

Volume IV Issue 10

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Parshas Mikeitz, 4 Teiveis, 5784

December 16, 2023

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On the Parsha

“And he [Yosef] turned away from them [the brothers] and wept, then returned to them and spoke to them; and he took Shimon from among them and imprisoned him before their eyes.” (Bereishis 42:24)

There is a fascinating Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma in Vayigash 4) that captures the conversation between Shimon and his brothers at the moment that Yosef, disguised as the Viceroy of Egypt, took Shimon away and imprisoned him. When seeing that his brothers had agreed to the demand of Yosef to imprison him, Shimon immediately said, “What you did to Yosef, is the same thing that you wish to do to me now!” The brothers responded, “What should we do? Our entire household will starve to death [from the famine, as we will not be permitted to buy food from him if we do not acquiesce to his demands]!”

The comparison that Shimon made to Yosef is that just like the brothers are acting upon feelings of hostility and ill-will towards him now by giving him up to Yosef, so they had done to Yosef when they threw him into the pit and sold him into slavery because of the hostility and ill-will they harbored towards him.

Shimon’s reaction is very puzzling. Shimon knew what had just transpired. He knew that the brothers’ hands were indeed tied, and that Yosef would refuse to sell them food unless the brothers allowed Yosef to take him as a captive. Nonetheless, Shimon still suspected them of these ulterior motives.

That being the case, how did the brothers’ response allay his concerns? All they said was that they had no choice but to acquiesce to Yosef’s demands or else they would not be sold any food and they would starve. Shimon knew that already and yet somehow,

when the brothers stated was plain for Shimon to see, his concerns were alleviated.

The answer is that it appears that the brothers were able to convince Shimon of the purity of their motives, not by the information contained in their response, but rather by the earnestness and the sincerity contained within their words. It was not “what” they said, but “how” they said it.

We see from here, the power of sincerity and its ability to change a person’s perceptions about the motivations of someone whom he had previously suspected.

However, we all know too well that many dishonest people have the ability to trick others into believing that they are sincere. Shimon was not naïve and knew this as well. Why did he not suspect them of faking their sincerity?

The answer is that he was convinced of their sincerity because they had a track record of sincerity. For example, when discussing the brothers’ aversion to Yosef, the Torah tells us (Bereishis 37:4), “They [the brothers] could not speak to him [Yosef] peacefully.” Rashi comments that from the negative, we see the positive – since they sincerely disliked Yosef, they could not fake it and pretend that they liked him and that is why, “They could not speak to him peacefully.”

As we see from the above, it is important to realize the power of sincerity and how it has the ability to allay concerns and to persuade people to see things our way – as the brothers’ sincerity did with Shimon above. We also see the importance of having a track record of honesty and sincerity – a good reputation. If it was not for the brothers’ reputation of honesty,

Shimon would not have believed in their sincerity. As King Solomon has said “Tov Shem MiShemen Tov” – a good name is far better than good oil. (Koheles 7:1)

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Since I have a hectic work schedule, it is not easy for me to visit the hospital during visiting hours when the hospital permits outsiders to visit the sick, so I rarely have the opportunity to perform the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick). However, I recently discovered that I can enter the hospital after visiting hours if I disguise myself as the hospital building contractor – usually, all it takes is for me to carry a clipboard and wear a helmet and I can come and go as I please. Am I permitted to disguise myself in this manner to perform the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim?

ANSWER: The same question was posed to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT”L, as cited in Titain Emes L’Yaakov Siman 130 p. 185 (albeit with a nurse’s uniform instead of a contractor’s uniform). Rav Shlomo Zalman responded that if the hospital is very stringent about visits to the hospital at particular times outside of visiting hours, for example, when the doctors make their rounds in the mornings, it is certainly forbidden. He continued to explain that during other times outside of visiting hours, where the hospital “may look the other way” it is still inappropriate for Bnei Torah (upstanding, Torah Jews) to behave in this way.

We must also keep in mind the notion of “Mitzvah HaBa’ah B’Aveirah” – a Mitzvah that is performed through an action that is sinful. In your case, you have disguised yourself in order to deceive the hospital into thinking that you are entitled to be there outside of visiting hours which is the sin of Gneivas Da’as (deception) to accomplish the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim. This would not be permitted in this circumstance even if the Mitzvah and the sin were on equal footing.

It is interesting to note that they are not on equal footing, as most Poskim (Halachic authorities) rule

that Geneivas Da’as is a Torah prohibition while most Poskim rule that Bikur Cholim is not a Torah Mitzvah (MiDoraisa) but is of Rabbinic origin (MiDerabanan). It also bears mentioning that Rav Vozner ZT”L in his Shaivet HaLevi Vol. V responsa #184 writes that most Bikur Cholim that is performed these days would likely not qualify as Bikur Cholim. As intended, Bikur Cholim requires not just a visit to the sick, but caring for the sick during the visit e.g., helping them bathe, cleaning their room, etc.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky ZT”L had Arichas Yamim (the merit to live a long life) – he was ninety-five years old when he died. When he turned ninety, he began wearing Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin in addition to the standard Rashi Tefillin. Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin have the Parshiyos (Torah inscriptions) placed in a different order within the Tefillin compartments. Wearing these Tefillin is a Chassidic Minhag (custom). Rav Yaakov was Litvish, so this was not his custom or that of his father. When he was asked why he started wearing Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin at such an advanced age he explained the following.

“Many years ago, I was asked, ‘Why don’t you wear Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin?’ I answered, ‘I don’t wear Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin because it is not my Minhag to do so.’ He was pressed further ‘But the great Chofetz Chaim [who like you, was also Litvish], toward the end of his life, started wearing Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin!’ I said, ‘When I get to be the Chofetz Chaim’s age, I too will wear Rabbeinu Tam’s Tefillin. When I reached the Chofetz Chaim’s age, I did not wish to lie and so I began to wear them.’”

It is inspiring to see how careful Rav Yaakov was to keep his word. Wearing these Tefillin was not his Minhag, and the commitment that he made was as a much younger man. Nevertheless, for Rav Yaakov, his word was his word and when the time came (likely 50 or 60 years after he made his commitment), he felt that he had no other choice but to keep it.