

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

The admonition against uttering a falsehood, is quite different from other prohibitive *mitzvos*. Nowhere does it state that one must **distance** himself from the *aveirah*, sin.

Proximity to the sin, or area which might bring one to sin may not be advisable, but there does not seem to be a specific exhortation against it. Falsehood, however, seems to be very dangerous. It has such a strong gravitational pull that simply being in its immediate environment is dangerous and can influence one to sin. Why is it different than *maachalos asuros*, forbidden foods, which do not carry such a stringency that one is prohibited from being in close proximity to them?

Horav Zushia, zl, m'Annipole explains that the *tirchak*, "(you shall) distance (yourself)," applies to one's relationship with Hashem. One who prevaricates distances himself from the Almighty. Hashem abhors falsehood. *Chosomo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu emes*, "The seal of the Holy One is truth." There is nothing more to say. Hashem is the essence of unvarnished truth. One can perform wonderful deeds; he can execute *mitzvos* in the most conscientious manner –yet, if he lies, if his life and dealings are not performed with honesty, then he distances himself from Hashem. Good deeds do not protect the individual from the ill effects of mendacity. One who is deceitful cannot be close to G-d, regardless of his *mitzvos*.

A man approached the *Bais HaLevi* and questioned him concerning the *pasuk*, *Emes mei'erez titzmach (Tehillim 85:12)*, "Truth will sprout from the earth." The man asked, "*Rebbe*," "if truth grows in abundance from the earth, why is there such a lack of truth in the world?" Indeed, he was asking a good question. Truth is at a premium. In every phase of life, in every sector of society, integrity is quite lacking. The *Bais HaLevi* replied, "It is, indeed, accurate that truth sprouts from the earth, but people must bend down to pick it up. It does not harvest itself." Yes, truth is readily available, but we must seek it out. Regrettably, falsehood is much more aggressive in its growth. It comes right at us – without shame. Most people appreciate that which is "convenient" over that which requires effort.

The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, was wont to say, "True, *emes* sprouts from the earth, but nothing grows unless a seed of some sort is first planted in the earth. When one buries seeds of truth in the ground, all that is produced is falsehood. However, when falsehood is planted in the ground, it will sprout *emes*."

His entire life, the *Kotzker* waged a war for the truth. Indeed, the *chassidic* court of *Kotzk* became synonymous with a burning and piercing form of truth. It was a fiery truth that singed anyone who dared to delve deep enough to uncover it. The *Kotzker* came on the scene during the early stages of *chassidus*. While he believed in *chassidic* doctrine, he felt that Torah should be the focal point of all *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, and people should be more self-reliant, not subjugating their G-d-given minds to their *Rebbe*. A person should take personal responsibility for his life and work to develop a personal relationship with Hashem. His greatest legacy is his staunch

support of the truth.

The *Kotzker's* approach to *avodas Hashem*, although laudatory, was not for everyone. Indeed, while the *Baal Shem Tov* embodied the *middah*, attribute, of *Chesed*, kindness, *Kotzk* represented *Din*, strict justice. The *Baal Shem Tov* attempted to reach **all** people. The *Kotzker* was available only to the elite. The *Baal Shem Tov* elevated people, taking them out from the “dumps.” The *Kotzker* rebuked and rebuffed, making great demands on his students, constantly pointing out their inadequacies.

Clearly, the *Kotzker's* approach attracted the unique, the brilliant, the aspiring youth who were prepared to undergo his demands of self-analysis and *mitzvah* performance on the highest level of sincerity. Indeed, sincerity was as much a catchword for him as was *emes*. Veritably, they are both the same. One who is not truthful is not capable of being sincere.

The *Chidushei HaRim*, the first *Rebbe* of Gur, was a close disciple of the *Kotzker*. He once brought to the *Rebbe* his *chiddushim*, novellae and commentary, on all of *Choshen Mishpat* – the section of the *Shulchan Aruch* which deals with monetary matters. Since the laws are difficult, the *Kotzker* was very impressed with his student's achievement. Yet, he said, “I feel that such a work should be destroyed...I feel that it will minimize the credit due the *Shach* (whose immortal commentary to the *Shulchan Aruch* is without peer). The *Shach* studied Torah with such *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, and with such sincerity, that it would truly be a shame for people to ignore his commentary.”

The *Chiddushei HaRim* took his son and immediately burned his *kesavim*, written manuscript. When the *Gerrer Rebbe's* son visited the *Kotzker* a short time later, the *Kotzker* asked him, “What ever happened to your father's commentary on *Choshen Mishpat*?”

“He burned it,” the son replied, “at the *Rebbe's* suggestion.” The *Kotzker* was amazed. “Such nobility; such pure intent! I am certain that before long, your father's reputation will spread throughout the world!”

One would think that a person who has confronted the truth in its untainted form would realize that some things are simply not surmountable. Take the *yetzer hara*, for instance; one cannot triumph over the evil inclination. It is a constant, never-ending battle in which we may never weaken and surely not give up. As aware as he was of man's weakness, the *Kotzker* refused to compromise his aspiration for the truth and purity of action.

One of the *Kotzker's* close *chassidim*, *Reb Shemaya*, lay on his deathbed. We would think that at this moment of ultimate truth, the *yetzer hara* had no “takers.” One of his fellow *chassidim* asked him, “*Nu, Reb Shemaya*, does the *yetzer hara* still bother you now?” “Of course,” he replied, “do you not see him standing near my bed, whispering into my ear, ‘*Reb Shemaya*, say *Shema Yisrael* in a loud voice, and draw out the *echad*.’” See, I recognize the *ganav*, thief, that he is. He

wants to seduce me into acting righteous, so that you will say, ‘*Reb Shemaya* left this world in a pure state.’” This was Kotzk. It did not have a large following, because he demanded of his adherents that they search for the unattainable. His devotees were the pure, the sincere, and the real.