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Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman ZT"l was once walking with

Rav Yisroel Meir Friedman Ben-Shalom ZT"l and found a coin lying on the road. Rav Shteinman picked it up and was intent on keeping it. Sensing his intent, Rabbi Friedman Ben-Shalom, a scion of the Ruzhyn Chasidic dynasty, remarked that it is the custom to give "found money" to Tzedakah. It is best not to keep it, since we cannot be sure of the origin of the money and that it was not stolen.

Rav Shteinman disagreed. "On the contrary," he said. "This is the most honest money in the world. The Halacha states that when a coin is found and there is no Siman (identifying sign of ownership) on it, there is Yi'ush (despair by the owner of ever finding it) and therefore Halachically, this money rightfully belongs to me – there is no doubt about it. If the Halacha says it is rightfully mine, I can be sure that it is. I am most definitely going to keep it. However, when we receive money from our jobs, how can we be certain that we were completely honest with our employer. For example, did we come late without our employer's consent? Were we overly distracted with personal matters while we were at work? Therefore, the money that we receive from our jobs may be tainted.

There is indeed however, a custom to give found money with no Siman to Tzedakah. Rav Shteinman explained the reason for the custom using the same rationale. Since the money is Halachically yours, it is yours unequivocally, and the most ideal way to perform the Mitzvah of Tzedakah is to give money that is definitely yours - free from the possibility of any taint of theft.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: There are vicious hackers out there

who target innocent companies by gaining access to their computer systems and placing viruses such as ransomware on them. The ransomware locks the users out of their computers until they pay the hackers the ransom to let them back in. There was a Yeshiva that was hacked in this manner and a demand was made by the hackers for tens of

thousands of dollars in ransom. I am a CPA for one of the Big Four accounting firms. Am I allowed to produce false documentation to effectively convince the blackmailers that the Yeshiva is in chapter eleven bankruptcy and simply does not have the money to pay the ransom? I could also say that because the Yeshiva is in bankruptcy, anything over the sum of \$5,000 must be approved by each of its sixteen creditors which could take several months to happen.

ANSWER: The Gemora in Yoma 83b, discusses an incident with Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yossi and an inn keeper that clearly indicates that lying to prevent theft would be permitted. In pertinent part, the Gemora says that the aforementioned sages, stopped at an inn seeking a room on the eve of Shabbos. Two of the sages had their wallets stolen by the innkeeper. The sages dragged the innkeeper to a store and gave him wine. While the innkeeper was away, the sages returned to the wife and lied to her, telling her that her husband told them that she should return their wallets to them, which she did.

Accordingly, just as the sages were able to lie to prevent the theft of their wallets, it is clear that you may lie in order to prevent the theft of the Yeshiva's money by the hackers.

On the Parsha

In this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu's father-in-law, Yisro,

highlights the inefficiency of having all of Bnei Yisrael come to Moshe to adjudicate their disputes. Yisro recommends the establishment of additional judges that will hear the people's minor disputes, with only the major disputes coming to Moshe. Yisro discusses the qualifications of the additional judges as follows:

"You shall also seek out, from among all the people, 'Anshei Chayil' - brave individuals, 'Yarei Elokim' who fear Hashem, 'Anshei Emes' - men of truth, 'Sonei Betza' - who hate ill-gotten gain." (Shemos 18:21)

The RaLBaG (1288-1344) explains that the term "brave individuals" means that these judges should fear no man, "who fears Hashem" means that their fear of Hashem

appears on their face (i.e. is readily detectable) and “men of truth” means that they love truth.

However, the RaLBaG explains that “hate ill-gotten gain” cannot mean that they hate theft and robbery, for that would already be included under the term, “who fears Hashem”. Therefore he explains that the qualification for judges to “hate ill-gotten gain” means that they hate corruption and the warping of justice that can come from a judge favoring the rich and powerful because of the future monetary benefits and favors it may bring the judge.

The implications of the above are extraordinary. According to the RaLBaG, it is not sufficient for a judge to be one, “who fears Hashem” and to be, “men of truth”. These two requirements cannot guarantee that the judge will be qualified and not pervert justice. The judge has to actively hate corruption and favoritism of the wealthy.

It is interesting to note, that the RaLBaG does not explain that a judge must eschew the gathering of wealth - that would be permissible for a judge. However, he must ensure that the gathering of wealth does not affect his judicial sensibilities. In order to do that, he must cultivate an active hatred of corruption and favoritism towards the wealthy as mentioned above.

That would appear to be possible by setting boundaries that allow for this cultivation, such as working on himself to limit and control his desire for money. If the judge does not do so, the fact that he fears Hashem and is a man of truth will not guarantee that he will not pervert justice.

So how can we cultivate the appropriate measure of hating corruption and ill-gotten gains so we can remain honest and ethical in our business dealings, and not permit the perversion of justice in our own lives?

Perhaps we can suggest that if we focus on the plight of the victims of the ill-gotten gain who were preyed upon by those with an unbridled desire for money, then we can end up hating the corruption and ill-gotten gains themselves. As an example, we have a family man in his early sixties, who worked very hard and every day to make a living. He woke very early to go to Minyan. Then he worked long hours and scrimped and saved money to help his children and grandchildren.

He was careful to invest the money he made from his honest living, in very safe securities. Then, someone who appeared trustworthy presented him with a very powerful investment opportunity. He did his due-diligence on the investment and was convinced that it was safe to invest. Shortly after the investment, the truth becomes apparent – it is all a ruse and all his money was gone. All of it. Not only the money that was saved for his children and grandchildren, but even the money needed for him to retire. He now needs to work well into his seventies just to meet his obligations.

Now let us picture scenarios like this unfolding over and over again. Focusing on the plight of the victims of corruption, can help us cultivate our hatred of corruption and ill-gotten gains and help ensure that we remain honest and ethical in our business dealings.

Mussar – Introspection

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

“Great is the character trait of Temimus (innocent devotion and wholehearted sincerity), before Hashem. Anyone who walks with Temimus is wanted by HaKadosh Boruch Hu, as it says (Mishlei 12:20) ‘His desire is for those who walk with Temimus.’ Moreover, because of this quality of Temimus, they (Heaven) will lead this person on the pathway of good, as stated (Mishlei 11:5) ‘The righteousness of those who are wholeheartedly innocent will strengthen their path.’ Regarding all those who engage Hashem and people with Temimus, HaKadosh Boruch Hu will guard them from conscious sins and inadvertent sins. He can sit and remain quiet and trust in Hashem like wine aging (sitting) in a vat with its grape pulp. [As Dovid HaMelech says] (Tehillim 18:24) ‘I was wholeheartedly innocent with Him and I was guarded against sin.’ And in a comparable sense, [Dovid HaMelech] teaches (Tehillim 41:13) ‘And because of my wholehearted devotion, You supported me and You placed me before You forever.’ And from this exemplary character trait [of Temimus] will evolve the trait of truth, which is one of the 13 descriptive Attributes of HaKadosh Boruch Hu, as related to the Torah (Shemos 34:6) ‘...slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth.’”