

Volume III Issue #3 Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman	Parshas Lech Lecha, 11 Cheshvan, 5783 November 5, 2022
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On the Parsha In this week's Parsha, Hashem told Avrohom Avinu to, "Go forth from your land – your birthplace – and the house of your father – to the land that I will show you" (Bereshis 12:1). We see from this Possuk that Hashem felt it necessary to tell Avrohom to depart from each of these three places. Would not it have been sufficient to just say, "Go forth from your land"?

It seems that there was a need for Avrohom to distance himself from each of these three places. Rav Ovadiah Bartenura (the "Bartenura") explains that we are all influenced by our surroundings, whether the influences come from our country or land, our birthplace or city, or the house of our father (i.e. our immediate surroundings). All of these influences, writes the Bartenura, can be equally detrimental. Hashem told Avrohom to leave behind each of these places so as not to allow any of these aspects of his past life to influence him.

Rav Hensch Leibowitz ZT"l, however, asks a question: He points out that Avrohom had recognized Hashem at the age of three. He broke the idols of his father's household and showed remarkable courage when he stood by his convictions which caused Nimrod to throw him into the Kivshan Ha'aish (fiery furnace). Can we say regarding Avrohom that he could still be so negatively influenced by his surroundings?

We see from the Bartenura's comments above that "Yes" even Avrohom could have been influenced negatively by all three of the aforementioned factors. But how do negative influences actually work?

Negative influences often affect a person in a two-stage process. The first stage involves the desire to conform. We fear rejection by those around us if we do not conform to whatever they are doing. If they are smoking, then we feel we must also smoke. If they drink, we also drink. If they dress immodestly, then so

do we, and on it goes until we have adopted the lower standards of the society around us.

Now we have a problem. We have violated our own, previously higher standards of behavior. We have likely negated the values of our own home, that of our parents and grandparents and what we know deep down in our hearts is right. Then, we feel negatively about ourselves, and we have an internal conflict between our old values and the new conforming values that we have adopted. How do we reconcile the two to make us feel better? To make us feel better, we often negate our true selves and completely adopt our new values so there is little left of our old selves to reconcile. We no longer have an internal conflict since we have completely suppressed who we truly are (or were).

On some level, this could even have happened to Avrohom, Heaven forbid, unless he listened to Hashem's charge to leave those who could have influenced him behind.

If we can fortify ourselves with the knowledge that we tend to negate our true selves when we conform to another's values, we can be on guard and protect ourselves against this tendency. In addition, if we adequately appreciate the importance of truth, it will make it that much harder to negate our true selves if the situation presents itself.

Chizuk - Inspiration Sometimes, inspiration can come from the young and dedicated teachers that teach our sons and daughters. [Some details of the following story have been changed.] A number of years ago, a seminary girl took a position as a high school English teacher at a Bais Yaakov. She was careful to mark every paper with thoughtful comments. On one occasion, she made a comment to a young girl's paper based on a misunderstanding of

her student’s answer. Consequently, she gave the student a lower mark.

The student explained her position and why she had responded in the way that she did. The teacher realized that she had erred and had misunderstood what the student had written. She handed back the paper with the lower mark removed and increased her mark. She further pointed out in her comments that she now understood her point and appreciated the depth of her paper. The student was so enamored and inspired by the teacher’s honesty with her quick and ready admission of her mistake.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Barilla is a pasta making company which, it seems, is deliberately deceiving U.S. shoppers by using the slogan "Italy's #1 Brand of Pasta" on its packaging which makes it sound as if the ingredients come from Italy. However, the majority of the company's products that are sold in the U.S. are produced in Iowa and New York and no ingredients come from Italy. Is it Gneivas Da’as (the prohibition against engaging in deceptive practices) to sell Barilla pasta in a Kosher grocery store?

ANSWER: The Gemorah in Chulin 94a cites a Beraisah which discusses four examples given by Rabbi Meir of things that are considered to be Gneivas Da’as. 1] It is forbidden to repeatedly invite someone to a meal when you know that he will refuse 2] It is forbidden to repeatedly offer gifts to another when you know that he will refuse them 3] It is forbidden to open a new barrel of wine to honor a guest (when one has to open it anyway to fulfill an order for a previous sale) unless one informs the guest of the real reason he has opened it 4] It is forbidden to offer someone oil from an empty barrel to anoint oneself when one knows full well that the person will refuse it. If, however, he is offering the oil to show his fondness for the person, then it is permitted.

The Mishna in Bava Metzia (59b) tells us that it is forbidden to mix old produce with new produce and

sell them together as one package, when making the representation that the entire package is made of new produce. This is comparable to our case where Barilla implies that its pasta is something it’s not – that its ingredients are sourced from Italy. Accordingly, it would appear that one may not sell Barilla pasta in a Kosher grocery store. However, most people when they buy Barilla pasta do not care where the ingredients are sourced from – which would lead us to a lenient opinion and permit the sale of Barilla pasta. However, since some people do care – it would be appropriate to place a sign next to the product – indicating that the ingredients DO NOT come from Italy.

Mussar – Introspection

This week we continue Chapter Three of our translation of the Chofetz Chaim’s Sefer entitled, “Sefas Tamim.”

“And you should further note that in the Heavenly realms the prohibition of stealing is most severe, to the point that even the mere cause of a financial loss to another, and even less, falls into the category of theft. As it is said in Bava Kamma 119a: ‘Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who steals from his friend, even a nickel’s worth, it is as if he has taken his soul away from him, as it is stated (Mishlei 1:19), “So are the ways of every one that is greedy for profit; it takes away the life of the owner thereof.”’ And it states (Yirmiyahu 5:17), ‘And they shall consume your harvest, and your bread, [and since there is no food - it is as if] they shall consume your sons and your daughters.’

And it states (Yoel 4:19): ‘Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the extortion of the children of Yehudah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.’ And it states (Shmuel Bais 21:1) ‘And Hashem said: It is for Shaul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites.’”