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On the Parsha

In this week’s parsha, one of the Malachim (angels) that visited Avrohom Avinu informs him that Sara Imeinu was going to have a son despite her advanced age. Sara overheard this prophesy and did not believe it. The Possuk says, “Now Avrohom and Sara were old, coming on in years; Sara had ceased to have the way of the women. Sarah laughed within herself, saying, ‘After I have become worn out, will I have smooth flesh...’” (Bereishis 18:11-12)

How could Sara, who was on an even greater level than Avrohom in regards to prophesy, deny the truth of the prophecy?

Rabbi Avrohom Reuvain Sofer from Prague, author of the Yalkut Reuveini, a Kabbalistic work from the 1600’s, explains that Sara took stock of herself and due to her exceptional humility, could not find a merit that, in her opinion, was deserving of the miracle of having a child at her advanced age. Therefore, Sara erroneously concluded that the prophesy was not true.

This gives us a remarkable insight into the interplay between humility and truth. The Kochvei Ohr explains that many people entertain the erroneous notion that the trait of humility requires a person to deny the truth of where one really stands on a spiritual level. This, however, is incorrect. Truth is something that should never be obscured – neither because of humility, nor on account of self-deception.

Humility is a great Middah. However, as great as it is, it should not be permitted to obscure the truth. Sara should have believed the truth about the prophesy and not let her humility get in the way. Not that we learn this lesson from here, but it bears mentioning, nonetheless. We must not let humility make us think of ourselves as less than who we really are, but we must also take steps to not fool ourselves into thinking that we have greater merits than we actually do. It is a careful balance that we must walk.

Chizuk - Inspiration

According to Indeed.com, the average pay for a gas station attendant in New Jersey is \$14.55 per hour. One such attendant, working in a Passaic service station, thought of a

perfect scam to supplement his income. He observed that religious Jews often filled up at his station. He decided to implement an idea that he had brewing.

He told the next Frum Jewish person that he saw, that a person who looked exactly like him had filled-up a few hours ago, albeit in a different car and left without paying for the gas. Was it possible that it was him and that he had forgotten to pay? He spoke courteously, and not in an offending or in an accusatory tone.

The idea struck paydirt. The Frum man felt badly for the attendant and felt a responsibility that one of his co-religionists may have, either purposefully or inadvertently, defrauded the attendant out of the price of a fill-up. The Frum Jew graciously offered to pay for the cost of the gasoline. The attendant repeated the scam several times until he was eventually caught and arrested by the police.

We see from here the noble character of Acheinu Bnei Yisroel to rectify a potential Chillul Hashem that was caused by the dishonesty (even inadvertent dishonesty) of another member of Klal Yisroel.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I own a business, and in the post-pandemic market I have a particular vendor that is always trying to raise his prices. I get the feeling that if I was to find a cheaper alternative vendor – my current vendor will want to keep my business and will stop trying to raise his prices. I have not found an alternative vendor that is cheaper at this time. Am I allowed to stock-up on my order now by ordering more from him than I usually do, so that I can order from him less frequently in the future? The current vendor will notice my less frequent orders and will mistakenly take it as a sign that I have found another cheaper vendor.

ANSWER: There are two underlying issues here – the prohibition of Geneivas Da’as (deception) and the second issue of Dover Emes Bilvavo (speaking truth in one’s heart). In the case above, one would not be following the dictates of Dover Emes Bilvavo but that is a higher level of honesty that may not be obligatory. We will focus on the first issue, the prohibition of Geneivas Da’as, below.

Most Poskim rule that monetary Geneivas Da'as is a biblical violation. Does the case above qualify as monetary Geneivas Da'as? If it does, then it is not permitted. However, it may not be. Even though this case involves a monetary matter, the actual deception relates to whether an alternative vendor has been found and not directly with money (e.g. one sells silver jewelry for a higher price claiming it's white gold.)

Regarding the prohibition of non-monetary Geneivas Da'as, however, there is a debate between Rashi and Tosofos. The Gemorah in Chullin 94b discusses a concept called "Mateh es Atzmo Mutar"- deceiving oneself. Rashi holds that the prohibition of Geneivas Da'as regarding non-monetary matters, is only if someone deceives another by actually saying something deceptive – but otherwise, there is no Geneivas Da'as because one is considered to be deceiving oneself. Tosofos on the other hand, believes that one will transgress the violation if someone has intention to deceive another even if he doesn't say anything deceptive. However, Tosfos holds that there is no obligation to correct a misinterpretation that the other person made of his own volition as one is deceiving oneself. If, however, the words that one has said clearly mislead, then one is obligated to correct the misinterpretation. Therefore, in our case, according to Rashi, since you didn't actively say anything deceptive, it would be permitted. According to Tosafos, it would be prohibited assuming it's more likely than not, that your current vendor would be deceived by your actions and be misled into thinking that you have identified an alternative vendor.

As an aside, a simple remedy in your case may be, that rather than creating the mistaken impression that another alternative vendor has been found so the vendor will not raise his prices, you are allowed to say, "I cannot pay more than X dollars," even if you ultimately end up paying a higher price by changing your mind.

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: 'Rabi 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.'

The Gemorah asks that since Rabbi Yochanan's point was already proven by the first Possuk – why the need for more Possukim? The Gemara answers: And if you would say that the robber takes only the victim's life, but the lives of his children have been spared, then we have the second Possuk, which mentions the victim's sons and daughters.

And if you would say: This matter applies only where the robber does not give his victim compensation for the stolen item, but where he gave compensation for the stolen item, it is not comparable to murder, come and hear the verse: 'For the extortion of the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land.' Extortion is referring to coercing someone to sell an item that he does not want to sell. It is a form of robbery, and the verse equates it with murder.

And if you would say: This is only where he committed the robbery directly, but if he committed it through indirect action, the sin is not so severe, the Possuk says, 'It is for Shaul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Givonim.' And where did we ever find that Shaul killed the Gibeonites? He did not do so! Rather, due to the fact that he killed the residents of Nob, the city of the Kohanim, who would provide the Givonim with water (see Samuel I, Chapter 22) and food, the Possuk blames him for their death as though he had killed them himself.

We learn from here that even just being a cause of damage to his friend [it is counted as if he had killed those who had subsequently died because of this]."