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Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I work in the Bronx and coming back

from the school where I work, I got into a car accident. I had a green light and was driving straight. The other driver, a gentile from the Bronx, failed to stop at his red light and drove into the path of my car. At first, the driver admitted that he was at fault and said he would pay for the damage. However, after a few moments, he changed his mind and said that I had been the one who had run the red light. Is there a prohibition for a gentile to lie? If there is, is it appropriate to try to convince the gentile driver to tell the truth, or is it better to just leave it to our respective insurance companies to straighten things out?

ANSWER: Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman ZT”L in his Ayeles HaShachar on Kiddushin 61a cites the idea that a gentile is obligated in matters that make sense from a Saichel perspective (one’s common sense). He explains the Halacha that a gentile may not swear falsely (See Mishna LeMelech on Malachim 10:7) based upon the principle that Saichel would dictate that it is forbidden to lie (all the more so to swear falsely). We also find that Yaakov Avinu, when he first arrived in Charan and saw the shepherds taking care of Lavan’s sheep, he said, “Od Hayom Godol (the day is still large – i.e. there is still much time left in the day)”. He told them that it is not yet time to take the sheep away from grazing. He told them to give the sheep a drink and then take them back to the meadow. We see from here that he was correcting their behavior to ensure that they did their work faithfully and not slack off. One of my Rabbeim, Rav Yisroel Belsky ZT”L used to quote this LeHalacha – that one should correct gentiles in matters of honesty and integrity, even in today’s times. Rav Belsky would do so himself when the opportunity presented itself and would always do so with cheer and good nature.

Of course, Rav Belsky was over six foot four and presumably, you are much shorter than him and likely do not cut the

same imposing figure. Therefore, it may not be a good idea to try to coax the gentile driver from the Bronx to tell the truth and admit that he ran the red light.

A good friend of mine has original notes on Chumash from Rav Moshe Feinstein ZT”L that were never published. Contained within the notes, is a section that relates to the topic above regarding influencing a gentile’s behavior. Rav Moshe writes that Yaakov asked Pharoah to live in Goshen, away from the rest of the Egyptians, because his family could be influenced by the Egyptian’s immoral behaviors and damage their spirituality, whereas Yoseph who lived alone among the Egyptians could manage it without being influenced. The implication is that although ordinarily, Yaakov would have wanted to live amongst the Egyptians to influence them positively, in this case, he was rightly concerned for the spiritual peril of his wives and their children. The same concerns that Yaakov had did not apply to Yoseph however, who was living alone in Egypt.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev ZT”L was at the

very beginning of his rabbinical career in Pinsk. Shortly after his being appointed as the Morah D’Asra (lead rabbi of the town), he discovered that several of the wealthy merchants in the community were using forbidden and fraudulent weights and measures in their businesses - effectively cheating their customers.

Instead of immediately condemning them or causing public embarrassment, Rav Levi Yitzchak took a rather unconventional approach. He called the community together for a special meeting and announced that he had discovered that he himself was Halachically unfit to be their Morah D’Asra.

The assembled community panicked! “Rav Levi Yitzchak is brilliant! His Middos (character traits) are impeccable! What is he talking about!?” they exclaimed to one another.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explained that regarding the Mitzvah of "Ahavas Yisrael" (to love each Jew), the Torah requires a rabbi to be able to see the good in every Jew. However, in his community he was unable to do so. All he had found himself seeing was dishonesty and deceit. Failing to see the good in each Jew he reasoned, he must be the one at fault and was therefore, not qualified to be the Morah D'Asra.

His words, spoken with genuine anguish and humility, deeply affected the community merchants. That very day, many of them voluntarily brought their weights and measures to be rechecked, corrected and replaced when necessary. Over the next few weeks, the entire business community reformed their practices.

Remarkably, Rav Levi Yitzchak maintained both his integrity and his compassion. He corrected serious Torah violations without humiliating anyone or compromising his principles. Instead of using his authority to force compliance, he used his personal example and genuine love for his fellow Jews to inspire voluntary change.

On The Parsha

"Distance yourself from a falsehood; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer." (Shemos 23:7)

The Tiferes Shmuel (Likuttim 130b) offers a profound interpretation of "Midvar Sheker Tirchak" (distance yourself from a falsehood). He explains that this command carries a dual meaning: not only must we actively avoid falsehood, but the verse can be punctuated to tell us that, "through falsehood, you will become distanced (from Hashem)."

Our Torah commands us: "V'Halachta B'Drachav" (And you shall walk in His ways) (Devarim 28:9). The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 17:1) teaches us that walking in His ways by embracing Emes (truth) forges an extraordinary connection to Hashem. As we recite daily in the Ashrei prayer: "Karov Hashem LeChol Korav, LeChol Asher Yikra'uhi B'Emes (Hashem draws near to all who call upon Him truthfully).

Life's essence lies in mirroring Hashem's attributes and cultivating Deveikus (attachment) to Him. The Gemorah in

Shabbos (55a) reveals that Hashem's signet ring bears the seal of truth, a teaching our greatest sages urge us to internalize.

Mussar – Introspection

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*"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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