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**On the Parsha**

Rav Shaul Brach ZT"l was the Av Beis Din (Head of the Halachic Court) of the city of Kosice in Slovakia. In his B'Heyos HaBoker he presents an enlightening interpretation of a Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (684).

The Midrash states that the nations of the world were jealous of Klal Yisroel [and complained to Hashem regarding His preferential treatment of them]. Hashem silenced them and said, "Bring to Me your documents of lineage... just as my children are bringing them!" As it says (BaMidbar 1:18) "And they assembled... and they declared their pedigrees according to their families according to their fathers' houses."

The Midrash continues to explain that [because Hashem was proud of their lineage], He immediately commanded that they be counted. This occurred right after the listing of all of the Mitzvos, as we see that Hashem commanded Moshe to count Bnei Yisrael at the very beginning of this week's Parsha which is placed right after the last Passuk of last week's Parsha, "These are the Mitzvos that Hashem commanded Moshe to the Bnei Yisroel at Har Sinai."

The census took place [at Hashem's command because He was proud of their lineage] right after the giving of the Mitzvos to teach you that Bnei Yisrael merited to receive the Torah because of their lineage.

Rav Brach's inspiring explanation is that the Medrash means to say that Hashem was proud of how Bnei Yisrael actually took the census and that is why they merited to receive the Torah. What made Hashem so proud?

It was Bnei Yisroel's penchant for honesty and truth that was revealed during the taking of the census that made Hashem so proud. We know that anyone twenty and older would receive a direct portion of land in Eretz Yisrael. Imagine for a moment, the temptation for someone who is close to twenty years old but not quite there yet, to report to Moshe that he is twenty years old, nonetheless. There were no birth certificates in the desert so who would know if one were to fudge his age a little. However, as tempting as it was, not one member

of Bnei Yisrael lied about their age. They were completely honest and that is why they merited to receive the Torah.

Rav Brach implies that it was this honesty at the last census taken, thirty-eight years later, which was taken before entering Eretz Yisrael, that may have provided them with the merit needed to inherit the land.

Bnei Yisrael was counted three times in the desert. It is interesting to note that the first two censuses took place within the first two years that Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, while the third census took place thirty-eight years later. Why was the second census taken so soon after the first census? According to Rav Brach, Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael's honesty at the first census and because of his great love for Bnei Yisrael, he wanted them to take another census soon after, so they could be honest again and increase their merits.

Rav Brach's explanation of the Midrash can also explain why Parshas Bamidbar is read before Shavuos. The Parsha highlights our honesty in the taking of the census which provided us with the merit we needed to receive the Torah which we celebrate on Shavuos.

**Halacha – Jewish Law**

**QUESTION:** My friend, Batsheva, told me that she is getting engaged tonight, but she told me not to tell anyone. My other friend, Michal, sensing that something might be happening with Batsheva, asked me whether Batsheva is getting engaged. Am I allowed to lie to Michal and say that Batsheva is not getting engaged? Should I say that I don't know?

**ANSWER:** Your question pits two fundamental prohibitions against each other - the prohibition not to lie versus the prohibition of not revealing a secret.

The Gemorah in Yoma (4b) tells us that R' Menasya Rabbah said: "From where do we derive that one who says something to his friend, that the friend is then in the category of 'Do not say' until his friend tells him that he may 'Go and say it?' [We see it from the following, as] the Passuk says, 'And Hashem spoke to him [Moshe]

from the Tent of Meeting **to say...**" From the words, "to say" we learn that Moshe was only permitted to relate to Bnei Yisrael what Hashem had told him when he was given specific permission "to say" it to them. When no specific permission was given, Moshe was to assume that it may not be said.

Rav Elyashiv ZT"l and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT"l have both ruled that in such a situation one should rather say, "I don't know if she is getting engaged." (Titen Emes L'Yaakov Teshuva #26). Rav Shlomo Zalman cites the Gemorah in Brachos (4a) which states, "Teach your tongue to say, 'I don't know.'"

One may ask, "But isn't saying, 'I don't know' a lie as well?" The Ahavas Yisroel in Likuttim 43 asks this very question and understands the Gemorah in Brachos differently. According to the Ahavas Yisroel, the Gemorah is not saying that you should say, "I don't know" when you do know. Rather, it is saying that one should be accustomed to saying I don't know to things when it is not a lie to do so. Doing this enough times, will make one a poor conversationalist and will prevent one from being approached and drawn into predicaments like the one above.

Another suggestion is that one can respond with, "I wouldn't be surprised if she is getting engaged, she is a fine young woman. Why, have you heard anything?"

### Chizuk - Inspiration

The Academy of Management Annals In-Press recently published an article by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University about honesty not just being about avoiding lies, but that it also encompasses avoiding other deviations from the truth that have serious interpersonal, organizational and societal costs. The researchers based their work on a systematic review of 169 empirical research articles in the fields of management, organizational behavior, applied psychology, and business ethics. Although each article was different than the next, the researchers were able to identify four different components of honesty that the articles discussed. Based on these components, the researchers developed a new framework for honesty that incorporated each of the components:

1) Communicators of information must form accurate beliefs about that information based upon a process of

honest evaluation, search, and incorporation of anything new. They called this, "intellectual honesty."

2) The communicators must share their beliefs truthfully without lying. They called this, "honest content."

3) The communicators must ensure that they provide sufficient disclosure without leaving out any relevant information. They termed this, "honest disclosure."

4) The communicators must do all of this in a way that allows listeners to form an accurate understanding of the message. They termed this, "honest delivery."

The authors of the study also outlined both the antecedents and the consequences of each of the failures of the four facets of honest behavior referenced above, and how devastating the repercussions of failures in each of these four areas could be. It is encouraging that even the secular world is beginning to study and sensitize itself to the importance of honesty.

For reference purposes, the authors of the above referenced study (published in 2021) are: Binyamin Cooper, Taya R. Cohen, Elizabeth L. Huppert, Emma E. Levine and William Fleeson.

### Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the fifth chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sefas Tamim.

"The second reason that brings one to theft is a lack of knowledge of the law. People believe their actions do not constitute theft and that theft occurs only when someone actually takes something out of the pocket of his friend or snatches an item out of his possession - that is what constitutes, "theft".

But that is not true! When someone takes anything belonging to his friend in any way that is secretive, that is called theft. Similarly, theft includes someone who uses an object left with him for safekeeping; or uses a pledged security; or borrows an object from his friend without telling him; or delays repaying his wages; or collects a debt from his friend in excess of what was loaned to him. That excess could be in the form of money or some other favor, [as long as the] value is [at least] a Perutah (i.e. a few pennies). The general rule to follow is that anything belonging to others that remains in one's possessions illegally, even if it is worth only a Perutah is included in the prohibition of stealing."