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On the Parsha

Rav Yaakov Bistriz ZT"l, was the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Gedolah of Montreal, and a student of both the Telze Yeshiva and of the Lakewood Yeshiva. In this week's Parsha, he poses a question about the Sotah. A Sotah is a married woman who was warned not to seclude herself with a certain man with whom there is suspicion that she may be having an inappropriate relationship. If she does not heed the warning and secludes herself with this individual and is then accused of infidelity, she has the right to prove her innocence. She drinks the "Waters of the Sotah" which is provided to her by the Kohein. If she is guilty of the sordid behavior, then the waters poison her and she dies. If she is innocent, however, then she receives a special blessing.

Rav Bistriz begins his question by citing the words of Chazal (Berachos 63a) "Rebbe asks: 'Why is it that the section of the Torah that deals with Nazir is found immediately after the section of the Torah that deals with Sotah?'

He answers that it is to tell us: 'Whoever sees the Sotah in her state of disrepair should take it upon himself to abstain from wine.'"

In his Sichos Rabbi Yaakov (page 214), Rav Bistriz understands this Chazal on two levels. On a basic level, he cites the well-known Ramban (in his letter to his sons) that "one must take decisive action whenever one has a good thought [to better oneself] – to make a change that is both tangible and real. If it remains as a just a thought to improve, it will not be effective [and no improvement will be made]." That is why, if one sees a Sotah suffering the unfortunate consequences of her actions, and is inspired to change one's ways, one must take decisive action like vowing to abstain from wine.

On a second level, however, Rav Bistriz explains the Chazal to mean that we must all explore the inner thought processes of a Sotah. Why would the Sotah want to drink the waters when she knows that she is

guilty? Isn't she aware that the waters will poison her and cause her to die?

The answer is that the Sotah deceives herself and believes that she will not be punished. For example, she may rationalize that her infidelity was justified for one reason or another and therefore she is not really guilty. She thinks to herself, "There are other Sotahs that will be punished for their actions, but not me."

But she will be punished, and we should all realize that we have these same tendencies to delude ourselves into thinking that we will not bear the consequences of our actions.

Why do we deceive ourselves? It is often because we desire something that is off-limits to us and so we rationalize ways to get what we want.

And that is the second understanding of the words of Chazal above. Chazal are offering a remedy of sorts to one who is prone to self-deception. The Sotah suffering her consequences represents self-deception and wine represents desire. Accordingly, whoever is prone to self-deception (sees the Sotah in her state of disrepair) should remedy the situation, by removing the cause of the self-deception which is working on curbing his or her desire (abstain from drinking wine).

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I work in a very popular pizza place. Every so often, when I get a phone call for an order, the customer asks me how long a wait it will be before his or her order is filled. I ask the cooks and they typically tell me that it will take a little more than an hour. The owner then tells me, "Tell the customer it will take 30 minutes. If you say it will take longer than that, the customer will hang up and order elsewhere." What should I do? If I ignore my boss and tell the customer the truth, I will probably be fired, but on the other hand I do not want to lie.

ANSWER: We posed your question to HaGaon HaRav Shaya Kanievsky Shlita, the son of Rav Chaim Kanievsky ZT"l. He responded that it is "Barrur"- quite

clear, that it is forbidden for the worker to lie. If the worker fears that his or her job is at stake, the answer could be, "The wait will be more than a half hour."

When we pressed further and asked, "What if the customer asks, 'how much more?'" Rav Kanievsky answered, "One may answer, 'It is hard to say...'"

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin ZT"l (1818–1898) was a leading Rav of the Torah community in Eretz Yisrael. Prior to moving to Eretz Yisrael in 1878, he served as the Rav in Łomża, Mezritch, Kovno, Shklov, Brisk, and finally, Yerushalayim. When he was a Rav in Brisk, his enemies falsely accused him of engaging in illegal activities against the Tsar of Russia. The case went to trial and a non-observant Jewish lawyer was appointed to represent Rav Diskin.

At the trial, Rav Diskin explained to the court that the allegations against him were false and fabricated to discredit him because of his efforts to uphold the strict standards of Jewish law. After Rav Diskin pleaded his case, the court proceeded to hear the evidence against him. During the course of the trial, it became apparent that Rav Diskin would not look at his own lawyer who represented him. Taking notice of the odd behavior, the judge inquired about Rav Diskin's behavior and was told that Rav Diskin disapproved of the lawyer's rejection of the traditions of Judaism and therefore did not want to look at him.

The judge was duly impressed. The lawyer was there to protect Rav Diskin when his very future and freedom hung in the balance. And yet, because of the integrity of his convictions to Judaism, he would not look at the very person who was appointed to protect him. Ultimately, the judge said that there is no way that a person with Rav Diskin's integrity and strength of conviction, even at the risk of his own freedom, could be lying. He dismissed the charges against him and Rav Diskin was exonerated.

Mussar – Introspection

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

"Regarding overcharging in business transactions, even though the buyer pays him willingly, there is yet another explicit prohibition that he is violating, namely (VaYikra 25:17) 'Do not oppress your fellow Jew.' And because of our many sins, many people have completely forgotten the prohibition of "oppression" and someone who is engaged in this is lauded as a hardworking, sharp businessman.

This is the general rule on how to define overcharging. One may not qualitatively ascribe to his merchandise any more praise or any more value than it is actually worth. Nor may one say that he bought it for such and such a price, or that people have paid him such and such a price for it, if that is not true. It goes without saying that it is forbidden to make merchandise appear of a higher quality than it really is, or to mix bad merchandise with good merchandise so that the good merchandise is on top in plain sight, while under it and out of sight, is the bad merchandise. Furthermore, it goes without saying that it is forbidden to fraudulently represent weights, measurements, or volumes because Hashem calls that "hateful", "detestable" and "abominable". Regarding this, Chazal have taught (Bava Basra 88b) that the punishment for using fraudulent measurements is more severe than the punishment for engaging in illicit relations. This is true, because for every moment that a man retains in his possession a standard weight or measurement that is deficient or excessive, he is in violation of an absolute prohibition as Chazal have taught (Bava Basra 89b) 'It is forbidden to retain a measurement that is deficient or excessive.' Even while this person is asleep, the sin continues to accumulate which is unlike any other prohibition of the Torah and with absolute certainty this person will not be successful. In the end, he will be reviled and despised as an evil person in this world and that is apart from the punishment that is held in store for him in the World to Come. It is commonly known that when a person passes on, his judgment will begin with the question, 'Were you honest in your business dealings?' (Shabbos 31a)"