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Chizuk - Inspiration

Chazal (the Sages) teach us that the seal of Hashem is truth (Shabbos 55a). It is not merely one of His attributes. It is His signature upon creation. And because every Jew carries within himself a Chelek Elokah Mima'al (a piece of Hashem from above), that same seal of truth is imprinted upon every Neshamah (soul).

Naomi Shemer is recognized as one of Israel's leading composers. Her 1967 song "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" grew so popular that many regarded it as the country's unofficial national anthem. Yet, controversy lingered around the composition for years, as some critics claimed Shemer had taken its melody from "Pello Joxepe," a Basque lullaby. Despite these ongoing allegations, Shemer repeatedly and publicly denied the accusations.

During her last days, while suffering from advanced cancer, she penned a letter to composer Gil Aldema. She confirmed that she had heard the lullaby; she remarked that it had "gone in one ear and out the other." Yet, she acknowledged that its tune must have unintentionally influenced her own composition.

Then she said something that should give us pause. She called the episode, "a regrettable work accident — so regrettable that it may be the reason for me taking ill."

She admitted to a professional mistake and felt as though an unspoken truth was weighing heavily on her. Although she might not have been able to express it in religious terms, she realized she could no longer bear this internal burden. She asked Aldema to reveal her secret once she had passed away, and he honored her request.

Naomi Shemer was not, by any account, a woman of Torah observance. Yet the Chelek Elokah Mima'al does not sleep nor retire even if its host has wandered far from her Torah roots. Hashem's seal of truth exerts its pull until the very end — and

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sometimes, it is precisely at the very end that its force can become unstoppable.

If a Neshamah (soul) that was never nurtured with Torah and Mitzvos could not go to its rest without unburdening itself of a hidden truth — how much more so must we, as religious Jews, who invoke Hashem daily in the course of our observance, ensure that our words and our lives bear the imprint of His seal.

On The Parsha

Rashi offers an insightful explanation about the qualities Yisro suggests for selecting judges to handle the disputes among Bnei Yisrael. The verse in this week's Parsha (Shemos 18:21) says that the judges must be "Anshei Emes" — men of truth — Rashi explains: "These are people who keep their promises, upon whose words one may rely, and thereby, their commands will be obeyed."

At first this seems pretty straightforward, but Rashi is making an observation that deserves our careful attention. He is not defining "men of truth" as people who refrain from lying, or even as people who judge cases accurately. He defines them as those who keep their word and can be relied upon.

This is fascinating: Yisro is listing qualifications for judges — people whose function is adjudicating disputes and rendering verdicts. In this context, we would expect "Anshei Emes" to mean people who can weigh all of the evidence honestly, and come to the right conclusion on who is guilty or innocent. Yet Rashi does not interpret it that way. He says that Anshei Emes has nothing to do with how they will judge a case, but rather — how reliable are their words.

Then Rashi says, "...and thereby, their commands will be obeyed." Rashi is teaching us that the enforceability of justice depends on the personal integrity of the one dispensing it. A judge whose word means nothing — who promises and does

not deliver, who says one thing on Tuesday and another thing on Thursday — will find that his rulings carry no weight because no one will listen, even if each individual ruling happens to be technically correct.

This lesson extends well beyond judges. Anyone in a position of influence — a rav, a teacher, a parent, a communal leader — derives their authority not merely from the correctness of their guidance but from whether people trust their word. A person can be right about everything and still be unable to influence or guide anyone if he is known to be unreliable in his personal commitments. Integrity is not just about telling the truth; it is about *being* true — consistent, dependable, and someone whose word and deed are one.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: In the business world, it is not uncommon for individuals to utilize deceptive or insincere negotiating tactics. For example, a party may express a strong interest in securing "X" within an agreement, while their true objective is actually "Y." Such strategies are often employed to create leverage during negotiations. In certain cases, participants may enter into negotiations with no genuine intention of finalizing an agreement, but rather to gather pricing intelligence or delay the opposing party. May one employ these negotiating tactics?

ANSWER: It is strictly prohibited as there are several prohibitions that would forbid such practices.

The first prohibition is directly sourced in the Mishnah in Bava Metzia (4:10), which lists among the classic cases of Onaas Devarim (prohibition against causing another pain with words) the case of one who asks a shopkeeper "How much is this item?" when he has no intention of purchasing it. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) explains that this causes the seller genuine pain — he invests hope, time, and effort into what he believes is a real transaction, only to discover it was hollow. This addresses insincere "buyers" who, for example, engage salespeople in protracted discussions, forcing the sincere party to invest time and resources in a negotiation that will never bear any fruit. The Shulchan Aruch codifies this prohibition (Choshen Mishpat 228:4), making it clear that it is not just rude to engage in such practices but an actual Halachic violation.

In addition to Onaas Devarim, insincere negotiations implicate the prohibition of Geneivas Da'as (deception) by

creating a false impression in another person's mind. The Gemara in Chullin (94a) cites Shmuel who says that this prohibition applies to Jew and Gentile, and the Baraisah there enumerates cases of forbidden deceptive conduct, such as repeatedly inviting someone to a meal knowing that he will refuse, solely to create a false impression of generosity. The insincere negotiator does something similar: he mimics the behaviors of a genuine counterpart — making proposals, exchanging concessions, and engaging in deliberation — all to create a false impression that he intends to reach a deal.

Notably, the Shaarei Teshuvah (3:181) states that the leniency of "Mutar L'Shanos Mipnei HaShalom" — that one may sometimes deviate from the truth for the sake of peace — does not apply to Geneivas Da'as. There is no peace-based dispensation for deceiving someone into believing you are a sincere negotiating partner when you are not.

True, insincere negotiators can extract valuable information — the counterpart's pricing, priorities, and strategic alternatives — which can then be leveraged in future dealings. However, the ends do not justify the means and this is almost as bad as breaking into the competition's computers to steal the valuable information referenced above.

Finally, insincere negotiations implicate the prohibition of Midvar Sheker Tirchak (Shemos 23:7) — distancing oneself from falsehood. The Chofetz Chaim rules in his Ahavas Chesed that this is an outright prohibition, and this view is normative Halachah. Gaining information through insincere negotiation makes the interaction dishonest and any benefit unfairly obtained.

*"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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