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## On the Parsha

The Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1906), author of the Sfas Emes lived and led his Chassidus in Tsarist Russia which was a very difficult time for the Jewish people.

The Jews of Tsarist Russia endured horrible mistreatment under Tsar Nicolai the First. In 1827, through the issue of "The Cantonist Decree", he tried to convert young Jewish children by forcibly placing them on a path to become Russian soldiers where the chances of remaining Frum (observantly Jewish) were perilously thin. This was done in part, by kidnappers who would kidnap young Jewish children. These kidnappers who were called "Chappers", would forcibly take the children from their homes and induct them into training camps to prepare them for army service so that at the age of 18 they could begin their 25-year service in the Russian army.

Fortunately, after the rule of Nicolai the First, there was a bit of a reprieve. The next Tsar, Alexander the Second, came to power in 1855 and was friendlier to the Jews. He undid the Cantonist Decree and the Jews breathed a sigh of relief. The harsh regime and rule of Tsarist Russia subsided. However, the reprieve was short-lived – Alexander the Second was assassinated in 1881. The next Tsar, Alexander the Third was a despot. He hated Jews and unleashed a notorious era of cruelty and antisemitism.

The despairing Chassidim of the Sefas Emes who lived during this era looked to him for guidance and inspiration. In Parshas Vayigash of 1884, the Sfas Emes inspired his Chassidim with the following. He explained one of the Pasukim in this week's Parsha (Bereishis 46:4) "And I[Hashem] shall go down with you[Yaakov Avinu] to Egypt" in the following manner.

This Pasuk is not only a commitment to Yaakov, that Hashem will be with him in the exile of Egypt, but also a promise that Hashem will be with the Jewish people in future exiles – even in our own time. It is connected

to the Pasuk in Tehillim (91:15), "And I shall be with him in sorrow." This is what is elaborated in the Gemorah (Megillah 29a): "When they were exiled to Egypt and to Bavel, the Shechina [Hashem] was with them."

However, the Sefas Emes continues, this is a conditional promise. To merit Hashem joining us in exile, we need to be like the Yaakov who Hashem accompanied for that first exile to Egypt – which means that we need to grab hold of Yaakov's quintessential Middah of Emes (truth). If we do so, then Hashem will dwell among Israel, even in the exile. The meaning of the Possuk above "And I[Hashem] shall go down with you[Yaakov] to Egypt" is "I shall go down with you, *because of you (for those who are like you)*, to Egypt."

The Shevatim selling Yosef as a slave ultimately caused Yosef to go down to Egypt. Yosef caused Yaakov to go to Egypt. And when Yaakov went down to Egypt, Hashem went down with him.

Hashem is telling Yaakov and the Jewish people that by grabbing hold of Yaakov's Middah of Emes by always being truthful, Hashem will remain with them in Egypt and in future exiles.

(Author's note: It is quite clear that the Sefas Emes means to apply this message to the Tsarist Russia exile that he and his Chassidim were currently facing. He was telling them that if they grabbed hold of Yaakov's Middah of Emes, Hashem would be with them and protect them from the Tsar.)

The Sefas Emes continues, do not be mistaken and think that always being truthful is too difficult for us to obtain.

The fact is that within the nation of Israel, the essence and root of Yaakov – to always be truthful, is constantly with us as Chazal have said in a Midrash, "the face of Yaakov Avinu is etched onto the Kisei HaKavod [Hashem's throne], therefore, any place that he [Yaakov] went down to, the Shechina went with him as

well.” The metaphorical meaning of the face of Yaakov being etched onto the Kisei HaKavod is that Hashem will always be with us when we exhibit the trait bequeathed to us by Yaakov. This is the trait of Emes as it states in Micha (7:20), “You shall give the truth of Yaakov, the loving-kindness of Avraham, which You swore to our forefathers from days of yore” – which refers to the signet ring of Hashem.

Therefore, by grabbing hold of the trait of Emes – we can receive a Chiyus (a life-sustaining injection of strength and fortitude) in this exile as well.

### Chizuk - Inspiration

A Kollel student of a certain Yeshiva approached his Rosh Yeshiva and informed him that he could no longer afford to be learning in Kollel and that he feels the time has arrived to accept a position in the working world. The Rosh Yeshiva perceived a sense of sadness in the Kollel man’s demeanor and said: “You should realize that now you have an opportunity to sanctify the Name of Hashem on a very great level. How so? By being a shining example of integrity within the work force.”

He then proceeded to give him advice along the lines of the following: “My advice to you is to be reliable. Show up to work on time and refrain from unnecessary talk. Make sure that your words always have a positive effect on people. Be Modeh al HaEmes – admit the truth and acknowledge your mistakes - do not blame others. Show that you are willing and able to fix your mistakes. When there is disagreement between you and another worker, look at the disagreement from the other worker’s perspective – this is also part of the Middah of Emes. Finally, never compromise your integrity. Sticking to these ideals will bring you both success in your working environment and will be a source of great Kiddush Hashem.

### Halacha – Jewish Law

**QUESTION:** There is a politician who lied excessively to get elected. Although most politicians lie to some extent, this politician has gone well beyond what most politicians would do. He has fabricated his entire resume. He lied about where he worked and where he went to college. Further, with clear evidence to the contrary, he lied about being Jewish and that his grandparents escaped from the Nazis. The man is a

complete and utter liar. I have two questions: Are Gentiles allowed to lie and deceive the public, and how should the Jewish community relate to such a politician?

**ANSWER:** The Ritva in Chulin 94a indicates that a Gentile is included within the concept of all matters of theft because when the Torah discusses the prohibition of theft it does not say that it applies only to Jews (by using the words “Ish Ba’Amiso”). The Ritva then quotes the Tosefta in Bava Kamma 7:3 that lists different types of theft and includes Gneivas Da’as (deception) as a form of theft. Most authorities understand the aforementioned Ritva as not only prohibiting a deception to be perpetrated against a Gentile but also for a Gentile to perpetrate a deception on another. Furthermore, the Yereim and the SMAg both cite Bereishis 31:26 where the word “Geneivah” - a theft, refers to a form of Gneivas Da’as. So, our conclusion is that normative Halacha would understand the prohibition of Gneivas Da’as as applying to Gentiles as well and it would be prohibited for this Gentile politician to deceive the public.

As far as engaging this politician that depends. Engaging a person does not necessarily mean that one is giving a “Hechsher” on him (i.e. accepting his behavior). For example, we find that Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi engaged in various discussions with Antoninus – even though he was a murderer. However, in this case, the depth and the frequency of lying and deception is so extensive, that the Jewish community should perhaps avoid engaging this politician altogether.

*Editor’s Note: The contents of this Parsha Sheet was a repeat of Parshas VaYigash 5783. Our regular Parsha Sheet with new content will B’Ezras Hashem be back next week.*