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Chizuk - Inspiration

I (Rabbi Fischel Schachter) once went to be Menachem Avel (comfort a mourner) at the home of a truly remarkable family, a family whose very walls seemed to breathe Chesed (kindness). Their mother had just passed away, leaving behind a legacy of quiet greatness: a life lived with simplicity, honesty, and dignity, even though she had been blessed with considerable means.

The mother was not merely generous; she was Ehrlich (genuinely sincere). She learned Yiddish so she could understand the Meshulachim (charity collectors) who knocked at her door—not only their words, but their pain. Together, she and her husband built a home rooted in Torah, choosing simplicity when comfort was easily within reach. Shabbos after Shabbos, they prepared and packed food for orphans with their own hands. Wealth never softened their sense of responsibility, nor did it diminish their humility.

Many stories reveal the depth of the mother's character. When her husband first began his business, they had almost nothing. Once, he discovered a discrepancy of twelve cents—the value of two stamps. "They're mine," he said. She gently corrected him: "Half belongs to your partner." In those days, stamps cost six cents each. But to her, even a few pennies demanded absolute honesty.

That same vigilance accompanied the mother into the smallest details of daily life. After shopping, she would review every receipt, afraid to owe another person even a single cent. One Friday, boxes of groceries were delivered to her home, but the receipt was nowhere to be found. As she unpacked the order, she suddenly noticed something she did not remember ordering: a bar of chocolate.

Her husband tried to calm her. "Don't worry," he said. "If it was included by mistake, the grocer will not lose sleep over it." But she could not let it rest. "What if I didn't pay for it?" she said. "I don't

want any Ta'am Ganaivah (taste of theft)." Though the day was hot and Shabbos was approaching, she prepared to walk back to the store and return the chocolate.

Her husband suggested that she call the store instead. She phoned the grocer, who was overwhelmed with pre-Shabbos customers. "It's fine," he told her. "Keep it." But she persisted. "Please," she said, "check whether I paid for it." With a sigh, he agreed to look it up.

He began reviewing the records. To his surprise, he could find no record of the chocolate bar. Then he looked further—and found no record of her entire order. Troubled now, he turned to the security cameras. What he saw would uncover something far larger than a missing bar of chocolate.

On the footage, he watched the cashier accept a \$100 bill, slide it beneath the drawer instead of placing it in the register, cancel the sale, and pocket the money. In that instant, the mystery was solved: there was no record of the order because the sale had never been entered.

The grocer and his son went straight to the cashier's home. "We can call the police," they told her, "or you can make restitution." The cashier confessed on the spot. "Don't call the police," she pleaded. "I will return every dollar I took—all \$25,000."

It soon emerged that the cashier had been part of a ring of cashiers skimming money for years. The business had been teetering on the brink of collapse, and the owner could not understand where the losses were coming from. The mother's refusal to benefit from even a questionable bar of chocolate exposed the theft, stopped the bleeding, and saved the store from financial ruin.

Think about it. One woman lived with the conviction: "If Hashem gives me something, I do not want it to come at someone else's expense." Her concern was not how much she possessed, or how

much others possessed. Her only concern was that every penny that entered her home be clean. She lived not for the approval of this world, but before the eyes of Hashem.

And because of that vigilance, not only did the mother preserve her own integrity, she also saved another person's livelihood.

On The Parsha

"These are the words that Moshe addressed to all of Israel on the other side of the Jordan; through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth, and Di-zahab." (Devarim 1:1)

Rashi in this week's Parsha tells us that the "words" that were addressed to Bnei Yisrael in the above referenced Possuk, were meant to be words of rebuke and that the places that Moshe referenced in the second half of the Possuk were a listing of every location at which Bnei Yisrael sinned and angered Hashem. By listing these locations, Moshe hoped to rebuke Bnei Yisrael for their sins, by hinting at them and reminding them where they were committed. Moshe only hinted at their misdeeds as opposed to naming them directly, because he felt that it would have been overly harsh and not in-keeping with the K'vodam Shel Yisrael (the honor and dignity of Bnei Yisrael).

However, words of rebuke are supposed to correct a mistaken perspective that the sinner harbors or expose a self-deception that led to the sin. To accomplish this tall order, hinting may not be sufficient. Moshe may have been better served by telling Bnei Yisrael directly what they had done wrong.

It appears that telling them directly of their misdeeds may also not have worked – it may have been perceived as too harsh and overly critical, a scathing criticism that Bnei Yisrael would not have accepted.

However, while it is true that here in the beginning of this week's Parsha, the misdeeds of Bnei Yisrael were only hinted at, later on in Sefer Devarim, Moshe does tell Bnei Yisrael of their misdeeds directly (for example, see Devarim 9:21 for Moshe's rebuke of Bnei Yisrael's sin of the golden calf). According to the above, Moshe should have been concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not have accepted his rebuke?

The Sifsei Chachomim provides us with two answers. The first answer is that Moshe was concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not

accept his rebuke in a case where all of Bnei Yisrael's misdeeds were to be mentioned together as Moshe felt he needed to do in the beginning of this week's Parsha – that would have been too much for them to bear and would have overwhelmed them. However, Moshe felt that they would accept his words of rebuke if they were mentioned individually, over a period of time, which is why Moshe felt that he could tell them their misdeeds directly if it was done over a period of time throughout the course of Sefer Devarim. The second answer given by the Sifsei Chachomim is that Sefer Devarim is looked upon as a new beginning - a beginning of Moshe's farewell to Bnei Yisrael before he died. Moshe felt that providing rebuke directly to Bnei Yisrael at this new and sensitive time would have been too much for them and they would not have accepted his rebuke. It would be akin to children on the first day of school being scolded by their new teacher before their first lesson has even started.

We see from the thoughts above that when trying to influence others to see the error of their ways, we must make sure that we maintain that person's self-esteem, honor and dignity. Overwhelming the person with too many criticisms is too much of an indictment against the person and may go unheard. Also, when we begin a new relationship with someone, we need to build that relationship first before we can provide meaningful rebuke.

*"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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