

בשבת

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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

TO ERR IS HUMAN

In the middle of *Parshas Shemini* we find a fascinating exchange between *Moshe Rabbeinu* and *Aharon Hakohein*. Aharon had just lost two of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, yet Moshe told Aharon and Aharon's remaining sons to eat from the *karbanos* that were brought on that special day, the final day of the *Mishkan's* consecration.¹

Yet, despite Moshe's directive, we find that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *korban chatas*, and instead had it burned! Displeased, Moshe asked why they had directly contradicted his command. After Aharon explained that *halacha* would dictate that they not eat the *chatas* in their current state of mourning, Moshe agreed, stating that Aharon was correct, and that Moshe had forgotten the law.

The Gemara² praises Moshe for not excusing himself, and instead admitting that he had heard the *halacha* but had forgotten it. While we may understand the difficulty in admitting a mistake, why does the Gemara seem to imply that this is particularly praiseworthy for Moshe? After all, Moshe was known as the most humble of men, and this is just another way his humility manifested itself.

Clearly, it is not easy for anyone, even *Moshe Rabbeinu*, to concede that they made a mistake. This is especially true if we look foolish in the process. How many times have we accused others of an error or oversight, only to realize that we are the ones who have slipped up? How easy would it be to cough, mutter some sort of excuse, and try to change the subject! And indeed, would there be any harm in doing so?

However, based on this very episode, the *mishnah* in *Avos*³ states that one of the signs of a wise man is the ability to admit a mistake. A wise person can acknowledge that they are not all-knowing, can see their faults, and thereby can learn from their mistakes. By admitting the truth, we can then grow wiser in our pursuit of *avodas Hashem*.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Admit my mistakes!?! I can't do that!

We have all been in situations where we very clearly made a mistake, and are now faced with a choice - do I admit that I was wrong, or do I simply pretend that I never meant what I said, or worse, that I am still right?

What can we do to help ourselves acknowledge that we were incorrect in our thinking, and move on from there?

One of the biggest impediments to admitting a mistake or a failure is our fear of embarrassment. We think that if we say that we messed up, others will think less of us, or hurt our feelings.

A good way to battle this is to truly think through the reality - what is the worst that will happen? If we admit that we were wrong, will our friends really use that to hurt us?

And even if the answer is yes, is it something that, in the long run, will affect us? Or, will we end up feeling proud that, despite the difficulty, we were able to own up, and agree that we erred?

Acknowledging the possible shame, and putting it in its proper context, will better equip us to deal with the consequences of our admissions.

1 *Vayikra* 10:12-20

2 *Zevachim* 101b

3 *Avos* 5:7

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Indeed there are many true paths and approaches to Avodas Hashem. However one needs Tikkun Hamiddos in order to identify any of them.

- Vilna Gaon, *Likutei HaGra Mishlei* 1:2

THE RIGHT WORDS

Describing Rabbi Noach Aranovitch* as 'dynamic' would be an understatement. Rabbi Aranovitch is the energetic force behind three separate organizations, a powerful figure in the *kiruv* world, as well as a husband and father. His standard day would run anyone ragged, as he would answer questions from the newly observant, study one-on-one with those seeking to learn, give lectures, bedtime with his children, and run the logistics behind a global organization. He would also somehow find time for his own personal learning, in between phone calls and meetings.

There is no question that Rabbi Aranovitch is naturally talented, and picked up many skills along the way. However, one thing that people don't know about Rabbi Aranovitch is that he is naturally timid, and easily embarrassed. This trait almost held him back from his career choice, until an experience he had many years ago.

"As a young man, I was in a yeshiva far from my home. Every Shabbos, we would eat by members of the community. One week I went to a rabbi in the community who was known as 'Rabbi Yossi.' He was a local *kiruv* personality, well-liked by his students. At the table were a couple of yeshiva students, and many college students, some who knew little to nothing about Torah and *mitzvos*.

"During the meal, one of the college students asked Rabbi Yossi a question about *halacha*, regarding something that occurs on a semi-regular basis. Rabbi Yossi thought for a moment, and responded, 'I don't know, I'll have to look into that.'

"I was shocked! The student just nodded, and the meal continued. It might sound funny, but I really thought that if you wanted to teach Torah, you pretty much had to know everything. And if you don't, people won't take you seriously. Yet here was Rabbi Yossi, well-liked and respected, and he didn't have all the answers! Those three words were life changing, maybe not to the person who asked the question, but to me!

"It was a good lesson, and I think that it's important in life to know that if you don't know something you can say, 'I don't know!' It makes all the difference, both in teaching and in relationships. And perhaps most importantly, it allows me to be human, to make mistakes - it allows me to be who I am."

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**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- A person needs to be perceptive and understanding to see the truth. Only then can one admit a mistake.¹
- It is important to admit a mistake even when it is *halachically* permissible to bend the truth.²
- The *Mishnah* sometimes writes the opinion of a *talmid chacham* who later recanted his position to teach us the need to admit our mistakes.³

1 *Medrash Shmuel* on *Avos* 5:7 s.v. והרב רבי יוסף

2 *Lechem Shomayim* on *Avos* 5:7 s.v. ומודה על האמת

3 *Rambam*, Introduction to *Mishnah*