

When was the last time someone saw you on a tough day and asked “how are you?” And you answered “Oh fine!” Or “Good, how are you?” Even when answering, you knew that you were not actually fine or good. But why would you rock the boat by answering in any way other than what is socially acceptable? Why would you risk causing someone else’s discomfort by stating what is really on your mind?

We all tell these white lies because we perceive them to be a necessary social lubricant. We perceive that going about our lives in the most inoffensive, pleasing way is the easiest and best way to live.

What really would happen if the next time a person, who really wanted to know how you are doing, asked how are you? And you took a beat, and answered honestly?

In the last six months my honest answer to “how are you?” Has been “I am anxious,” or “I am scared,” “I am hurt,” or “I don’t know what comes next.” This was not just because I don’t actually know where I’ll live in a few months from now, or because this specific moment in my life is coming to an end. The last six months have been trying in my personal relationships,

my health, and my life, and while I won't get into every single detail here, I'll tell you the one core lesson I've learned from facing this cycle of adversity in my life, and it's pretty simple: I've switched from answering well-intentioned questions with white lies to answering them with radical honesty.

Radical honesty is a concept that advocates for complete and unfiltered openness and truthfulness in communication. People who practice radical honesty do so with the goal of fostering genuine and authentic connections by eliminating deception, pretense, or sugarcoating. Strengthening my radical honesty muscle has led to learning about a new type of relationship, one where the person in front of me truly gets the chance to know me, and hopefully, I model the opportunity to truly get to know them. Radical honesty in personal and communal life has transformative powers in being true to ourselves and cultivating trust with our people and our community.

In Parashat Beshalach, the Israelites, a newly freed people, are told that God would provide them daily nourishment through a food called manna. Each person was to take an omer of manna each day. The Torah teaches:

יִמְדוּ בְעֹמֶר וְלֹא הָעֲדִיף הַמְרֻבָּה וְהַמְמַעֵיט לֹא הִחְסִיר אִישׁ לְפִי-אֶכְלוּ לְקִטּוֹ:

But when they measured it by the *omer*, anyone who had gathered much had no excess, and anyone who had gathered little had no deficiency: each household had gathered as much as it needed to eat.

How much exactly is an omer of manna? And how would the community know whether their fellow gathered too little or too much?

Medieval commentator Chizkuni teaches that each Israelite took exactly what they needed. If someone took too much, they would throw out the excess. If someone took too little, they could go back and collect more. So the actual measurement of an “omer” didn’t matter. There was no miraculous right amount of manna given to each person or a measuring cup to the side of the pile to make sure each serving was equal. Rather, each person had to trust themselves to take the amount of food they needed, and they also had to trust their fellow without judgment, even if their fellow went back to the pile of manna a few times a day. The Israelites even needed to deeply trust God, knowing that their food needs would be met daily and consistently. In creating this system, God enacted on the virtue of radical honesty. Radical honesty became an embedded value that

lived between the relationships that the Israelites had with themselves, God, and each other.

Though trust was essential in developing the Israelites muscle for radical honesty, they also could not judge each other in the daily gathering of manna. Ramban suggests that manna engendered vulnerability, because it removed the evil of comparison. It was that each person learned to satisfy their daily needs while trusting that others did so too. Coming from the land of Egypt, from slavery, the Israelites are immediately taught a new way to be in relationship with each other: to love and to support each other through trust and honesty. The beauty in this system, in the flexibility of the measurement of the omer, was that each Israelite's needs could change daily. The trust and honesty had to have been present each and every day, even if one day an Israelite needed more or less food than the day before. This is the essential lesson of this instance of the manna: only in being true to ourselves, and noticing, but not judging others, can we create a community that trusts one another. Our commentators teach, just like our Torah, that honesty and trust are symbiotic.

Glennon Doyle, author of “Untamed,” and writer on radical honesty teaches: Radical honesty requires living in integrity: ensuring that my inner self and outer self are integrated. Integrity means having only one self. Dividing into two selves—the shown self and the hidden self—that is brokenness, so I do whatever it takes to stay whole. I do not adjust myself to please the world. I am myself wherever I am, and I let the world adjust.

God’s directions for the manna teaches the Israelites to live with integrity. One midrash in Mekhilta d’Rashbi¹ tells that Rabbi Eliezer taught that manna was given each day, and only for that day, for the Israelites to cultivate faith and trust in God, to know that their sustenance ultimately comes from God. Providing food each day allowed God and the Israelites to build a structured relationship, where the Israelites knew they would be cared for, and ultimately loved, by God. Not only could faith, love, and trust grow under these circumstances, but the Israelites could focus on their immaterial needs knowing food would come daily.

¹ Mekhilta d’Rashbi BeShallah 16 מה ר' אליעזר אומר מי שיש לו מה R. Eliezer says: That a person should not gather from one day to the next. And so R. Eliezer says: One who has what to eat today and says—what shall I eat tomorrow?—this is one of those who lack faith as it says: a day’s portion on its day (Exodus 16:4)—The One who created the day created one’s sustenance.

When we live in a world of radical honesty, we can live by Rabbi Eliezer's approach, that in a world filled with abundance, our inner compass and inner balance are the ultimate sources to provide for our needs. Only then can we be radically honest, accept hard truths and grow together. And then, our relationships have an inherent sense of authenticity and integrity. Developing this inner compass means being open to others and to God, to be vulnerable enough to ask for what we really need and honest enough to answer appropriately.

The radical honesty muscle takes practice - we have our whole lives to figure out how to be authentic, how to live with integrity, and how to be honest. In the Jewish calendar we are told to be radically honest on one day a year: Yom Kippur. But what if we were radically honest everyday? How would our relationship to our community, God, and ourselves grow?

Over the last 5 years, JTS has become my home *because* it has nurtured me to be both radically honest and wholly vulnerable. While I might have thought the journey to becoming a rabbi and communal leader might have been one of learning to censor the innermost version of myself, it has been quite the opposite. I have learned what it means to be in a community that

cultivates openness and self-revelation, a type of honesty that allows the opening of each and every one of our souls – allowing the most delicate and precious parts of ourselves to come alive. JTS has fed me a metaphorical manna, through daily emotional and spiritual nourishment as I spent five years navigating rabbinical school. As Rabbi Eliezer said about the Israelites, I needed this manna to develop a love for my chosen path, my faith, and my career.

I would not be here today without the support of my entire family across the country, who have supported me moving from LA to NYC many years ago. Thank you for welcoming me back home each time I return and always supporting and loving me from afar.

Many people in this room have guided me in my transition towards radical honesty, and have been by my side, not shying away every time the answer to “How are you?” was not just “good”, or “fine”. Some of these people are my friends, many of whom traveled to be here with me today. Your kindness, endless care, love, and levity bring beaming light to my life and teach me the beauty of my chosen family. Some of these people are my rabbis, both in the room and on Zoom, who have taught me to hold space

for honesty and have picked up the phone or opened their office door every single time I've needed them. Lastly, Miles, who is on this journey of radical honesty right alongside me, and teaches me how honesty opens a joyful world of unconditional love.