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בס"ד

A Name Concealed, A Word Fulfilled

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Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

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Chizuk - Inspiration

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Schach ZT"L recounted a remarkable example of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ZT"L's devotion to keeping his word. Long before publishing his renowned work, Beis Halevi, Rav Yosef Dov had remarked that his first book would be published anonymously. He had not made a promise or a formal commitment; he had simply spoken casually – an "off the cuff" remark. Nevertheless, his son, Rav Chaim, testified that his father ultimately kept his word.

At first, this seems puzzling. Beis Halevi is widely known as Rav Yosef Dov's first work, and its authorship was never in question. Even the first edition clearly bore his name. So how could Rav Chaim say that his father had kept his word to publish his first book anonymously? The answer lies in what happened before Beis Halevi went to press.

When the first volume was ready for printing, Rav Yosef Dov intended to publish it under his own name. Then he remembered the casual remark he had made years earlier. Instead of disregarding the seemingly immaterial remark, he postponed publication, sat down to write another book, and published that work anonymously. Only then, after his word had been kept, did he return to the arrangements for printing Beis Halevi.

For Rav Yosef Dov, even an informal remark made years earlier deserved to be honored. Although his words had not constituted a formal commitment of any kind, he would not allow them to remain unfulfilled. He was prepared to delay a major publication and write an entirely different book rather than disregard something he had said.

Rav Chaim knew the identity of the anonymous book. He noted that no one had even the slightest suspicion that Rav Yosef Dov had written it. Yet he would not disclose its title: his father had chosen to conceal his authorship, and Rav Chaim would not reveal what his father had kept hidden. Thus, he testified that his father's statement had been fulfilled while carefully preserving the anonymity his father had intended.

On The Parsha

"And Hashem appeared to him (Avrohom) in the plains of Mamre." (Bereishis 18:1)

Rashi mentions that the reason why Hashem revealed Himself to Avrohom in the plains of Mamre was because it was Mamre who gave Avrohom advice regarding Hashem's commandment to circumcise himself and the members of his household. The Daas Z'kainim MiBaalei HaTosfos, addresses the question as to what advice Avrohom was seeking – Hashem commanded him to circumcise himself and his household. Would Avrohom be asking advice on whether he should comply with Hashem's commandment? He answers that of course Avrohom would readily comply with Hashem's commandment. The advice that he was seeking was how to convince his household to comply. He continues to explain that when Avrohom sought advice from his two friends, Ener and Eshkol, they had no advice to offer. Then Avrohom sought advice from Mamre who suggested that he first circumcise himself and his son, Yishmael. When the members of his household would see that he circumcised himself first, then they would be amenable to follow his lead. This Daas Z'kainim MiBaalei HaTosfos may contain a deeper message as to how we can convince others to recognize a truth.

Why was Avrohom concerned that his household would not listen to him? We know that the people of Avrohom's household were people of stature. Yet, there appears to be

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real concern that if not for Mamre's advice to have Avrohom and Yishmael go first, then the rest of his household, as great as they were, would still not listen to Hashem's command.

Perhaps it can be suggested that the idea of "easy for you to say," is the expression of the need for acknowledgement and empathy. In this instance, if Avrohom did not go first, the members of his household would say to him, "You do not understand how challenging this will be for us. You do not realize the pain that circumcision will cause us." Now that they see that Avrohom has gone through the procedure himself, they now believe that Avrohom can understand them and empathize with them. We see from here, that when someone feels that another does not understand or empathize with them, it may be difficult to convince them of something – even if we are talking about trying to convince them of an absolute good or truth like a commandment from Hashem, and even if we are talking about men of stature, like those in Avrohom's household.

In our search for truth, we should address and remove all our biases to seeing the truth which can include not listening to a message that we need to hear unless we feel people understand or empathize with us. Having said that, it may also be wise when trying to convince someone of the truth, that we recognize the importance of understanding and empathizing with them so they are more receptive to our message.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am a high school girl, who, like other girls my age, often leaves class to hang out with my friends in the hallway or the bathroom. The teachers are often strict with me and do not allow me to leave class without an acceptable reason. I found that if I hold my hand on top of my nose, the teacher will allow me to leave – thinking that I desperately need a tissue. I feel that this is not actually lying as I have not said anything. Is this permitted?

ANSWER: This is not permitted. Rav Yavrov ZT"L in his Niv Sfasayim (1:6) writes that even alluding to a lie with a physical action is forbidden. Therefore, placing your hand on top of your nose to deceive your teacher would not be permitted. Rav Yavrov bases his ruling on a Sefer Chassidim (1:46) which says that even if one does not say a word but merely engages in an action that implies a falsehood, it is still not permitted. It seems that the Sefer Chassidim does not base his ruling on the prohibition of "Midvar Sheker Tirchak" – distance yourself from the word of a lie, because by engaging in a deceptive action, one has not spoken a word. Rather, he bases his ruling on a separate prohibition called "Hin Tzedek." This prohibition is explained in Bava Metziah 49a which derives from the words "Hin Tzedek" (Vayikra 19:36) that when we say "Hin" which is similar to the word "Hen" which means "Yes" to something, it needs to be "Tzedek" - true. This means that our words must be true and when we say "Yes" to something, we must mean what we say. Since the charge of "Hin Tzedek" is said in the Torah in the context of keeping honest weights, where one may deceive or cheat another without saying a word, the Sefer Chassidim learns that this prohibition extends to deceptive actions that are engaged in, even without the utterance of any words.

Even if one would argue that your action is relatively harmless, elsewhere, the Sefer Chareidim quotes the Rashbatz (Mitzvos of the Mouth #26) that even if the falsehood does not cause any harm, it is still a Torah prohibition according to the Rashbatz (and others concur with the Rashbatz as well).

"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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