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On the Parsha

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Moshe and Aharon come to Pharaoh to warn him of the plague of locusts. Prior to the warning, they say in the name of Hashem to Pharaoh, "...for how much longer will you refuse to submit 'לְעֹנֶת' before Me?" (Shemos 10:3)

Rashi explains that the word, "לְעֹנֶת" means "to submit" as we have translated it above. Rashi explains that, "לְעֹנֶת" is related to the word, "עָנִי" – an impoverished person. In this context, it means that Pharaoh had refused to act impoverished, humbled and submissive before Hashem. The words of Rashi indicate that it was Pharaoh's arrogance that caused him to refuse to listen to Hashem and set Bnei Yisrael free.

One may say that it was the potential economic benefits of keeping Bnei Yisrael as slaves, that may have led Pharaoh to refuse to allow them to leave. This was indeed true initially, however at this point, it was clear that keeping Bnei Yisrael in Egypt would yield no further economic benefits. Pharaoh's own servants recognized this when they said "... Send the men and let them serve their God, for soon Egypt will be destroyed." (Shemos 10:7)

No, it was not the hope of further economic benefits that he hoped to reap if he did not let Bnei Yisrael go. Rather, it was his arrogance and refusal to humble himself before Hashem as we have said above. It is interesting to note, that if Pharaoh in his arrogance, was afraid of having his honor compromised by letting Bnei Yisrael go, then he should have let Bnei Yisrael go earlier on. It is reasonable for Pharaoh to expect that he could perhaps keep Bnei Yisrael as slaves and "ride out the storm" after the first plague or two. However, at this point, we are at the 8th plague (locusts). The Ramban says that Pharaoh was not just smart but was in fact, a brilliant person. That being the case, he should have been able to predict where this was going

to lead and that he would ultimately have to set Bnei Yisrael free. Accordingly, it would be better to set them free now and save some of his honor, rather than to continue to get punished by Hashem through additional plagues, suffer more humiliation, only to have to set them free anyways. However, his arrogance blinded him and prevented him from making this assessment.

More recently, in the Second Gulf War, we see a similar situation with Saddam Hussein, who refused to allow inspectors to inspect his weaponry or to admit that he in fact had no weapons of mass destruction. Certain political pundits explained that in his arrogance, he wanted to be seen as more powerful than he was – wanting the world to think that he had weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, he did not let the inspectors in, as they would have been able to detect that he did not have these weapons. Recall what ultimately happened to Saddam Hussein – because of the concern that he had these weapons which he was unwilling to allow, his country was invaded and lost to him in its entirety. He was forced to go into hiding until he was ultimately caught, convicted of crimes against humanity and executed.

A person who desires to see the truth must be humble. Otherwise, one's arrogance can blind oneself and cause one to make decisions that may have terrible consequences.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Our company is based in

New York which is an "at-will employment-state." This means that, unless we have a contract – they can fire us at any time even without two week's notice. Generally speaking, we get a cost of living raise which ranges from 3% to 5% each year. Senior management told us that this year, the company needed to reign in expenses, and we were told that if we forgo our cost of living raise this year, the company

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would get back on track and raises would be paid next year. We agreed to forego our raises for the year.

Later, I found out that while raises were withheld from us, Senior Management gave themselves a raise. I feel that we were lied to, and I am really surprised because generally speaking, I have found Senior Management to be good and honest people. I do not know whether to tell my colleagues what happened or not. If I do tell them, and Senior Management found out that I told them, they will be angry at me. If I do not tell them, I feel that I am complicit in their lie and am not being honest with my coworkers.

I have two questions: Was Senior Management's behavior acceptable and should I tell my colleagues about what Senior Management has done?

ANSWER: At first thought, it would appear that Senior Management's behavior is very disturbing. However, after some reflection, it could very well be that Senior Management was not intent on denying you something that they did not deny themselves. Perhaps in years' prior, they withheld raises for themselves while they paid you and your colleagues a raise - this year, it is your turn to forgo a raise. In your question, you described your managers as, "...good and honest people." We are obligated to judge good people favorably and this is a Torah Mitzvah. (See Sefer Chafetz Chaim, Be'er Maim Chaim in the introduction – Positive Commandment #3). This is not limited to judges as we see that the Mitzvah applies to men and women at all times (Sefer HaChinuch #235). Accordingly, you should give Senior Management the benefit of the doubt that they have not done anything untoward and that withholding raises from you was warranted and perhaps they withheld raises from themselves the year before. You should not tell your colleagues about what Senior Management has done as it may anger them unnecessarily. We would be wise to remember the Gemora in Shabbos (127b) "One who judges his friend as worthy, will himself be judged worthy by Hashem."

Chizuk - Inspiration

One should always seek inspiration and

growth in their Middos. This is especially true in terms of one's relationship with Emes (truth).

A Mashgiach of a Yeshiva once asked, "What can we learn from the convenience store chain known as 7-11?" He answered, "We can learn that we should constantly seek and loves Emes!" A student asked, "How can we possibly learn that from 7-11?" The Mashgiach answered, "Many people know the term 'Ahavas Chessed' – the love of doing kindness, but few people have heard the term, 'Ahavas Emes' – the love of being honest. However, we do find this term in the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law). The term is found in the Choshen Mishpat section of the Shulchan Aruch that deals with the laws of Dayanim (judges in Jewish courts) and the requirements that Dayanim of even the smallest Jewish courts must have. One of the requirements mentioned for judges is 'Ahavas Emes'. And where in Choshen Mishpat can this be found? That's where 7-11 comes in. It can be found in Choshen Mishpat – Chapter 7, Subchapter 11. And we should also learn to love Emes 24 hours a day just as the convenience store is open 24 hours a day."

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the seventh chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sefas Tamim.

"Chapter Seven: An explanation of the great reward of those who follow Hashem with Temimus (innocent devotion and sincerity), and who embrace the character trait of Truth.

Having spoken in the previous chapters about the enormity of the sin of deceit and the severity of its punishment, we will conclude by describing the great reward of Temimus and quote here from the Safer Ma'alos HaMiddos as follows, 'Come and I will teach you the virtue of Temimus. My children, understand clearly that the character trait of Temimus is a great and precious trait. Regarding anyone who follows Hashem with Temimus, HaKodosh Boruch Hu chooses this person and his service as the verse states (Psalms 101:6), 'The one who follows Me in the path of Temimus, he will be the one who serves Me.'"