BEND - STRAIGHTEN - BALANCE
BEND, STRAIGHTEN, BALANCE

Blessed are you Hashem Our God King of the world who straightens the bent

Lavishing Kids With Praise Can Make Them Feel Worse About Themselves

The dangers of overdoing the compliments

ELEANOR BARKHORN JAN 2 2014, 4:19 PM ET

"Hollywood dishes out too much praise for small things," the great actor Jimmy Stewart once said. "I won’t let it get me, but too much praise can turn a fellow’s head if he doesn’t watch his step." He was talking about the sick power compliments can have on a person’s ego: You hear enough times that you’re awesome and you start to believe that you’re the most awesome. And then you become insufferable.

A new set of studies shows that for kids, high praise can have the opposite effect on self-esteem: It can actually make some children feel worse about themselves. "That’s Not Just Beautiful—That’s Incredibly Beautiful: The Adverse Impact of Inflated Praise on Children with Low Self-Esteem" found that when adults give excessive compliments to children with low confidence, the children were less likely to pursue challenges.

One of the studies involved 240 children who visited a science museum in the Netherlands. The researchers asked each of the kids to complete a self-esteem assessment to determine if they had high or low confidence. Then, the children were asked to draw a famous painting and told that a professional painter would evaluate it. After they finished their paintings, the children were given a card from the painter (who did not in fact exist) with one of three responses: "You made an INCREDIBLY beautiful drawing!" (inflated praise); "You made a beautiful drawing!" (non-inflated praise); or no comment about the drawing at all (no praise).

The researchers then tested the kids’ willingness to take on new challenges. They asked the children to make a new drawing and let them pick their subject: either a complex drawing
or a simple one. It turned out that the students with low self esteem were less likely to do a complex drawing if they'd received inflated praise. "Compared to non-inflated praise, inflated praise DECREASED challenge seeking in children with low self-esteem," the researchers wrote.

So it seems that the best way to improve kids’ self-esteem is to give them frank, straightforward praise. The only problem is, though, that parents and teachers often do the opposite. The researchers also found that adults are more likely to heap inflated praise on children with low-self esteem—presumably in a well-intentioned attempt to make them feel better.

Last month I wrote about how young teachers aren’t being taught how to praise students effectively. Teacher training programs emphasize rules and routines as the key to classroom management but often overlook the role of encouragement in creating a positive learning environment. The “inflated praise” studies only highlight the need for better training in this area. Adults are trying to boost children’s self-confidence, but their efforts are backfiring.

Teachers trying to reach kids with low self-esteem need to know what works and what doesn’t.

 DO YOU AGREE WITH THE ARTICLE?
 WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE CAUSES OF LOW SELF ESTEEM?

SELF ESTEEM VS HUMILITY

Low self-esteem has often been called one of our generation’s main inner difficulties.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD has devoted a number of books and countless lectures to the importance of proper self-esteem. He makes a crucial point, very relevant to our discussion of humility – that cultivating self-esteem does not in any way contradict or diminish from the traditional Jewish emphasis on humility. Being humble means having the accurate sense of self so crucial for healthy self-esteem. We here contribute a number of sources that underscore the spiritual source of positive self-esteem.

| Proverbs 22 | משל פיך כב
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| Anava (humility) is followed by fear of God, wealth and honor and life. | (ד) כקב ענוה יראת יקוק עשר ו撅וד והחיים

| Malbim’s commentary | מלבים
| --- | ---
| The root of humility comes from recognition of the greatness of the Creator, and His tremendous power, and the universe that He Created - - until one recognizes that he is vanishingly small in comparison to even a small part of Creation. And even if he | שרשぬ ענוה סמשתע ממה שמשתע נ٬ שבִּה יִשָּׁר מְצוּיָה שָׁלַשְׁנָה, דֹּא נְשָׁר בְּעֶדֶנֶיהָ, וְנִבְלָא אֶלֶּיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶיהָ, כְּלֵי עֵדֶנֶה
achieves kingship, wisdom and strength in this world, and all greatness, he knows that he is like a tiny worm before the Great King who stands over him, and is like nothing in comparison to even the smallest of Angels. This thought will bring Fear of G-d into his heart, fear of doing anything against His will.

WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMILITY AND FEAR OF GOD?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE HUMBLE AND HAVE HEALTHY SELF ESTEEM?

PHYSICAL ACTIONS

Bowing during prayer is important as an act of humility. Bowing is a physical expression of negating our ego before G-d. Ironically, complementing the discussion of bowing and its importance is a Talmudic passage about getting up after bowing. The gemara quotes the verse, “Hashem straightens out those who are bent (Hashem zokeif kefufim),” as the source for straightening up when saying the name of G-d. We bend the knees at the word “Baruch” (Blessed), bow down for the word “Ata” (You), and straighten up at the word “Hashem”. Getting up after bowing is, according to the Talmud, equally as important as bowing itself.

Talmud Bavli: Brachos 12b

R’ Sheses- When he would bow during prayers he would bow quickly like a staff but when he would rise he would rise slowly like a snake

WHY DO YOU THINK BOWING HAPPENS QUICKLY BUT RISING HAPPENS SLOWLY?

WHAT IS THIS GEMARA TRYING TO TEACH?
The explanation of this passage is that bowing is a result of the feeling of being confronted by God before whom everyone is subservient. This deference before God happens in an instant since the realization of oneself before God is not a product of time.

However, rising happens slowly. Any sort of self-development is a product of self-recognition (not the recognition of God) occurs slowly within the confines of time.

All growth happens slowly while defeat and subjugation happens in an instant,

 HOW DOES THE MAHARAL EXPLAIN WHY R’ SHESHES WOULD BOW LIKE A STAFF AND RISE LIKE A SNAKE?

 HAVE YOU SEEN EXAMPLES IN LIFE WHEN FAILING IS QUICK AND SUCCESS IS SLOW?

TWO MORE PERSPECTIVES

Rav Dessler zt”l (Mikhtav Mei’Elihu vol. 3, p. 296)

The three stages of bowing as an inner process. We at first recognize G-d as the source of all blessing and realize our own smallness — we bend the knees at “Baruch”. Then, when encountering G-d’s essence we totally negate ourselves — we bow down at “Ata”. From this comes revelation, recognizing Hashem — we straighten up at “Hashem”. Israel has cultivated the ability to recognize Godliness even when it is hidden and therefore merits the Divine revelation. It is this ability to negate one’s ego while bowing before God that enables the Jew to stand up straight and experience the Divine revelation.

Rav Kook, zt”l (Siddur Olat R’aya, vol. 1, p. 267)

Bowing and straightening up as a metaphor for two stages of personal development. People begin with all sorts of negative forces they need to weed out, suppress, and destroy. This is difficult work that demands a lot of subjugation — of ego, and of negative inner forces in general. This is the bowing stage of development, where we bend ourselves in an attempt to
destroy the problematic elements within us. However, teaches Rav Kook, subjugation and self-negation are a preparatory stage of development. “The goal is to shine with the light of God with an abundance of strength and joy. There all of the powers of the soul straighten up and endure with much courage and an elevated and lofty life force.” First we bow, but then we straighten up. Our real self is naturally good and, when cultivated, improves and strengthens. Our negative side is not essential to us, but only an incidental covering, a darkness of the body. Once we are freed of the negative forces within us, a person feels a constant strengthening of his inner self with every advance and additional good. Real self-good does not weaken the soul, but lifts it up and strengthens it through the redemption of the living God.

CONSIDER THE WORDS OF RAV DESSLER AND RAV KOOK: WHICH EXPLANATION OF BOWING MAKES MORE SENSE TO YOU?

BEND, STRAIGHTEN, GROW

The Talmudic source for straightening up after bowing is “God straightens up the crooked. (Tehillim 151)” Rav Kook offers us the following reading: Hashem straightens up – constantly strengthening and improving – those who have bent themselves down – who have enabled this by first subjugating the negative powers within them.

The daily experience of bowing in Shemoneh Esrei might go beyond being just a ritual-procedural part of the daily prayers and become an integral part of our inner personal growth. One possible way is to see bowing and straightening up as expression of an inner experience. When bowing we physically express humility, and then, according Rav Dessler’s and Rav Kook’s teachings, revelation, growth, personal strength, and joy is enabled – we straighten and stand up.
Rabbi Simcha Bunim used to say:

"Every person should have two pockets. In one, [there should be a note that says] בושল ובernational [for my sake was the world created.] In the second, [there should be a note that says] אני ער בוץ [I am dust and ashes]."

In some versions of the story, as if the listener can't figure it out for him- or herself, Rabbi Simcha Bunim is alleged to continue, "When one is feeling down, he should take out the note that says 'for my sake was the world created.' And when one is feeling smug, he should take out the note that says 'I am dust and ashes.'"

**WHY DO YOU THINK EACH POCKET NEEDS TO BE AN EXTREEM?**

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

- Self-esteem is not built on endless positive comments
- Healthy self-esteem is someone who can be humble too
- Bowing during prayer is a physical manifestation of subjugating oneself to God
- Rising up during prayer is important but the growth and straightening is a slow process that needs more time than the bowing
- Balancing humility and self-esteem is vital for a balanced world view