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On the Parsha

In this week's Parsha, Hashem instructs Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael, "I will bring you to the land, concerning which I raised My hand to give to Avraham, to Yitzchok, and to Yaakov, and I will give it to you as a heritage; I am Hashem." (Beraishes 6:8)

Moshe relayed this message to Bnei Yisrael, but they did not listen to him because of their "shortness of spirit" (their despair) and the hard servitude that they were enduring. Hashem then instructed Moshe to speak to Pharaoh to let Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.

Moses responded, "Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me, and I am of closed lips [have a speech impediment]?" (Bereishis 6:12)

Rashi points out, that Moshe's argument above (that if Bnei Yisrael did not listen to him, then certainly Pharaoh was not going to listen to him) is one of the ten Kal VaChomers (fortiori arguments) in the Torah. This fortiori argument however, seems to be flawed. The reason that Bnei Yisrael did not listen to Moshe was on account of their "shortness of spirit" – their depressive state, and their hard labor – factors that did not exist regarding Pharaoh! How then can Moshe Rabbeinu make a Kal VaChomer argument? Bnei Yisrael did not listen to Moshe but perhaps Pharaoh would?

In addition, Moshe ends his argument in the Passuk above with the fact that he was "of closed lips". What does that have to do with his argument?

From the explanation of Rav Elya Boruch Finkel ZT"L (1947-2008) in his MiShulchan Rav Elya Boruch on the Parsha, we can understand the nature of the factors that prevent us from seeing the truth and how these factors can be overcome.

Often, there are a number of factors that prevent us from seeing the truth. In this case, Bnei Yisrael were blinded from seeing the truth that their salvation was at hand. The factors that blinded them were 1] the depressive state that they were in – the "shortness of spirit" we referenced above and 2] the excessive work and pressure that they were under. However, Rav Elya

Boruch explains, these factors could have been overcome and Bnei Yisrael could have been persuaded, by one of two methods:

- 1) Persuading Bnei Yisrael with genuine and sincere words that emanate from the heart; or
- 2) Persuading them with an eloquent and articulate argument.

Both of these methods, however, have limitations. In order for method 1) to be effective in opening one's eyes to the truth, there needs to be someone with genuine "heart" on the other end to receive the truth. The factors that may blind us to life-changing insights of truth can in fact, be overcome by the genuineness of the words of others. However, they require the recipient of the message to have a measure of spirituality. Bnei Yisrael possessed this measure of spirituality to potentially be able to be persuaded by a sincere and genuine message, while Pharaoh did not. Therefore, if Bnei Yisrael who had the measure of spirituality to be persuaded, could nonetheless not be persuaded, then certainly Pharaoh, who did not have the requisite measure of spirituality, was not to be persuaded. With this explanation, we now understand Moshe's Kal VaChomer.

As for method 2) above, where an eloquent and articulate argument can be employed to persuade one to see the truth, Moshe says to Hashem that he is "of closed lips" and cannot present an eloquent and articulate argument. Thus, the point of Moshe being "of closed lips" is not extraneous to his argument. It speaks to the second method of opening one's eyes to the truth which Moshe was not able to employ.

Chizuk - Inspiration

There is another definition of falsehood that is described by Rav Shlomo Volbe Z"TL (1914-2005), the author of the Alei Shor (Vol. II p. 76) that is rather eye-opening. He writes that even "truths" that are relayed to another to cause harm or to damage another are still considered lies and falsehoods. He derives this from a Rashi in the Gemorah in Succah, where the Gemorah is in the process of identifying the plant which produces the

Haddasim – myrtle leaves that are used as one of the Arba Minim (Four Species) that are taken on Succos.

“Our Sages taught: It is written: ‘Boughs of a dense-leaved tree’ (Vayikra 23:40); this is referring to a tree where its leaves hide its tree. And which tree is that? You must say it is the myrtle tree.” The Gemorah suggests two other possibilities but rejects them. The Gemorah then suggests the “Yirduf” – the Oleander tree, which has two favorable characteristics that were absent in the previous two suggestions. However, the tree is highly toxic. “Abaye said: It is written regarding the Torah (Mishlei 3:17) ‘Its ways are ways of pleasantness’, and that is not the case with the Oleander because it is a poisonous plant and its sharp, thorn-like leaves pierce the hand of one holding it. Rava said: The Oleander is unfit because it states in Zechariah (8:19) ‘Love truth and peace,’ and poisonous plants are antithetical to peace.” Rashi commenting on the Gemorah above explains that the Oleander represents neither truth nor peace because it is so poisonous.

Rav Volbe says that Rashi’s comment needs further explanation. The fact that the Oleander tree is so poisonous explains why it is not “peace” but how is it not “truth”? Rav Volbe concludes that we see from Rashi that something that is so harmful and negative cannot be considered truth. This is an additional understanding to consider about falsehood. If telling someone the truth would be hurtful and not constructive, it would be considered falsehood.

Halacha – Jewish Law

Part of the parameters of “distancing oneself from Sheker” according to Rav Nachum Yavrov (Niv Sfasayim first edition, pp 131-132) is to distance oneself from anything that could lead one to lie. What follows is a series of summary rulings that Rav Yavrov provides. The numbering system is the author’s own.

1. Although the prohibition of “distancing oneself from a lie” (“Distancing”) applies to anything that could lead one to lie, when that possibility is remote, then the prohibition does not apply.
2. Distancing applies even if the matter is not a definitive lie. As long as it is likely to be a lie, the prohibition applies.

3. Distancing also applies when the person’s heart indicates to him that the matter is a lie even if it is not yet known to be a lie.
4. Distancing also means that one cannot be the cause of someone else lying, even if this is brought about by being silent.
5. Distancing applies even if the person lies and has in mind to tell the truth afterward.
6. Distancing applies in a case where someone sees others whispering among themselves - it is forbidden to ask them what they were discussing, because it can cause them to lie.
7. Ideally, one should not be around people who are whispering as this can launch events that might lead to a lie.
8. Distancing applies in a case where Reuvain invited Shimon to come to his house for an event and Shimon did not attend - it is forbidden for Reuvain to ask him why he did not attend, as this may cause Shimon to lie.

Mussar – Introspection

We now begin our translation of the fourth chapter of the Chofetz Chaim’s classic work, the “Sefas Tamim”.

“In the past chapters, we explained some of the repercussions of theft and robbery in this world. Now we shall begin with some of the extensive repercussions in the World to Come, if he does not look to repair the sin in his lifetime – that is to return ill-gotten money or to appease his victim and be forgiven.

It is well known that the sin of theft, and all such sins that are between man and man – Yom Kippur does not atone for it – until he placates his friend. Even death itself does not atone for him, as it states in the Midrash Rabbah (Vayikra 18:1) on the Pasuk in Koheles (12:6), ‘And the jug will break upon the spring [of water]’. This [the jug] refers to the stomach. After three days, his stomach bursts open and sends it [the food] back to the mouth and says to it, ‘Take that which you stole and desired and gave to me.’ [It is possible to say that this is the meaning of the Pasuk in Mishlei (10:6), ‘And the mouth of evildoers will cover the theft [because the stomach will send the stolen food back to the mouth where it is covered]].”