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On the Parsha

The Midrash in this week's Parsha (Bereishis Rabbah 38:11) tells us of the confrontation between Avrohom Avinu and Nimrod, and Avrohom's remarkable Mesiras Nefesh (self-sacrifice) as a young child.

"Nimrod said to him, 'Let us worship fire!' Avrohom responded to him, 'Should we not then worship water, which extinguishes fire!' Nimrod said, 'Then let us worship water!' Avrohom responded, 'Should we not then worship clouds, which carry the water?' Nimrod said, 'Then let us worship clouds!' Avrohom responded, 'If so, should we not then worship wind, which scatters the clouds?' Nimrod said, 'Then, let us worship wind!' Avrohom responded, 'Should we not then worship human beings, who withstand the wind?' Nimrod said to him, 'You are merely piling words (making fun of me); we should bow to none other than the fire. I shall therefore cast you into it (as a sacrifice) and let Hashem to whom you bow, come and save you from it!'"

Avroham made a great Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of Hashem's name) by challenging Nimrod and poking fun at his idol worship and Hashem performed a miracle to save him. This would seemingly be an incident that warrants mentioning in the Torah. Yet this entire incident is conspicuously absent. Why was it omitted?

The Gemorah in Sanhedrin 74B states that a Ben-Noach (a gentile) is not commanded in the Mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem. Indeed, a Ben-Noach may not put his life at risk, as this is considered a form of taking one's own life. At this point in time, Avrohom was considered a Ben-Noach. Risking his life by challenging Nimrod and poking fun at his idol worship to perform a Kiddush Hashem was not warranted and was considered sinful on some level. Therefore, this incident was not mentioned in the Torah.

A second question can be asked as follows. The Midrash tells us (Bereishis Rabbah 63:2) that Hashem saved Avrohom due to the future merit of Yaakov Avinu! How could this be as Yaakov was not born yet? How could the merit of his grandchild help him now?

Perhaps we can suggest that Avrohom believed wholeheartedly in the Emes (truth) of Hashem's existence and running of the world. His knowledge of Hashem was based upon the Middah (personality trait) that he had to recognize Emes. Rav Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov ZT"l (1783–1841) in his Igra D'Kallah (p. 158) explains that Avrohom bequeathed the Middah of Emes to his grandson Yaakov. Yaakov then perfected this Middah to the highest level humanly possible. Since Avrohom bequeathed the Middah of Emes to Yaakov which helped enable him to perfect it, the merit of Yaakov was imputed to Avrohom. It was this merit that saved Avrohom. We see from here the sheer power of Emes and its power of salvation.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION:

There are a number of anti-Semites on Facebook who are using the social media outlet to support Hamas and its horrific, murderous acts in recent weeks. There is something called "Tagging" on Facebook. Through this process and the application of certain Facebook settings, it is possible for me to anonymously photoshop a picture of an Israeli flag onto an antisemite who is supporting Hamas, "Tag" his name and place the heading on him, "I love Israel." By doing so, anyone who searches his name on Facebook will be greeted with the image that I photoshopped. This will discourage him and others like him from further posting things that support Hamas. Am I permitted to engage in this ruse?

ANSWER: To every question there is a theoretical aspect as well as a practical aspect. From a theoretical perspective, there is nothing more important than saving the lives of others which you may be doing by discouraging support for this terrorist entity. This is a huge Mitzvah and you would be permitted to engage in this ruse. From a practical perspective, however, the act might infuriate the antisemite further and he could use this as propaganda to further his aims – pointing out the "dishonesty" of Jews which could further his resolve to support Hamas. This has to be carefully weighed by those who are more familiar with the possible and practical

repercussions of your actions. If one is uncertain how to proceed, there is a principle in Halacha called “Shev V’al Ta’aseh” – (due to uncertainty), sit and do not take action.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Eliezer Menachem Man Shach ZT”L would relate the careful adherence of Rav Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik ZT”L to the Middah of Emes (Sichos Rab Shach p. 160).

It was 1863. At long last, Rav Yosef Dov had completed his responsa entitled the “Bais HaLevi”, which would facilitate the establishment of what would be known as the Brisker Dynasty. However, as it was about to be published, Rav Yosef Dov remembered that he had made a commitment to himself, that the very first Sefer (book) that he would publish would be published anonymously.

The Gemorah (Makkos 24A) tells us of the lofty level of Emes that Rav Safra achieved - that of speaking truth in one’s heart. Once a buyer had offered a certain price for Rav Safra’s merchandise. In his heart, Rav Safra agreed to accept the price, but was unable to answer the buyer as he was reciting the Shema prayer when one is not allowed to talk. The seller took Rav Safra’s silence as a rejection of his offer and kept offering higher and higher prices to purchase the merchandise. However, when Safra completed his prayer and was able to answer, he insisted on taking the price that was first offered to him as that was the price that he had agreed to initially in his heart.

Similarly, Rav Yosef Dov had agreed in his heart that his first work would be published anonymously, and he felt strongly that this commitment needed to be honored. Fearful that publishing the Bais HaLevi anonymously would hurt its credibility, Rav Soloveitchik spent the extra time and money to work on another Sefer and publish it anonymously to honor the commitment he made to himself. Only then would he permit himself to publish the Bais HaLevi which bared his name.

Mussar – Introspection

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

“There are many levels of lying and we will explain some of them here as follows.

There are those who will lie about something they heard and will intentionally change some of the words without gaining any benefit by lying and he is not causing loss to others but that is his nature. He loves lying more than speaking righteously, Selah.

On occasion, he will create a complete fictional story to encourage conversation between people or in order that he should be thought of as wise or as one who is very knowledgeable. This man, even though there will be no loss to anyone because of his lies or foolishness, nevertheless, his punishment will be very severe given his brazen contempt of the sin and his love of lying. His sin is even more profound because he loves it for no gainful reason. Regarding these people, the text says (Mishlei 12:22), ‘Lips that lie are despised by Hashem.’ Further it says (Yeshaya 59:3), ‘Their lips speak lies, their tongues utter wickedness.’ Chazal have since decreed what will happen to them (Gemara Sotah 42A), ‘Four groups of people will never merit to receive the presence of the Shechinah,’ and one of those groups of people is the group of liars.

There are yet other people who are closely related to these people in status, but are not precisely like them. Meaning that one can find lies mingled within their stories and conversations, but they do it unintentionally because they don’t pay attention to what they’re hearing, to investigate and determine exactly what happened and the prohibition of lying is not so important to them that they would take care not to add any lies to what they are repeating. Thus, when they do come to relate or repeat what they have heard they will intersperse some lies as befitting the conversation. This too is a bad character trait because these people become habituated to lying as time passes by to the point where lying becomes second nature to them. These are the liars, the people about whom it is impossible to believe anything they say. Chazal have expressed this as ‘the punishment of liars, that even if they speak the truth, no one will believe them.’ All of this is because this evil trait is rooted in their personalities, and they are not able to utter anything clean because of the lies that are in their mouths. This is what the prophet laments (Yirmiyah 9:4), ‘They have taught their tongues to speak lies.’”