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Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

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On the Parsha

“And Yeshurun grew fat and rebelled; You grew fat (שָׁמַן), thick (כָּבֵד) and gross (רָשָׁע). The nation forsook the G-d who made them and spurned the Rock of their support. (Devarim 32:15).

The word “כָּבֵד” is translated above as “thick.” However, the Talmud Yerushalmi, the Targum Unkeles, and the Targum Yonasan all translate this word differently. They translate the word to mean “acquired possessions” and comment that the Torah is discussing the acquisition of numerous and expensive possessions.

Accordingly, the verse above implies that acquiring possessions of this nature is a sin. The question arises, however, that this is not a sin!

Rav Henoch Liebowitz ZT”L, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim, explained that the Torah is not telling us that acquiring possessions is a sin. However, it is telling us that it can cause us to rebel against Hashem as it did for Bnei Yisrael, as explained in the verse above. Apparently, the acquisition of significant possessions is a factor in preventing us from seeing the truth and our mission in life which is to serve Hashem and glorify His Name. Not only that, but it can even cause us to rebel against Him (Heaven forbid).

There are different ways that acquiring possessions and amassing wealth can blind one to certain truths. One way that wealth can be used to blind one to the truth, is that one can use their wealth to amass fortune and fame and build an empire. One does so with the goal of creating an everlasting legacy and to be remembered long after one has passed away. However, the truth is, that no matter what one does with the wealth one has acquired, one is ultimately forgotten after one passes away.

We find this idea in the Seforno’s comments on Tehillim 49:10-12. The verses state, “Will he live yet forever and not see the Pit? For he sees that wise men die, together a fool and a boorish man perish, and leave over their possessions to others. In their heart, their houses are forever, their dwellings are for every generation; they call by their names on plots of land. Their grave is their eternal home, the dwelling place for all generations of those once famous on earth.”

The Seforno explains that man, in his nature, desires and yearns for an everlasting life or legacy. This desire should cause him to seek Dveikus b’Hashem (clinging to Hashem) and to fulfill His Mitzvos to earn true, everlasting life. However, some individuals go in a different direction and tragically seek to establish an everlasting legacy through their possessions. They think that if they acquire enough possessions or name their buildings or their progeny after themselves, that they will be immortal. However, sooner or later, they will be forgotten with time.

We find regarding Pharaoh and Nevuchadnetzer, that the possessions that they acquired blinded them to the truth. In Shemos (10:1), Rabbeinu Bachya points out that all of the references to Pharaoh’s magnificent dwelling and palaces are the key to understanding how Pharaoh was blinded and could not see the truth. The same is true with Nevuchadnetzar, who stated in Daniel 4:27, “There is great Babylon, which I have built by my vast power to be a royal residence for the glory of my majesty!”

We are not Pharaoh of course, and our wealth will likely not blind us to the extent that it did for Pharaoh. However, we are still at risk. If we are not careful, our wealth can blind us to the true reason we are put in this world - to serve Hashem and glorify His Name.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I recently read of a Rabbi who had a couple that came to him to request that he officiate at their wedding. The bride advised that she had been previously married and claimed that she received a Kosher Get (bill of divorce) and was therefore eligible to remarry. The Rabbi had reason to doubt the truthfulness of her claim and did not wish to perform the marriage because of his suspicions. He tested the woman by falsely stating, “As you know, at the wedding ceremony, the custom is that the bride circles the groom seven times. At the divorce ceremony, the wife circles the husband seven times in the opposite direction that she traveled during her wedding ceremony, and in such a manner ‘undoes’ her marriage. Then, the Get is given. A variant custom is to make the wife circle the husband two times. Which custom did the Rabbi who officiated at your divorce insist that you do?” The woman answered, “It was definitely the full seven times.” The Rabbi then asked if she was certain, and she responded that she was.

He then revealed the truth to her - there is no custom at a divorce ceremony to circle the husband. Realizing that she had been caught in a lie, she admitted that she never received a Get.

Was the Rabbi permitted to resort to these deceptive tactics? Doesn't this give the impression that it is acceptable to lie?

ANSWER: Although technically it is permitted to lie to ensure that serious prohibitions are not violated, there is a fascinating statement made by the Ohr Yitzchok, authored by Rabbi Yitzchok of Radvil ZT”L. He writes that in situations where one may lie for a Mitzvah (e.g. in your case to prevent a serious transgression), one receives much greater reward if the goal can be achieved without resorting to Sheker (falsehood). Therefore, if it would be possible to ask the woman a series of questions designed to uncover the truth without lying to her, e.g., asking her a multiple choice

question like, “How many times did the Rabbi direct you to circle your husband at the divorce ceremony? a) 7 times, b) 2 times, c) 0 times” that would be preferable as there is no lie in such a case.

In any event, what the Rabbi did was proper as he lied to the woman in order to prevent a serious transgression.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky ZT”L,

whose Shiurim (Torah classes) on the Talmud have been studied and admired throughout the Yeshiva world, would often visit an empty beach in Israel in order to admire its beauty and appreciate Hashem’s creation.

Rav Shmuel’s dedication to Emes was legendary. He would constantly review his Shiurim to ensure that every insight that he said was the truth and had no elements in them that even remotely could be construed as a falsehood.

Rav Shmuel’s dedication to Emes in his everyday life was equally legendary. There was one occasion where a student drove him to the beach (to admire Hashem’s creation) and the student was stopped by a security guard who asked that they park in a certain location and walk the rest of the way to the beach. The student who drove him stated that Rav Shmuel was the Chief Rabbi and out of respect for the Rabbi, should be allowed to park closer to the beach. Rav Shmuel gently scolded the student that he was not the Chief Rabbi. The student responded that he was the Chief Rabbi of the Yeshiva. Rav Rozovsky kindly responded that it was still considered a lack of truth if the security guard was not aware of his intent and can readily misinterpret it. He asked his student to park as directed by the security guard and to walk with him the rest of the way to the beach.