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On the Parsha

“These are the words that Moshe addressed to all of Israel on the other side of the Jordan; through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab.” (Devarim 1:1)

Rashi in this week’s Parsha tells us that the “words” that were addressed to Bnei Yisrael in the above referenced Possuk, were meant to be words of rebuke and that the places that Moshe referenced in the second half of the Possuk were a listing of every location at which Bnei Yisrael sinned and angered Hashem. By listing these locations, Moshe hoped to rebuke Bnei Yisrael for their sins, by hinting at them and reminding them where they were committed. Moshe only hinted at their misdeeds as opposed to naming them directly, because he felt that it would have been overly harsh and not in-keeping with the K’vodam Shel Yisrael (the honor and dignity of Bnei Yisrael).

However, words of rebuke are supposed to correct a mistaken perspective that the sinner harbors or expose a self-deception that led to the sin. To accomplish this tall order, hinting may not be sufficient. Moshe may have been better served by telling Bnei Yisrael directly what they had done wrong.

It appears that telling them directly of their misdeeds may also not have worked – it may have been perceived as too harsh and overly critical, a scathing criticism that Bnei Yisrael would not have accepted.

However, while it is true that here in the beginning of this week’s Parsha, the misdeeds of Bnei Yisrael were only hinted at, later on in Sefer Devarim, Moshe does tell Bnei Yisrael of their misdeeds directly (for example, see Devarim 9:21 for Moshe’s rebuke of Bnei Yisrael’s sin of the golden calf). According to the above, Moshe should have been concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not have accepted his rebuke?

The Sifsei Chachomim provides us with two answers. The first answer is that Moshe was

concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not accept his rebuke in a case where all of Bnei Yisrael’s misdeeds were to be mentioned together as Moshe felt he needed to do in the beginning of this week’s Parsha – that would have been too much for them to bear and would have overwhelmed them. However, Moshe felt that they would accept his words of rebuke if they were mentioned individually, over a period of time, which is why Moshe felt that he could tell them their misdeeds directly if it was done over a period of time throughout the course of Sefer Devarim. The second answer given by the Sifsei Chachomim is that Sefer Devarim is looked upon as a new beginning - a beginning of Moshe’s farewell to Bnei Yisrael before he died. Moshe felt that providing rebuke directly to Bnei Yisrael at this new and sensitive time would have been too much for them and they would not have accepted his rebuke. It would be akin to children on the first day of school being scolded by their new teacher before their first lesson has even started.

We see from the thoughts above that when trying to influence others to see the error of their ways, we must make sure that we maintain that person’s self-esteem, honor and dignity. Overwhelming the person with too many criticisms is too much of an indictment against the person and may go unheard. Also, when we begin a new relationship with someone, we need to build that relationship first before we can provide meaningful rebuke.

A final thought. Just like there was a possibility that Moshe could have provided rebuke that was not listened to if he was not careful to use hints and not overwhelm Bnei Yisrael, so too we should be careful when we rebuke ourselves. Working on being truthful people means being concerned about our own self-deceptions that lead us to sin. However, we must realize that when we try to correct ourselves – we should not be overly critical and overwhelm ourselves. This can lead us to ignoring our own criticism or alternatively lead us to being too hard on ourselves. The Alter of Slabodka sometimes advocated the taking of “baby steps” which meant

providing gentle criticism and the implementation of a slow, incremental approach to correcting a character flaw. He took this approach with students that he felt were susceptible to excessive self-criticism.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: We are planning a vacation and will be travelling abroad. Where we are going, there is not much Kosher food available, so we are planning on packing Kosher food in our suitcases and taking it with us. People have warned us that at the airport, customs officials often take away food that is packed in suitcases – and sometimes, even food that the law of the country states is completely permitted to enter the country. Can you give us some guidance regarding the prohibition of Gnaivas Daas (deception) and / or other relevant Halachic issues as to what we may or may not say, in case we are questioned or stopped at the airport and asked about the Kosher food in our suitcases?

ANSWER: It seems that there are three categories of foods in this particular case:

Category One are foods that are clearly forbidden by the law of the land to enter the country. Category Two are foods where the law is unclear as to whether they may enter the country. Category Three are foods that the law permits to enter the country.

With that in mind, let us explore each of the categories. It is forbidden to bring in Category One foods because of Dinei D'malchusa Dina – the law of the land is the law (See Choshain Mishpat 369:8). Regarding Category Two or Three foods, when you pack your suitcases, it is permitted to split the food up and place them throughout your carry-on items and or packed suitcases in order to avoid detection. Should the customs agents end up discovering some of your food and confiscate it, at least you will still have some food in other pieces of your luggage. However, it is forbidden to lie, even in regards to Category Three foods (where your food is at risk of being confiscated illegitimately). If you are stopped by the custom agents, you must answer their questions truthfully or you have violated the prohibition of Genaivas Daas.

It does not matter whether the custom agents are Jews or Gentiles. The Rambam writes quite clearly in his Peirush HaMishnayos (Kailim 12:7) that Gnaivas Daas is forbidden even to Gentiles – especially if it is combined with Chillul Hashem. The concept that Chillul Hashem only applies to other Jews is entirely incorrect. We see from the SMAg (Lavin #2) that the prohibition of (Vayikra 22:32) “Lo Sechalelu Es Shaim Kodshi” – Do not sully My Holy Name, applies to Gentiles as well. It causes Gentiles to say, “the Jews have no Torah.” It negates the Passuk in Tzefania (3:13), “The remnant of Israel shall neither commit injustice nor speak lies; neither shall deceitful speech be found in their mouth...” See also the SMAg in Assai #74.

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 the following plan. He told the next religious Jew that he saw getting gas, 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 religious Jew felt badly for the attendant and felt a responsibility that one of his co-religionists may have purposefully or accidentally defrauded the attendant by not paying for his 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 Bnei Yisroel, and how responsible each member of Bnei Yisrael feels for another, in rectifying a potential Chillul Hashem that was thought to have been caused by someone else's intentional, or even unintentional dishonesty.