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Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein (“Reb Chatzkel”) ZT”L maintains that developing a commitment to truth is attainable, though it requires deliberate effort to overcome inclinations toward falsehood. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 8:5) explains this concept through an account of a debate that occurred during the creation of the world:

Chessed (the attribute of kindness) argued that man should be created, because he would be a creature that does Chessed. Emes (the attribute of truth) differed, saying that man was full of falsehood. Tzedakkah (the attribute of righteousness) spoke in favor of man, arguing that he is generous, whereas Shalom (the attribute of peace) was against man, because his very nature is to be argumentative. Hashem decided in favor of creating man and threw Emes to the ground.

All the angels looked on in shock, astounded at Hashem’s denigration of Emes.

“How can You act towards Emes in such a way?” the angels asked.

Hashem answered that His decision to throw Emes to the ground was for the good. Once truth was on Earth, it would be accessible to all who wanted it.

Rav Levenstein asserts that truth is more attainable than is generally perceived; although embracing it may present challenges, individuals are capable of refining their dedication to truthfulness. Within Kelm, precision in communication was paramount. When someone in Kelm would ask what time it was, the response given was to the exact second, underscoring the community’s commitment to Emes.

It is recommended that individuals reflect regularly on their actions to assess how truthful they are and to identify areas for improvement. The pursuit of truth demands a conscious investment of time and effort, allowing one to fulfill the expectations entailed in becoming a person of integrity.

A wealthy man once visited Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT”L, saying that he intended to make a generous donation to rescue a family from poverty. “Perhaps the Rav knows of a fitting family to donate to?” he asked.

Rav Shlomo Zalman contacted Rav Yitzchak Shlomo Zilberman ZT”L, who was responsible for the Zilberman school system in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Zilberman and his family of twenty-one children lived in abject poverty. Rav Shlomo Zalman shared the wealthy man’s proposition with Rav Zilberman in the hope that he would accept the proposition and rescue Rav Zilberman and his family from poverty.

Instead of jumping at the opportunity, surprisingly, Rav Zilberman asked to think it over. Even more surprisingly, a short time later he decided to refuse the offer. What was Rav Zilberman’s reason? He had made a careful calculation, and he realized that based on the amount that he was to receive from the wealthy man, his family would still need an additional twenty percent to completely extricate himself and his family from poverty. Accordingly, Rav Zilberman felt that if he were to accept the offer, the wealthy man would be giving the money to him under false pretenses as the wealthy man intended to give the money to someone that he could lift out of poverty. Since according to Rav Zilberman’s calculation this would not be the case, Rav Zilberman felt that accepting the money would have been dishonest.

Due to Rav Zilberman's dedication to Emes, the money went to a different family. He never regretted his decision. It is known that all his sons grew up to become true Talmidei Chachamim (Torah scholars), which is perhaps attributable to the merit he received for his commitment to Emes.

On The Parsha

A primary theme of this week's Parsha is the continuation of the events of Yetziyas Mitzraim (the exodus from Egypt). Regarding Yetziyas Mitzraim, the Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 819) cites Rabbi Pinchas in the name of Rabbi Hoshiyah: "Hashem took hold of the legs of Yaakov Avinu and placed them on the ocean. He said to him: 'Witness the miracles that I am performing for your descendants...'"

There are three questions we may ask on this slightly perplexing Midrash.

- 1) Why did Hashem need to bring a witness for the miracles that he performed for Bnei Yisrael?
- 2) Why was Yaakov chosen as that witness?
- 3) Why does the Midrash say that Hashem took hold of Yaakov's legs?

Yaakov is associated with the Middah of Emes – truth. Rav Shaul Yedidya Elazar Taub ZT"L (1886-1947), better known as the Moditzer Rebbe, an extraordinary Torah scholar and master composer of Chassidic melodies, (see Yisa Bracha Vayikra p. 106) says that Bnei Yisrael were redeemed in the merit of their ability to see and implement the trait of Emes – truth, as we say each and every day in our prayers (in "Ezras Avoseinu"), "Emes MiMitzrayim G'altanu..." – Truly [or because of truth], from Egypt, You have redeemed us.

Where do we find Bnei Yisrael practicing the Middah of Emes? We find that they admitted to themselves that they were unworthy of redemption (please see the explanation of Rav Eliezer Dovid Pal ZT"L of Vishnitz cited in Emes Parsha Sheet Volume III - Issue 13 - Weekly Newsletter Volume 3, Issue 13). They saw their own flaws and had no hubris or false self-worth.

Hashem brought a witness to the miracles that he was performing as if to say to Bnei Yisrael, "Witness why you are being redeemed!" This was a powerful message to Bnei Yisrael and one that Hashem delivered so Bnei Yisrael could see where they had excelled and how they had merited redemption.

With this explanation, we can readily understand why Hashem chose Yaakov as the witness. As we mentioned above, Yaakov is associated with the Middah of Emes. Hashem's message was that you were redeemed because of your Middah of Emes.

Why did Hashem take hold of Yaakov's legs? It was to allude to the fact that "Sheker – Ain Lo Raglayim" – falsehood has no legs to stand on, it eventually crumbles like a house of cards. It is only the truth, that truly "has legs" and permanence.

With this understanding, the Moditzer Rebbe interpreted the words of the Hagaddah, "In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he himself was redeemed from Egypt". The explanation is that each one of us must be honest with ourselves and see ourselves as we are, with all our character flaws, as Bnei Yisrael did in Egypt when they acknowledged that they were unworthy of redemption.

*"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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