



Volume IV Issue 14

Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

Parshas Vaera, 3 Shevat, 5784

January 13, 2024

-- Sponsored anonymously L'Ilui Nishmas Sara Eidel Bas Mordechai --

On the Parsha

“And now, go back to your work, but you will not be given any straw [from which to make bricks]. Nevertheless, the [same] number of bricks you must produce.’...And Moshe returned to Hashem and said, ‘O Hashem! Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, He has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people.’ ...And Hashem spoke to Moshe and said, ‘I am Hashem.’” (Shemos 5:18-6:2)

The Midrash in Koheles Rabbah (7:17) explains that these words, “I am Hashem” were directed at Moshe’s complaint of “Why have You sent me?” The Midrash elaborates, “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘You are flesh and blood and could not endure [the suffering that they undergo], but I am Hashem [and the name of Hashem that is used is the name that represents His mercy] and among My traits that I have is mercy.’ as it says, ‘...I will carry; I have made and I will bear, and I will carry and rescue you.’” (Yishayahu 46:4).

Rav Shmuel Ben Yitzchok Ashkenazi Yaffe was the Rav of the Ashkenazi community of Constantinople right after the Muslim takeover of the city. He was the author of the “Yefei Toar” commentary on the Midrash. He explains our Midrash above as saying that Hashem’s answer to Moshe’s complaint was a message to Moshe that he should not react out of frustration or anger, or doubt what Hashem is doing. Rather, Moshe should trust in Hashem’s abundant mercy and that everything that Hashem does is for the good – “Kol Mah D’Avid Rachmana L’Tav Avid.”

Now certainly, according to the Yefei Toar, Hashem wanted Moshe to feel the pain and agony that Bnei Yisrael was in. However, the Yefei Toar is saying that in addition to that empathy, Hashem wanted Moshe to have a more tempered, balanced reaction – one with the

full realization of Hashem’s unlimited love and mercy for His people.

If a tragedy should befall our loved ones (Heaven forbid), the ideal response is a balanced one – on the one hand, empathy for the plight that they are in and on the other hand, acceptance that Hashem is merciful and that everything He does is for the good.

Some people can reach this high level of understanding (as Moshe did after Hashem instructed him to do so). However, there are some people that parrot this ideal – seemingly taking what happens to Bnei Yisrael in stride with equanimity and trust in Hashem. However, in truth, they do not have the requisite level of empathy, of Ahavas Yisroel (love for their fellow Jew), that Hashem wants and requires of them – they just think that they do.

Someone who wishes to emulate Hashem’s Middah of Emes – of truth, must question his motivations and be honest with himself. Almost every day it seems, we read of Jewish soldiers who have lost their lives in Gaza in defense of Bnei Yisrael. Let us ask ourselves, “Are we feeling the Tzaar – the pain of Bnei Yisrael’s suffering – as is required of us? Are we also appreciating the idea of whatever Hashem does is for the good?” Perhaps we are able to carry on with our day, relatively unburdened by what is happening, and perhaps we have reached the ideal that we have discussed - a proper balance of feeling the pain of our brothers and sisters with the understanding that Hashem is merciful and good. Or perhaps if we are honest with ourselves, we may discover that we have allowed ourselves to become gradually indifferent to the suffering, and we simply do not care enough for the welfare of our brothers and sisters.

We must continuously work on ourselves to authentically feel the pain of Bnei Yisrael and work on deepening our belief in Hashem’s mercy and kindness.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I know someone who comes

from a religious, Torah home. In the religious society that he lives in, familiarity with the internet is not looked upon favorably. I have observed that when this person is with his friends and the topic of the internet comes up, he says that he is unfamiliar with the internet and how it works. However, I know this individual well and that he is indeed well acquainted with the internet. He acts this way, because if he revealed what he knows about the internet, he would be looked down upon. Is feigning ignorance of the internet, a violation of the Torah commandment of “MiDvar Sheker Tirchak” – distance yourself from a lie?”

ANSWER: On the one hand, pretending to be someone you are not, may not be permitted as it could be considered to be imitating the ways of Eisav. The Torah says in Parshas Toldos, that Yitzchak loved Eisav, “Ki Tzayid b’Fiv” – because he hunted and fed Yitzchak. This is the simple interpretation of the words. However, the Midrash interprets these words differently – Eisav hunted and trapped with the words that he fed Yitzchak. Eisav would ask Yitzchak Halachic questions that he knew the answers to, to make it appear to Yitzchak that he was interested in these matters and that he was particularly fastidious in matters of Halacha which was most certainly not the case.

On the other hand, if a Torah observant person shows an over familiarity with the internet, it could possibly lead people who do not know any better, to become accepting of internet usage, perhaps even unfiltered internet usage. They may be thinking, “If a Torah observant person knows so much about the internet, then he probably uses it, so why can’t I?” We are all aware of the harm that can come from unfiltered internet usage. As such, pretending that one is not familiar with the internet may be a potential course of action.

The best course of action is likely not to pretend that one is unfamiliar with the internet and not say anything to lead others to come to that conclusion. Better to remain quiet and not say anything and in that way, one would avoid any transgression.

Staying away from falsehood is an imperative that we must all adopt. From a historical perspective, during the early times of the second Bais HaMikdash, Bnei Yisrael were lax in their Shabbos observance. To compensate for the laxity, Nechemiah initiated a temporary period of, “Super Muktzah” where many items became Muktzah with the hope that Shabbos observance would improve. After Shabbos observance did improve, the laws of Muktzah were relaxed somewhat. One may say that the problems of dishonesty are so pervasive in our times that we may need to implement a policy of “Super Emes” - going above and beyond what the Halacha requires until society returns to a more healthy, honest equilibrium.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman ZT”L was

one of the leading Torah giants of the past generation and was known for being meticulously honest. He would provide for a number of poor Torah scholars who were too embarrassed to request financial assistance. One time, there was a wealthy individual that left \$5000 on Rav Shteinman’s table for Rav Shteinman to distribute to “Reuvain” on Purim morning.

When Rav Shteinman went to his table to retrieve the money to give to Reuvain, the money was gone! Someone had stolen the money from Rav Shteinman’s table! Rav Shteinman called the wealthy individual who gave him the \$5000 and said, “I want to tell you that the money you gave me was stolen. I did have a few hundred dollars to give to Reuvain and I have done so. However, I am advanced in years and know that my time in this world is limited. Even though the Halacha is that I am exempt [because I am classified by Halacha as an ‘Unpaid Watchman’ who is not liable for the theft of an object under his watch], this is only true in the Jewish court of this world. However, after my death, in the Heavenly Court of the next world, this will be held against me [because my method of protecting the money was not adequate]. Therefore, I have borrowed the rest of the money from Rav Neuwirth (author of the Shmiras Shabbos K’Hilchasa) to give to Reuvain. I owed Reuvain \$5,000, but I would pay many times that amount if necessary, rather than face the Heavenly Court with this on my record.