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Chizuk - Inspiration

It was the winter of 1918. In Chicago, a crowd had packed the auditorium to hear Yossele Rosenblatt — the most celebrated Chazzan (cantor) of his generation, and perhaps of all time. He had come to raise money for Jewish victims of World War I in Europe, but the hall had become more than full; hundreds were left outside, unable to get in. And seated in a box that night was a man who knew greatness when he heard it: Cleofonte Campanini, General Director of the Chicago Opera Association, the impresario who had discovered many opera stars.

When the concert ended, Campanini did not wait. He asked to be introduced to Yossele and came straight to the point. He had heard a voice that belonged on the grandest stage, and he offered Yossele the role of Eleazar in Halévy's "La Juive" — for \$1,000 a performance. In today's money, that is roughly \$23,600 for a single night.

Yossele was shaken. Before him stood fortune, fame, thunderous applause, and an entirely new world waiting to be conquered. For one brief moment, the offer seemed irresistible. But then another voice rose inside him: "Yossele, don't do it. Do not trade the Amud (prayer lecturn) for the opera stage. Your voice was given to serve Hashem, not to become a spectacle." And with that, he heard again the words his father had spoken twenty-five years earlier, when a Viennese professor wanted to train the young Yossele for opera: "He was born for the Amud, and at the Amud he will remain!"

Campanini pressed on, removing objection after objection. Yossele could remain a frum Jew. He could keep his beard. He would be cast only in roles suited to his appearance. His fellow singers would be Jewish. Hotels would arrange kosher food. His contract would state clearly that he would never appear

on Shabbos or Yom Tov. Then Campanini raised the stakes: a guarantee of at least seventeen performances a year with every expense paid. Whatever Yossele needed, he would have.

Now there was no practical barrier left. The door to another life stood open before him. Yet Yossele could not walk through it. He listened until Campanini finished, and then, with quiet dignity, he answered that while the offer was acceptable, his contract as Chazzan for his community synagogue still had two years remaining. He was not a man who would break his word.

His son later revealed that the contract was only an excuse — a gracious fiction meant to spare Campanini the sting of an outright refusal. In truth, Yossele's congregation would likely have wanted to see its Chazzan recognized by the greatest musical authorities in the world. But Yossele needed no time to decide. From the first instant, he knew he could not accept.

He turned away from a fortune not because anyone had forbidden it, and not because he could point to a rule that required him to refuse. He turned it down because he knew who he was. He knew what his voice had been given for. A voice entrusted with leading Yidden (Jews) in prayer, with lifting hearts toward Hashem, could not be surrendered to the stage for entertainment purposes. Yossele turned down the offer. To remain true to himself, he really had no other choice.

On The Parsha

The first Possuk in Parshas Chukas (BaMidbar19:2) introduces the Mitzvah of Parah Adumah (red heifer) whose ashes are used to purify one who has become impure. This Mitzvah is puzzling because even though the Parah Adumah's ashes make the one that is impure, pure; it makes the one who is preparing the ashes to be used, impure. The Torah tells us that this Mitzvah is a "Chok" which is a commandment of the Torah that we must observe

whether we understand it or not.

The Torah introduces the Mitzvah of the Parah Adumah with the words, “Zos Chukas HaTorah” – this is the Chok of the Torah. There is a debate between the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh and the Akeidas Yitzchok as to what these words are referring to. The Ohr HaChaim believes that the Torah only means to call this particular Mitzvah of Para Adumah a Chok. The Akeidas Yitzchok believes that the Torah means to say that Mitzvahs in general should be viewed as a Chok. Accordingly, we should therefore observe them regardless of whether we understand the reasons for them.

The author of the Yemin Yaakov who was a student of Rav Chaim Visoker ZT”L of the famed Mir Yeshiva in Poland, expounds on the view of the Akeidas Yitzchok. His approach is that if we overdo searching for the reasons of the Mitzvahs, then we could possibly end up rationalizing away the Mitzvah when we think that the reason that we found for the Mitzvah no longer applies to us. Therefore, we should treat all the Mitzvahs as a Chok – not to unduly concern ourselves with finding a rationale for the Mitzvahs and observe them whether we understand them or not.

This would have particular application to the Mitzvah of “Midvar Sheker Tirchak” – distance yourself from any matter of falsehood. We may say that the rationale for this Mitzvah is because telling a lie can be damaging and harmful. That being the case, we may consider that the Torah would permit one to tell harmless “white lies”. We may think that telling a story with a lie or a bit of an exaggeration here and there is harmless. We may rationalize that telling a story is much more entertaining that way. However, white lies are still not permitted. Harmless as they may be, telling white lies can make it easier to lie in general and could make lying habitual. Therefore, to observe “Midvar Sheker Tirchak” properly, treat it as a Chok, observe it without delving into the potential reasons for the Mitzvah.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: My friend and I are both Rabbis in a Yeshiva.

The whole Yeshiva Davens (prays) together including the principal. After davening, the principal teaches a quick Devar Halacha (Halachic law or practice). Sometimes, he will say a Halacha that my friend and I know is incorrect. My friend says that our obligation of Emes (to tell the truth) dictates that we

correct him, but to do so in a way that will not embarrass him. I agree, but caution my friend that I do not think that that we can correct the principal without embarrassing him and therefore I advise my friend not to correct him. Did I correctly advise my friend?

ANSWER: The Gemorah (Brachos 27b) relays the incident of Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Gamliel. A student asked a question to Rabbi Yehoshua about whether one is obligated to recite Ma’ariv (the evening prayer) or whether it is voluntary. Rabbi Yehoshua answered that it was voluntary. Outside of the Beis HaMidrash (study hall), Rabbi Gamliel was asked the same question and he answered that it was obligatory. He then entered the Beis HaMidrash where Rabbi Yehoshua was sitting and asked, “Is there anyone here that disagrees?” Rabbi Yehoshua did not voice his disagreement with Rabbi Gamliel because he did not want to embarrass him and compromise his honor. We see from this Gemorah that maintaining someone else’s honor trumps the obligation to correct him. Therefore, you were correct when you advised your friend not to correct the principal if he could not do so without embarrassing him. [See Niv Sfasayim p. 186]

Editor’s Note: This Halacha section was last published in a prior version of the Emes Parsha Sheet (Parshas Shelach – June 13, 2026). When published at that time, the above referenced positions of Rabbi Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua were incorrectly reported due to an editor’s error. Accordingly, the Halacha section has been reprinted with the corrected positions of the aforementioned.

*“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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