

Parashas

A I K E V

Perceptions • Av 18, 5786 • August 1, 2026 • Issue #2158

The Gemora does not speak too highly about flatterers, but a little flattery can have its place in life. If you want to learn the art of flattery, use AI. The compliments it will throw your way will leave you feeling great and accomplished. I did after.

If you want to see how NOT to flatter someone, read this week's parsha. In it, God tells the Jewish People in no uncertain terms what's what:

Do not say to yourself, when God, your God has repelled them from before you, "Because of my righteousness God has brought me to possess this land"...It is not because of your righteousness or honesty of heart that you possess their land. It is because of the wickedness of these nations that God your God drives them out from before you, and in order to fulfill what God swore to your forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov...You are a stiff-necked people, and you should remember and not forget how you angered God, your God, in the desert. From the day you went out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place you have been rebelling against God. (Devarim 9:4-7)

Ouch. It all sounds so “bidieved.” In halachah, that’s when a situation arises that is permissible but not ideal. It’s not the way you are supposed to do things in the first place (l’chatchilah), but if it happened to occur you can still move forward.

And, it is one thing to be told that by a spouse, business partner, or friend. It is something different to be told that by God who only knows and speaks truth. Well, at least in the ultimate sense of it. Humans may seek false praise, but God offers painful but necessary truth.

When I was a teenager, my father got me a job one summer with a graphic artist painting houses. It took some time, and a little damage here and there, but eventually I learned some of his tricks of the trade, and the following summer I took on my own jobs successfully doing the same thing.

Years later it came out that my father had actually secretly given the money to the graphic artist who had “hired” me to pay for my salary. At the time, I took offense because I had believed that I had earned my salary on my own, and now I had found out that the only reason the man hired and paid me was because it wasn’t his money. He got free help, and I got paid for training.

It took a couple of years of growing up (and extra humility) to change my perspective on that. I had realized how good my father had been to me, and how fortunate I had been to get such valuable training at no cost to me. It allowed me to go out on my own the next year and actually earn my own money, and have great fun doing it. Over time, I became extremely grateful to my father and, fortunately, it was better late than never.

In other words, it may have sounded bidieved, but in fact it was “l’chatchilah” for the Jewish nation to know that Eretz Yisroel was a gift to them, and not earned. When you earn something,

you develop a sense of entitlement, and that hadn't worked out for us very well until that time. The biggest problem we have today is how entitled everyone feels about what they have or want in life. It's ruining people and the world.

Receiving the land as a gift made them more aware of their tenuous relationship with it. It was intended to make them feel a need to earn it for themselves by how they lived on it. And it worked for a while until people started feeling they had the land in their own merit. Once that became the perspective the clock started counting down to destruction and exile.

Have a great Shabbos.

Pinchas Winston