

The Keys to Peaceful Relationships Part 1
Delivered by Rabbi Aaron Krupnick on June 8, 2013

As you may have heard, Google is making cars that drive themselves. There's no need for a driver; the whole thing is kind of on "auto-pilot." And while that's great for Google, it's not great for us. We can't afford to be living our lives on autopilot because this moment, this hour, this day is never going to be given back to you, and when you are living on auto-pilot, you are missing out on all that life has to offer. But much of the time, that's just what we are doing – getting from one appointment to the next, getting the next carpool started on time – getting through the next e-mail only to have 20 more piling up behind it. And what happens when we are on auto-pilot is we start to neglect and take for granted the most important things in our lives – our relationships. Nobody really WANTS that to happen, but it does anyway. So what we need to do is to take a few minutes to take a few steps back and consider the choices we are making and the lives we are leading. We need to shift out of auto-pilot and go back to manual control and take more control of our lives. That's why we have been devoting the past month or so to taking time to more carefully consider the relationships in our lives – precisely so that we are not living them on auto-pilot.

You know, a lot of people think that the best relationships are easy, that they just flow naturally; that the best relationships are the ones you don't have to think about. Well, that's just not true. Judaism believes just the opposite. Good, meaningful relationships take work; they take time and care and consideration. Good relationships can't be built and maintained on auto-pilot. And that's why we are going to be taking the next month of Shabboses to talk about the Keys to Peaceful Relationships. We are going to take the time to step back and see what makes good relationships work and what undermines them as well.

The most important thing to understand is that every day, in every relationship, you are planting seeds and you are going to reap what you sow. You are either going to plant seeds of trust or distrust. You are planting seeds of anger or of peace. When we get bitter, when we get resentful, when we get selfish in relationships, we are planting seeds; and when we are patient and careful and thoughtful, well, those are seeds planted, too. You are planting seeds in every one of your relationships every single day. The question is – what kind of seeds? So we need to be asking ourselves, "How do I plant seeds of peace?" Well, that's what we are going to be looking at today and next week.

Now in every relationship we have to start with the understanding that half the problem is you. It's how you respond that really shapes that relationship. The way you respond is an indication of the real you, and it is in that response that you show your true character. Plenty of people are going to push your buttons. That is going to happen. But your response is up to you. And in that place between what happens to you, what people say to you, and the way you respond lies the most important factor in peaceful, meaningful relationships, and that is trust. The foundation of all good relationships is trust. No trust, no meaningful relationship. All meaningful relationships are built on trust, and all trust is built on truth. All trust is built on truth and all truth is built on trust. You are not going

to have meaningful, peaceful relationships without those two things – trust and truth. If an employee is lying to her boss, she may have an “arrangement”, but it’s not a relationship. If a kid is lying to her parents she might still have respect for them, but that’s not a relationship. If a husband is lying to his wife, he may have a commitment, but he doesn’t have a relationship. Honesty is the bedrock of all peaceful and meaningful relationships. And it is not as easy as it sounds. If it was easy, then every one of your relationships would be easy, peaceful and meaningful, but they aren’t.

The reason it’s tough is because getting at the truth isn’t easy. My brother, David just retired after a career in law enforcement. He had a lot of interesting jobs, but one of them was working for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. And his job was running the lie detector program for the whole agency. If you wanted to work around a nuclear power plant in the U.S., you had to take a lie detector test with one of my brother’s agents. And when he was getting trained and doing the training he learned that people lie a lot. But it turns out that the people we lie to most of all is ourselves. The easiest person to lie to is yourself because you are the least afraid of getting caught. We have an amazing ability to tell ourselves things that aren’t true and convince ourselves that they are. And that’s why it is so important to start with truth and integrity. And so if you want your relationships to be meaningful and peaceful, here is the first key: You need to say, “This relationship will work best if I do not compromise my integrity. I won’t violate my conscience, I won’t compromise my convictions, I won’t live a double life, I won’t lie to you; I’ll tell you the truth because trust is built on truth.”

But truth alone can’t build peaceful relationships, it has to be coupled with integrity. You have to have the integrity and honesty to say, “What’s going on here? Am I really trying my best to pursue a path of peace in this relationship? Or, am I just trying to win an argument and gain the upper hand?” And if you are like me, then your auto-pilot, your default will be to want to win, but that’s not a basis for long term peace. As you know, there are two ways of winning: You can have what I call the “hard victory” where you just out-reason or out-argue, or out shout the other person. Or, you can have what I call the “soft victory,” where you just clam up, sulk, and punish the person by withholding affection. And in either case, of course, it’s all about them – it’s not about you. “She made me go ballistic.” “He pushed me away.” But what kind of victory is that? You’re not helping the relationship- you are hurting it.

King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs said, “Any fool can start an argument – only the wise can avoid a quarrel.” You have to be honest about what you want out of the relationship and avoid the things that are not going to get you what you want. You need to ask yourself – is what I really want selfish, self-indulgent, and ego driven? You are never going to have meaningful, trusting relationships unless you are honest with yourself. We have to be able to take the time to look carefully in the mirror of our own souls and ask, “Am I pulling people in, or am I pushing them away? Am I planting seeds of compromise, of coalition, of trust and cooperation, or am I so busy at work or at home or at the gym, or with my friends to really do the important work necessary to make this relationship better? That’s not a rhetorical question – it’s a spiritual one – and it is probably one of the most important questions you can ask. If you want to have

meaningful, mature, trusting relationships, you have to think things through and be willing to patiently put in the work of making it work. It takes time and reflection, and shifting from auto-pilot, which is what we do here each and every week in our quiet time of prayer and thoughtful reflection...