

Distance yourself from a false word. (23:7)

The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 97a relates that there was a city called Kushta that was unique in the phenomenon that none of its residents ever lied. Prevarication was to them the ultimate anathema. As a result, they were blessed with extreme longevity. No one in their community died. One *Erev Shabbos*, a woman came to the door of her friend's home and asked to see her. Her husband was aware that his wife was preparing herself for *Shabbos* (combing her hair), so he said that she was not home at the time. As a result of his untruth, his two sons passed away. During the *Shivah*, seven-day mourning period, he was asked concerning their cause of death, since this was a community where death did not occur. When he told them what he felt was the reason (for his simple untruth), they asked him to move from the community before the punishment which had prevailed on him would spread to the rest of the city. This was a community that had zero tolerance for falsehood.

This is a sad, but inspirational, story. Something, however, does not make sense. When this man moved to the city he knew what kind of community it was. He was acutely aware that this community had a zero tolerance level concerning falsehood. No one lied – everyone lived. How could he take a chance and endanger his entire community – men, women and children – by prevaricating? Furthermore, prior to his acceptance to that community, he was certainly vetted and emerged squeaky clean. How did it happen that he uttered an untruth?

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, offers a penetrating explanation. During his entire life, this man had fought to overcome the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, for uttering untrue, misleading, dishonest statements. He focused on honesty, distancing himself from any form of trivial or subtle untruth. So what happened when he moved to this town? He stopped fighting. He felt that he no longer needed to fight. He was living in a community in which no one lied. Therefore, he slacked off, no longer maintaining strict vigilance against uttering any form of misleading, dishonest statement. This was his mistake. The fact that everyone in your circle is perfect does not guarantee your perfection. This is the point at which the *yetzer hora* worms its way in, by connecting to the complacency that accompanies one who lives in a *frum*, Torah observant community. One must always fight, because the *yetzer hora* never gives up.

Perhaps I harp on the subject too much, but, if it will awaken one family to be less complacent, thereby saving the tragedy of seeing a kid at risk, it will have been worth it. Some of us think that vigilance in raising our children is necessary only if we are living in rural Idaho, but in Torah communities, where Torah learning reigns supreme, where computers and smartphones have filters, and the filters have filters, we have nothing to worry about. Our children imbibe Torah from the minute they enter the world. What could possibly go wrong? Well, sadly it does – in the most *Torahdik* communities, in the most perfect and ideal Torah observant homes – it does go wrong. Why? There are reasons, although this is not the forum for conjecture or discussion. One thing is certain: We are not fighting the *yetzer hora* in the same manner as we would if we were living in a secular-oriented community. When our due diligence begins to wane, the *yetzer hora* has already

won. That man's complacency was the cause of his downfall. The *yetzer hora* is willing to work overtime. So should we – at least for our children's sake.