



BEFORE YOU REACT...

make shalom your goal

BY LEONARD CARR

The vision of Project Shalom is to empower you to fully embrace your reality in ways that allow you to grow closer to and become more deeply aligned with the ideal of shalom. Shalom is a name of Hashem. Hashem is the ultimate transcendent and inclusive reality. It is therefore only through shalom that you can truly get close to Hashem. Through embracing your inner experience in ways that allow you to become actively engaged with your reality, you make yourself into a more whole person. When your reality is aligned with the ideal of shalom, you rise to the highest levels of G-dliness that can be achieved in this world.

The theme that runs through this entire series is the idea that your power to reclaim your sense of wholeness to enhance and build your world or the opposite lies in your words. The power of speech refers both to your thoughts or internal dialogue, the words you choose in narrating and commenting on your experience. It also refers to the words you speak. How you describe something confers on that object or phenomenon reality, substance and meaning.

Your choice of wording in your narration of life determines the quality of life you experience of the world you create through those choices. Hashem created the world through speech. Words can help you to become a more conscious person if you use them to accurately describe and reflect your inner experience. They help you to be a more effective person if you choose them with awareness and care. They can also become a distraction, diverting both you and others from discovering your true potential.

Your capacity to become Hashem's

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partner in perfecting creation or antagonist in destroying people lies in how you use words. Words can cause untold harm when used in cruel, careless and indiscriminate ways. Unlike with physical actions, the good or harm caused by words can be limitless in its continuity and in the breadth of its influence and spread. You alienate yourself and your world from Hashem whenever you distort true reality with words. Speech practices that distort reality, like mockery, ridicule, gossip, tale-bearing, ingratiating, flattery, lying, revealing private confidences and secrets and impugning reputations create division and conflict, thereby destroying the world.

Wise choices bring about shalom in the world. Our rabbis teach us that silence is a fence around wisdom. This is because it is only in the quietened solitude of your internal world can you get to reflect on your

experience and get to understand the forces that influence your decisions, remember what is deeply important to you and make conscious choices that honour the ideal image of the person that, deep down, you aspire to become. The concepts described in this article illustrate some of the reasons that the sages put such value in the quality of being able to keep your 'inner life' private, through being careful with how you show yourself to the world in speech, behaviour and dress. It is through containing your inner life by allowing yourself to fully feel your feelings, be conscious of your thoughts and how they serve you or otherwise, and refining your deeds by being humble and modest, that you can gain mastery over your inner world, and in so doing, become more aware of and sensitive to the humanity, challenges, frailties and entitlements of others.



Your power to grow in wisdom and become more whole through the resulting enlightenment can be actualised through developing your capacity to fully 'host' your inner experience. This means fully embracing whatever you are experiencing, without judgment or complaint. Hosting your experience challenges you, through your attempts to overcome discomfort, to grow into a deeper, broader, stronger and wiser person. Appreciative hosting entails learning to tolerate and patiently hold in conscious awareness of your inner experience, without avoiding it by denial or numbing, fighting it by distraction, or acting on it before you have processed it to further develop your ability to grow from experience.

Through this process, you will in time come to recognise that while you have the capacity for great pain, that you are often subjected to profound loss and seemingly unbearable circumstances, nonetheless, you have the corresponding capacity to recover and to grow wiser and stronger through the embracing of and working with the potential inherent in your challenges.

The secret to mastery of free will is using your inner experiences and reactions as navigational tools, and not allowing yourself to be ruled by them either through your avoidance of facing and owning your reactions, or just acting them out without consciously choosing your preferred way of being. What you are able to keep to yourself grows you.

If you consciously embrace whatever thoughts, feelings and impulses arise within you at each moment then you increase your self-awareness and enrich your relationship with yourself. More importantly, you open yourself to the possibility of fully utilising Hashem's greatest gift to human kind, which is the ability to shape your world through exercising the power of free will. Personal

growth through the exercise of conscious choice is the way to actualise your full potential and express the greatness inherent in your humanity. For this purpose, your inner life should serve as a guide to help you to consciously navigate through life. When you live in a way that expresses your most deeply-held values and ideals, you experience shalom in the sense of having serenity and peace of mind, regardless of the challenges that confront you at any time.

Discomfort is a sign of misalignment with actual reality and an implicit invitation to become more self-aware and conscious of your choices. Pain is your experience of an implicit choice to remain unconscious and resist dealing with reality. When you avoid processing your discomfort, you lose out on a valuable growth opportunity and inevitably push that pain onto someone else. It then becomes the other person's problem to process the pain.

Reactions you outwardly express before giving yourself time to process and make conscious choices about how ideally to respond, have the potential to destroy you and others. When you act on your impulses, whether through thought or action in ways that diminish others or make them feel bad, you relinquish the opportunity to use that discomfort to help you to become a better person. You also rob others of their potential to grow, because when you threaten someone, they either retaliate or shut down, and thus oftentimes, cannot grow from the experience.

All your uncomfortable emotions are gifts that alert you to where your potential lies for growth. They show you where you can reclaim lost power and wasted resources. You are then free to use this knowledge to act more consciously, and in so doing, become a more effective and creative human being. The gift of envy is that it awakens you to qualities in yourself

that you have failed to recognise and manifest in your own life. By identifying those un-lived aspects of yourself, you can align your life more closely with what you most deeply value. Regret can motivate you to give yourself a second chance to upgrade your life and to change in ways that avoid you creating new regrets in the future. Bitterness may show you where you failed to stand up for yourself or gave power away, and where you need to reassert your value and re-establish boundaries with others. Your passions, preoccupations and desires help you to recognise where you waste energy in distraction, invest resources in things that will not bring you long-term satisfaction, and may even be causing you to squander precious resources. Feeling overlooked or disrespected or any other feeling that makes you tell yourself you have been short-changed can help you to be more sensitive and aware of the vulnerabilities and needs of others.

When you become aware of how whatever you are experiencing is a reflection of you, and not whoever happens to be provoking your reaction, you start to become more aware of your own boundaries. This means growing in appreciation of where you and your inner being ends, and other people and their challenges, entitlements, needs and sensitivities start. With this sensitivity, you can really engage in an authentic and compassionate way with yourself and others.

The greater your self-awareness the more profound your ability becomes to transcend your own self-centred orientation and make your life an expression of higher values, like integrity, compassion and kindness. Gaining mastery over your egoistic self and living according to higher values is the secret of true self-esteem and inner peace. When you separate your subjective reactions from the outside provocations or thoughts that provoke them, then you can weigh up what your internal experience is telling you and seemingly compelling you to do against what you know to be the right choice based on your understanding of what Hashem expects from you. **IL**

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