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On the Parsha

Bnei Yisrael had sinned by worshiping the golden calf. Moshe Rabbeinu interceded on behalf of Bnei Yisrael and begged Hashem for forgiveness. The Pasuk states: "And Hashem passed before him and [Moshe] proclaimed: Hashem, Hashem, benevolent G-d, Who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness and **truth**..." (Exodus 34:36)

Rav Yitzchok Hutner ZT"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin, poses a fundamental question. Why did Moshe appeal to Hashem's attribute of Emes – truth, when asking for forgiveness? In truth, from a strict justice perspective, people do not deserve to be forgiven. When dealing with forgiveness, we ask for Hashem's kindness and mercy. Why did Moshe include Hashem's attribute of Emes when praying for their forgiveness?

Rav Shneur Kotler ZT"l (Noam Siach p. 251) explains that although the very foundation of forgiveness when one repents (Teshuva) emanates from the attribute of Chesed – kindness, once the concept of Teshuvah was presented in the Torah (the Midrash quotes Kayin telling Adom that he did Teshuva for killing Hevel) it becomes part of Torah, and as a consequence, it is Truth itself, because everything in the Torah is true. In addition, because it is now part of Torah, it is eternal and unchanging which are defining characteristics of truth. Therefore, Moshe was correct in including Hashem's attribute of Emes when praying for Hashem to accept Bnei Yisrael's Teshuva.

As an example of Teshuva's eternal nature and efficacy, Rav Kotler further explains that Hashem will always provide us with the opportunity to have our sins forgiven when we do Teshuvah and that in a similar vein, Rabbeinu Yonah writes (Shaarei Teshuvah 1:9) that for every Teshuvah that one does, there is always at least some form of forgiveness.

Chizuk - Inspiration

In Kisvei HaSabba MiKelm (p. 336), Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv ZT"l discusses the relationship between Chochma – wisdom, and one's dedication to

Emes - truth. He says that the more one engages one's brain in the study of wisdom and works to become wise, the more honest one will become.

What follows is a fascinating study on engaging the brain through direct stimulation and the effect it has on honest decision making.

The essential element behind our observance of Torah and Mitzvos is Bechira Chofshis – freedom of choice. One very common choice is deciding between being honest and one's base self-interests. Research performed at the University of Zurich ("UZH") and performed together with colleagues from Chicago and Boston, has shown that non-invasive brain stimulation over a region in the right dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (rDLPFC) can, for some people, actually increase honest and ethical behavior. This has been reported in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (April 10, 2017).

In the experiments conducted by the researchers, they applied transcranial direct current stimulation which made brain cells more sensitive and active. They found that participants undergoing the transcranial direct current stimulation were less likely to cheat and enhance their winnings at a dice rolling game that the researchers designed. The pattern of results suggested that the referenced stimulation helped the brains of the participants resolve trade-offs between being honest and cheating for their own self-interests, and made the study participants choose to play the dice rolling game honestly.

Another fascinating observation was that the number of consistent cheaters remained the same. The researchers found that about 8% of the participants cheated whenever possible to maximize their winnings regardless of the brain stimulation applied. Christian Ruff, UZH Professor of Neuroeconomics, said that this finding suggested that the stimulation mainly reduced cheating in participants who actually experienced a moral conflict, but did not influence the decision-making process of those who didn't feel torn or guilty about their dishonesty.

The Gemorah in Kiddushin 20a quotes a statement of Rav Huna: “Once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it is permitted to him. The Gemorah is surprised at this: Can it enter your mind that it is permitted to him merely because he has sinned twice? Rather, say that it becomes to him as though it is permitted. Therefore, when he violates a prohibition a second time, the Baraisa takes for granted that he does not sense that he is performing a sin.”

We see from this Gemorah, that when a person repeats a transgression, it becomes engrained in him and he does not experience a “moral conflict”. And interestingly enough, when a participant did not experience a moral conflict in the above referenced study, the participant could not be helped.

Halacha – Jewish Law

Question:

Whenever we go to my mother-in-law, who is getting older and has some health issues, she uses her limited strength to constantly shop for us and pack us up with food to take home. We feel bad about her overextending herself on our behalf. Am I permitted to lie and tell her that there is no room in our refrigerator for her food? We would tell her that we recently made arrangements with the Shul to give us all of the leftover food that they have from Simchas held there. We have made no such arrangements of course, but knowing my mother-in-law, this is the only thing that would convince her to stop overexerting herself on our behalf.

Answer: The Gemorah says that regarding three matters, it is normal for sages to deviate from the truth. If he is asked whether he studied a particular tractate, he may humbly say that he did not, even if he did. If he is asked whether he slept in a particular bed, he may say that he did not, to avoid potential shame in case an unseemly residue is found on the bed that he slept in. And regarding his “Ushpiza” – his host, even if he was well received by his host, he may say that he was not, to prevent others from taking advantage of his host’s hospitality. (Bava Metziah 23b)

The Meiri explains lying regarding a host’s hospitality in the Gemorah above differently. He writes that the Gemorah means to say that if he is concerned that the host is extending himself too much to feed him, then he may lie to the host and say that he has already eaten – even if he has not.

The Titen Emes L’Yaakov Siman 120 cites this Meiri and it would seem that your situation is similar. It would appear that you would be allowed to lie to prevent your mother-in-law from overextending herself by shopping for you. If it is at all possible, it is “best practice” to figure out a way of convincing her without resorting to a lie.

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the fourth chapter of the Chofetz Chaim’s Sefas Tamim.

“And know further, that one who steals and robs his friend, it is not just that the ill-gotten money will ultimately be taken away from him, but each aspect of the pain he caused his friend will come back to him in the precise amount and extent that he had caused to his friend...”

We who have mortal eyes, if we see a poor person borrow 20 silver rubles from someone, and he traveled away from his home to find whatever livelihood that he could and transact some business as best he could just to survive, and while he was on the road a robber attacked him. This poor man begged the robber to leave him alone, but the murderer ignored his pleas and beat him severely and stole every last ruble from him. This poor man cried bitterly and could find no consolation and fainted on the road. Some men who are passing by and saw him lying in a field and with great effort and hard work, they revived him. This poor man then told them everything that happened to him. The men were astounded as to why Hashem would let something terrible like this happen to the poor man, and how he would now be able to return back to his home and support his family and little children.

But all of this is only from the perspective of mortal eyes, as we do not know what this poor man did up until now. But who can suspect the actions of the Holy One, blessed is He, that he would administer strict justice without good cause. Most likely, this poor man did the same thing to someone else, either in this lifetime, or in some previous reincarnation, and caused that other person to lose his money, and because of that endured suffering to the point where that other person could find no peace because of his worries. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed is He, paid back poverty to this poor man measure for measure.