wicked Hordos (who killed the entire house of the Chashmonaim). When King Agrippas came upon the *possuk* in the Torah that says we have a *mitzvah* to have a Jewish king (as opposed to a gentile king), he became angry, and demanded an explanation from the *Chachomim* for the Torah’s disapproval of a gentile king. So the *Chachomim* comforted him (in the attempt to flatter him and win his approval), and they said to him, “Prepare yourself, prepare yourself [to become the king].” They told him that they will make him into their “Jewish king”. The *Gemara* says that on

that day, because the *Chachomim* flattered King Agrippas, destruction came upon the Jewish people, as *Tosafos* explains from the *Talmud Yerushalmi*. This is all the “*egrofah shel chanufah*” – to flatter a person who has power. This is not the same thing as flattering a wicked person, which is permitted when one has a pressing need, who will be able to do him something that’s either permitted or a *mitzvah*. With flattering the powerful, *egrofah shel chanufah*, it is about flattering the person for something forbidden. That was the case with King Agrippas. It was forbidden to flatter him, because it involved encouraging him to become a “Jewish” king, which he was not fit to become.

Now, what about if someone is flattery someone in power not for something forbidden as in the case with King Agrippas, but when flattering a person in power for something that’s permitted or needed? Although the *Gemara* is discussing flattering a person in power for something that was forbidden, there is also a concept of flattering a person in power when we need something for him, which is permitted. However, there is something we need to know in order to go about this properly [so that we don’t teach ourselves how to be dishonest in the process.] In today’s times, *egrofah shel chanufah*, flattering those in power, is a common occurrence. We often need to engage in flattery with someone who has more power than us, so that we can get something out of him that we need. Although the *Gemara* mentions this kind of flattery with regards to flattering a government or king, it can also be applied to flattering anyone who is in a position of power or control.

To give a simple example, a person might want to flatter someone in the community who in any sort of position of power, such as a person who is very wealthy and influential. And, even if a person isn’t getting something out of the influential person right now, he might want to form a close connection with the influential person, so that at a later time, he can get a favor from him. He makes sure to form all the “right connections” with the “right people to know”. This particular kind of flattery, called *egrofah shel chanufah*, was always around, but it is especially prevalent in our times. In fact, today’s society is immersed in this *egrofah shel chanufah*! We often find ourselves dependent on having to form certain connections with those who have power. Many organizations sit and think of how they can form connections with people by using all different means of magazine ads, social media, websites and fancy brochures. This is really all a form of flattery – in particular, the *egrofah shel chanufah*. We live in a world in which all kinds of superficial calculations are the driving force behind many organizations. Pursuing

what's right and the *emes* is not on the agenda at all.

This is not only the way it works in the outside, secular world. Even Torah organizations of various good causes are often being run by the powerful and influential, and everything today, even when it comes to Torah causes, is all about the connections you have. For example, when a big *gvir* (wealthy donor) passes away, there's a certain protocol for many organizations, that they have to make big memorials for him in the papers and magazines, acknowledging his loss - and it's often just so that other people will notice that these organizations exist. Because if they don't get noticed, then they never make it into people's radar, so they think that they have to do this. This is a form of *sheker*, and it really shouldn't be that way, but it is. Another example: A person wants to get his child into a certain yeshiva, and as long as he has the right "connections" with the right people, his gets his child into the yeshiva. People who work for organizations can relate to this very well - everything works on based on the connections you have. People who do fundraising for *Yeshivos* are successful using various forms of flattery, making sure to form the right "connections" with certain wealthy individuals. This is all the *egrofah shel chanufah*, where flattery is running the world and enabling society to function. It is a particular kind of flattery which has bled into the Torah world as well.

If one is not aware of this, then he is somewhat disconnected from reality today, the deceptive reality that we find ourselves living amidst. It's a big fact of life, that the world today revolves around this particular kind of flattery today, and there's no way for a person to ignore it.

A person has to know how the world is really supposed to look like, in contrast with the way it looks now. After we realize what the truthful way of living is, we then need to figure out how to act in the current world of falsity that we live in. When you think about it deeply, you can see how it's the entire depth of the *Galus* we are in, where falsity dominates like never before. We must first become aware and realize that we live in such a false kind of world, a society that is not the truthful way of how the world should really be. First let us think about it and become aware of it at least on an intellectual level, and then, we can gain sensitivity to it, to the point that it really bothers us. This doesn't mean *chas v'shalom* that *everything* on this world is false. It is just that the general way that society runs with today is through flattering those in power by the *egrofah shel chanufah*. After we are bothered by this falsity that dominates all of society today, we can then have a wish to leave it. We can do this either by *davening* for the *Geulah*, or through at least having a yearning for the *Geulah*, when we will all depart from all the falsity, flattery, and corruption of today.

That is one part of what we can do (as individuals), but

there is also another part we need to do. We need to know how to actually deal with this, because we live in it. How, indeed, can we survive spiritually, remaining as truthful people with *emes*, in a society today that revolves so much around falsity and flattery? Hashem gave us two different abilities in our *nefesh* (soul) which we can use in particular to fight against the trait of flattery: *emes* (truthfulness) and *emunah* (believing how everything depends on Hashem).

One of these powers that we have is the ability to act with *emes*, truthfulness. When we are in a situation in which we need to engage in some kind of flattery with a person of power, we can wonder what the *emes* is, and then, we should pit the truth against the falsity that is found in the flattery which we are forced to engage in. You can use the power of *emes* and try to analyze: How much truth, and how much falsity, is involved with what I am doing right now? In this way, you'll notice the elements of truth in what you are doing as well as the elements of falsity, and hopefully, your search for *emes/truth* will guide you in avoiding the *sheker/falsity* that is found in the act of the flattery. We can take notice of how much *emes* is involved, versus how much *sheker* and *chanufah* (falsity and flattery) is involved, and then, we give ourselves more options to follow. Hopefully, by doing this, we will take notice of the falsity involved in having to resort to flattery, once our power of *emes* has been activated.

One way to separate yourself from the falsity of flattery, when you inevitably find yourself in a situation of having to flatter another is to try to increase the amount of truth in any given situation. In that way, there is hope that you will be able to minimize the flattery as much as possible.

The other power we have to fight flattery is *emunah* (faith in Hashem). When we gain a palpable sense of Hashem really being next to us, and by increasing this feeling of Hashem's Presence in our lives and how everything comes from Him alone, we can lessen the amount of flattery that we may have to be involved with. The more we make use of our *emunah*, the less desperate we will feel on having to resort to flattery. And the less desperate and dependent we feel on those who are in a position to help us, the less we will be trying to flatter them.

When people engage in *chanufah*, what are they really doing? They flatter people when they really need something from them. If a person realizes that he engages in flattery with others because he needs things from them, he can do some thinking, where he will come to a turning point in his life: What is really meaningful to me? Here is an example to think about. When we need to talk to the banker, and we are given all sorts of options on how to earn more credits and make some profit, we have two choices in front of us. If we don't have *emunah*, then we will probably be more comfortable with forming a trusty and reliable relationship with the

banker. We'll become wrapped up in *egrofah shel chanufah*, because we are desperate to be comfortable. But if we use our *emunah*, then our *emunah* tells us that only Hashem is in charge of our money, and no one else is; in that way, we'll be able to give ourselves a good chance at avoiding *egrofah shel chanufah* from ensnaring us.

If one does not base his life on a palpable kind of *emunah* in Hashem, when *emunah* isn't an actual part of his life, then most probably, he will be drawn towards flattering another. But if a person is regularly using either his power of *emes* or his power of *emunah*, then what will happen when he feels a temptation to flatter others for something or when he's forced to come on to them? Either his power of *emes* will take over, or his power of *emunah* will take over, and it will save him from having to engage in any unnecessary flattery.

Your mind will probably rationalize with you and tell you need to flatter people in order to succeed on this world. But your ability of *emunah*, or your ability of *emes*, will be able to overpower your rational logic and save you from flattery – that is, if you are making regular use of your powers of *emunah* and *emes*.

That being the case, a person has to know really well what his personal level of *emunah* is. If a person only has logical *emunah* and he believes only intellectually that Hashem can help him, then he does not have a palpable feeling of Hashem's existence next to him, so he will not feel empowered enough to overcome the tendency to engage flattery. Even if he says "*Ani Maamin*" every day, if he doesn't palpably feel Hashem in his life, then his *emunah* is only intellectual and he is not activating it enough, so his *emunah* will not be strong enough to help him avoid depending on flattery. One needs a very palpable feeling of *emunah* in Hashem order to overcome the urge for flattery.

Here is an example which really exemplifies this concept. Most *bnei Torah* are struggling with having to make *parnassah* (livelihood). A few *bnei Torah* are *zocheh* not to worry about it, but most *bnei Torah* do not have it easy with *parnassah*. Sometimes a *ben Torah* is offered a way to make some money, as long as he does such and such, and he is very tempted to engage in some efforts to make a little money on the side. Being that he is a *ben Torah*, he will of course not even consider it, if it might compromise on his *ruchniyus* in any way. However, way before that, a person first has to know how much effort he needs to make in the first place. And he might find out, amidst this process, that he does not have any *emunah* in Hashem at all! With no *emunah* in Hashem, he will immediately put in more effort in making some more money. But if he has worked already on having palpable, real *emunah* in Hashem before this situation came upon him, then what will happen when he realizes he needs to do something? He will discover a reservoir of *emunah* that

he has built for himself already before this test came, and he will have the inner strength to realize that it's really not appropriate for him to engage in any effort to make money. The whole entire need to make a living is a penalty placed on mankind ever since Adam sinned (as the *Messilas Yesharim* writes), but if one has *emunah*, the penalty is less applicable to him, and he won't need to engage in that much effort in order to have livelihood.

The point of this example is to bring out the concept that one has to discover how much *emunah* he really has. This is not a small discovery to take notice of - it's an issue of how a person lives his entire life. How unfortunate it will be for a person when he comes upstairs after 120 years and he will be shown how he was totally unaware of how little *emunah* he had (because he never worked on it and never thought about it). Many things that people do are not necessary, because if they would be aware of how much *emunah* in Hashem they are capable of right now, they would realize that they don't need to engage in those actions. Knowing "where you are holding in your *emunah*" is very important, and it might even be the most important thing you can ever know about yourself.

Of course, it's impossible to go by life for 120 years and never have to flatter anyone or engage in some sort of falsity in order to get what you need. But the question is how much a person really needs to flatter and form connections with others. Where does a person know to draw the line? If one knows what his level of *emunah* is, he can know how much he needs others or not, and this will greatly lessen the amount of how much he relies on other people or tries to flatter them, in order to get by life. (We are not speaking here of the need to flatter others in order to make friends, which fulfills a person's emotional needs. There is a lot to say about that also, but that's an entirely different topic, not for now). And, a deep outcome of this will be that even when he does have to engage in flattery with others, he will be much less negatively affected by this, when he knows what level of *emunah* he has.

Thus, when using the power of *emunah* in order to avoid the negative effects of *egrofah shel chanufah*, when you do have to engage in some kind of flattery another in order to form a connection with someone whom you need, you need to remember that it's always up to Hashem if you will succeed or not. Don't think that some person will help you get anywhere, no matter how powerful or influential he is, without Hashem letting it happen. Try to always remember that Hashem is in charge! This is a very practical way to get by life during this *Galus* (exile) that we live in. Pit your abilities of *emes* and your *emunah* against the amount of flattery in your life, and this will gradually weaken any dependency that you may feel on having to engage in flattery when you find yourself in situations where you need to use some kind

of flattery and “connections” in order to get by.

There is also an additional point to work on, after you have worked on strengthening your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*. It is to come to a very truthful realization that your need to form connections with people on this world should be very minimal. The reality is that it is hard to find people who are truthful, and therefore, most of the people that we are involved with are not going to be truthful. We mostly have to deal with people who live a superficial kind of life, who are not concerned at all about becoming more truthful. So the less we are involved with having to deal with so many people, the better it will be for us. Therefore, we should lessen the amount of people that we choose to connect with and develop relationships with. As much as possible, we should only allow ourselves to become connected with a few truthful people that we know.

The more that a person lives a more inner and truthful kind of life, he will find that he is fine without having to form many connections with others. So, if you are afraid that your son or daughter won't get into the yeshiva or school that you want him or her to get into, you can *daven* to Hashem about it and strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem, rather than engage yourself in flattery and forming the right “connections” with certain people. Of course, you can't run away totally from having to deal with the world. You will have to form connections with people and you will need to come onto others to help you get by. But the amount of flattery and falsity that you have to engage in can still be lessened to a very great degree, when you have made sure to increase your *emunah* which will tell you that you don't need flattery to get by. You can use your *emunah* (after you have firmly worked on it, by feeling closer to Hashem in your

life), by telling yourself that you will disconnect from feeling dependent on people. Certainly you also need to put in *hishtadlus* (effort) in order to achieve any results, and this will inevitably involve some flattery and there's no way around it. But the point here is that although it appears to us that “success in life is about making the right connections with others,” there is a truer and more inner way to live life, which is that we need to achieve a disconnection from any feeling of dependency on forming the right connections with certain people, and instead, let us reveal our abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

So, really, the very first thing you need to do, to counter the flattery of *egrofah shel chanufah*, is to disconnect from the “need” to use certain people on this world in order to get certain things you need. And if you succeed in doing that, you can then have the ability to deal with the *alma d'shikra*, the world of falsity that you inevitably must live with and deal with at some point: Through using your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

QUESTION What is the way to view the pleasure that comes from the love that we get from others?

ANSWER The pleasurable feeling when you feel loved by another is coming to you from Hashem, by way of this messenger whom He has sent, to give it to you. As a result of this, a person should mainly feel thankful to the One who has sent him this pleasurable feeling, to Hashem. And he should also feel thankful to the “messenger” of Hashem (the person) who gave it to him.

QUESTION I need to buy a house in the near future, and houses are only going up, so maybe I should buy one now. On the other hand I don't really need it right now. But maybe since prices are

going up, I should do *hishtadlus* and try to buy a house now, especially because now I have the money to do it and later I might not have the money. If I do need to make *hishtadlus*, do I need to be pushy about buying a house or should I just do a bit of *hishtadlus* without being too aggressive?

ANSWER Yes, make *hishtadlus*, but do it calmly and pleasantly, along with *emunah*, and *davening*.

QUESTION How do I blindly follow what my Rebbe tells me? How can I find a Rebbe who is closer to the *emes* - how can I trust my own perception of what *emes* is? And what if my Rebbe tells me that I am allowed to have an Internet job?

ANSWER The fact that you are so bothered by this and searching for a *Rebbe*, in order to listen to what he tells you, is a proper way to go in. As long as you feel that you are not finding the Rav or Rebbe that you are searching for, you should continue your search and continue *davening* for this, until you find someone whom you recognize as closest to the *emes*. If you search for him with all your heart and with a desire for the pure truth, Hashem will accommodate your wishes.

QUESTION What should a person do if his *Rov* or *Rosh Yeshiva* has a smartphone?

ANSWER Enter into a conversation with him in a way that shows that you are trying to clarify something with him, and make it clear to him that you are coming as a student coming before his *Rebbe* to discuss an issue. Present to him all of your information that you have gathered on this topic, and ask him: “What is the Rav's view on this matter?” In this way you can present to him all the information, but in a way that is respectful and careful with his honor.