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Chizuk - Inspiration

In 1985, Rav Shimon Schwab ZT"l, a student of the great Mir Mashgiach, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz ZT"l, was preparing to publish a comprehensive book about the history of the Washington Heights Shul which he led, for its 50th anniversary. However, during his research, he discovered some uncomfortable truths about certain respected figures in the community's past. Rather than glossing over those facts or presenting a sanitized version of the Shul's history, he faced a difficult decision.

In a remarkable display of honesty and integrity, Rav Schwab ultimately decided to cancel the entire book publication project. He explained his decision in a now famous essay where he wrestled with the conflict between telling the truth and the Torah commandment to not speak Lashon Hara (slander). Rather than publish an incomplete or sanitized history that was not completely Emes (truthful), or to tell the truth and reveal potentially damaging information about certain respected community leaders, he chose to forgo the project entirely.

What makes this story particularly powerful is that Rav Schwab had already invested significant time and money into the project, and many people were eagerly anticipating the book's publication. The Shul's 50th anniversary was a major milestone, and the absence of a commemorative book was conspicuous. Yet, he stood firm in his conviction that if he could not tell a complete, truthful story, it was better not to tell the story at all.

Rav Schwab's choice demonstrated that honesty and integrity sometimes requires us to take difficult positions that may disappoint others or come at a personal cost.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I just came back from Israel for winter break and Air France lost my luggage. At first, I had thought that it would simply be a day or two before they found it, but after 21 days they declared it "officially lost". After that declaration, Air France is supposed to reimburse me for the value of the lost luggage and its contents. However, if

you read the fine print, Air France requires me to present receipts to them for each of the contents of the luggage to support my claims of their value. Now there is no way that anyone can reasonably be expected to keep the receipts of the items that were in their suitcase – there are many items, varied items, many of which were purchased many years ago. The airline knows this of course, and this is likely a way for the airline to shirk its responsibility to pay for the lost contents of my luggage.

I know the value of the contents in my luggage, but of course, I do not have the original receipts for the items. Since this airline policy is illogical and unfair, am I allowed to present the airline with receipts from other products that I have purchased that total up to the amounts that I spent on the items in my luggage?

ANSWER:

The answer is "Yes," but, if possible, do not lie and state to the airline that the receipts you are presenting are the receipts for the contents of the lost luggage. It is better to just present the receipts to the airline without saying anything if possible, and let them draw the conclusion that these are the authentic receipts on their own.

In support of this conclusion, please see the Gemorah in Gittin 14a which relates that Rav Sheshes had a business arrangement to give cloaks to the merchants of the city of Mehoza. The merchants would then sell the cloaks and be responsible for reimbursing Rav Sheshes at a later time. One time, the merchants decided to break their agreement with Rav Sheshes and withhold the reimbursement that was owed to him. In order to get his money, Rav Sheshes asked Rav Yosef bar Hama go to Mehoza and attempt to convince the merchants to pay. The merchants ultimately gave Rav Yosef the money, but unjustly asked him to agree that if something were to happen to the money (e.g. he was robbed on the way home), he would be personally held responsible. This was not a fair request, because per the agreement, it was the merchants' responsibility to reimburse Rav Sheshes and ensure that the money got to him safely.

Accordingly, it was unjust to pass off that responsibility to Rav Yosef. Nevertheless, to convince the merchants to give him the money, Rav Yosef told them that he would accept responsibility. When the merchants gave Rav Yosef the money, he tricked them and took the money in such a way that Halachically circumvented the obligation of personal liability. When Rav Yosef brought the money back and told Rav Sheshes what he had done, Rav Sheshes agreed with his actions due to the unfair nature of the merchants' request.

The Yaavetz concludes from this Gemorah, that it is permitted to lie to get something that is yours when the other party is unfairly demanding or withholding it. This is permitted as explained in the The Avnei Naizer (EH 416) through the Halachic principle of "Avid Inesh Dinei L'Atzmo," - a person may take unilateral steps to correct an injustice done to him (assuming that Beis Din (Jewish Halachic court) would agree with him if the matter was brought to their attention).

Accordingly, you would be able to respond to the unfair request of Air France to provide receipts in the manner described above.

On The Parsha

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Hashem tells Moshe to "come to Pharaoh" and deliver His message to him.

- 1) Why does the Possuk use the words "come to Pharaoh"? The Possuk should have said "go to Pharaoh"?
- 2) In the next Possuk, Hashem says that He will implement his signs of Divine Providence "within their midst" and so that "you should know that I am Hashem." Why was it so important to place these signs publicly, in the midst of the Egyptians?
- 3) Also, when the Possuk says that "you should know that I am Hashem", who is it that should know that He is Hashem – does the word "you" include others besides for Bnei Yisrael?

To answer the first question, Rabbeinu Bachya explains that the command from Hashem to Moshe was to come into Pharaoh's home itself and censor him there. It was not to go out and meet with Pharaoh outside of his house. This is because Pharaoh had an enormous sense of Ga'avah – haughtiness, which emanated from his pride that he had in his palace. Hashem wished to correct this within him.

Regarding the second question, the Ramban explains that

Hashem's signs and plagues were not done to punish the Egyptians. If that were the case, the signs and plagues could have been done privately. Rather, it was so that all the Egyptians would recognize Hashem's greatness. Therefore, a public display in their midst was warranted.

Regarding the third question, Rabbeinu Bachya writes that "you should know" refers not only to Bnei Yisrael, but also the nations of world – meaning that everyone should recognize Hashem's true greatness. In other words, Hashem's signs and miracles were a message to the world to see the truth of Hashem's existence and the consequences of doing evil toward others. We see from the fact that the "you" includes the nations of the world - that Hashem's concern is for all of His creatures. The Sefas Emes (Parshas Beshalach 5641) explains that the words "Umasbia Lechol Chai Ratzon" – he satisfies the needs of all creatures (Tehillim 145), is not limited to food and drink, but includes even the spiritual needs of all of His creations that so desire it.

This concern that Hashem has for the welfare of all of His creations can also be seen in other ways. There is a well-known expression in the Gentile world called, "What goes around comes around" or the misapplied term known as "Karma." For example, when a driver misbehaves and attempts to cut off another driver, and if during this process, the offending driver himself ends up in an accident, people will comment, "That's Karma!" However, what this actually is, is a manifestation of the Torah concept of Midah K'neged Midah – Hashem punishing an individual "measure for measure". This means that Hashem punishes an individual in the same manner that the person himself has erred. Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz ZT"l (in his Darchei HaChaim Vol. I p. 389) explains that Hashem punishes people in this manner as a kindness to them. By punishing people measure for measure, a Jew or a Gentile can see clearly and truthfully in what area they have failed based on how they were punished and correct their behavior accordingly.

*"May I back out of a school carpool that
I have already committed to?"
"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"*

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