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On the Parsha

“And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.” (Bereishis 32:25)

The Midrash on this verse tells us that the “man” that Yaakov Avinu wrestled with was an angel who represented Eisav. Rashi mentions that Yaakov went to retrieve small, inconsequential containers and it was at that time that he was confronted by the angel. The Gemorah explains that the righteous value their money (or possessions) more so than their own body. The Gemorah continues to explain that this is because they have acquired their possessions ethically and honestly, free from any tinge of theft. Therefore, their possessions, even seemingly inconsequential ones, are precious to them.

We may ask, it is very noble that the righteous value their possessions exceedingly because they achieved them without any tinge of theft, but should anyone value their possessions more than their life? It is also interesting to note that a little earlier in the Parsha we learn of the large gift that Yaakov prepared to give to Eisav (numerous goats, camels, cows, etc.) If he indeed valued his possessions, perhaps a smaller gift to Eisav was in order?

To better understand the Gemorah above, let us envision a Torah scholar who is diligently studying the Talmud. Due to his dedication and depth of his study, he discovers profound new ways to understand the Talmud and its commentaries. Often, he makes multiple discoveries on each page. To ensure that he does not forget his thoughts, he writes each of them down on an index card. He continues this practice as he goes through the Talmud. He finishes the Talmud in this manner, and then finishes the Talmud again and again in this manner. You can well imagine that after many, many years of study, the Torah scholar may have a collection of many thousands of index cards.

Now imagine, Heaven forbid, that there is a fire in our Torah scholar’s home. The fire is burning closer and closer to the room where our Torah scholar keeps his thousands of index cards, essentially his life’s work. Would he not enter that room to save his index cards even if it endangered his life?

And so it is with the righteous. Yaakov’s inconsequential containers were in fact, his life’s work. It represented to him a lifetime of ethics and diligence in honesty, to make certain that his possessions were only acquired through the most honest of means, down to the most inconsequential of containers. Therefore, it would follow that he would risk his life for them.

It is important to note that the righteous would still not be allowed to risk their lives for their possessions if it meant placing their lives in grave danger. The situation that the Gemorah is discussing above is one of moderate danger. And even placing one’s life in moderate danger to save one’s possessions would not be permitted, unless we are discussing the righteous who are confident that they have lived a life of honesty and integrity, down to the last, “inconsequential container.”

However, as careful as the righteous are with their possessions, they understand that to save a life, one should spend lavishly. This is responsive to our second question above – Yaakov felt that the gift he was to give Eisav could appease his violent anger and save his life and the lives of his family. He therefore spent lavishly.

Yaakov’s “inconsequential containers” represent his badge of honesty, integrity and devotion to truth (Emes). He was honest down to the last cent. It was this honesty that allowed him to wrestle with the angel that represented Eisav and come out victorious.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am often on the phone with a friend of mine who talks my ear off. Every time I

say that I really need to end the conversation, she gets very insulted. I can't just hang up on her because that is impolite, and she will be even more insulted.

However, I discovered that if I were to press "Airplane Mode" on my phone, my phone drops the call and the message that she would receive on her phone would be, "Call Failed." This message would not insult her as it appears as if my phone (or perhaps her phone for that matter) malfunctioned and dropped the call. Can I do this so as not to insult her now, and if questioned later, blame the, "Call Failed" on my malfunctioning phone?

ANSWER: There are two parts to your question. The first part is, can you press "Airplane Mode" on your phone and give the impression that your call failed due to a dropped call, instead of what actually happened which is that you hung up on her. The answer is that this is permitted as the Gemora in Yevamos 65b tells us, "Mutar Leshanos Mipnei HaShalom" – it is permitted to change the truth in order to promote peace. If you are engaged in a long conversation with your friend that you need to end, and your friend on the other end is not, "taking a hint", you can hang up on her in the matter that you have described so as not to insult her. However, Rav Nachum Yavrov ZT"l in Niv Sefasyaim writes, that the dispensation to tell a lie to promote the peace should not be a course of action that is pursued with any regularity, because one ends up habituating oneself to lie which is not allowed. In the case that you describe, there may be less of a concern, "with teaching oneself to lie" because you have created an impression that the phone call was dropped because it malfunctioned which is not the case, however, you have not actually told your friend a lie.

The second part of your question is more problematic because your friend will likely ask you about your phone and the dropped call. To continue the false impression that you have given, you may have to lie further about your phone malfunctioning. If your friend does indeed ask you about your malfunctioning phone, it is best for you to use an expression that supports the impression that it was a phone malfunction without telling an outright lie. So if your friend asks you what happened to your phone, we recommend responding with, "Do you

think that phone manufacturers purposely degrade the performance of their phones over time so we are forced to buy a new one?" This statement supports the impression that it was the phone's fault for malfunctioning, but it dodges your friend's question and is not a lie.

Please keep in mind another caveat of Rav Yavrov's regarding the leniency of permitting a lie to promote peace. He says this only applies to someone who does not lie frequently. If someone does lie frequently, then the leniency does not apply because lying to promote peace still results in reinforcing this bad habit which is not allowed – akin to what we have said in the name of Rav Yavrov above - it is habituating one to lie and is not permitted.

Chizuk - Inspiration

The author of the Beis HaLevi, Rav Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik ZT"l (1820-1892), was once in court in Czarist Russia to testify on behalf of a Jew who was falsely accused. After the proceedings, the judge called the Beis HaLevi into his chambers for a private discussion. The judge said, "I want to point out to you that our Russian laws are superior to the laws of your Torah. Your Torah says, 'Do not *take* a bribe', but it does not say, 'Do not *give* a bribe.' So only the taker of the bribe (i.e. the judge) is punished, but not the giver of the bribe. However, in our system, both the giver and the taker of the bribe are punished equally. Therefore, our system has made it less likely than the Torah system for bribery to occur."

The Bais HaLevi responded, "Quite the contrary! In your system, there is a greater possibility that a bribe will occur. Since your system also punishes the one that gives a bribe, the bribe giver will never come forward and admit that he has given a bribe for fear of punishment. Therefore, the judge can rest easy taking the bribe, because he knows that he is less likely to be found out. In our system, since there is no prohibition of giving a bribe, the judge lives in fear that at any moment, the bribe giver will admit to giving the judge a bribe. Being afraid that he will be found out, keeps the judge honest and helps ensure that a bribe will not occur to begin with.