

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

Sforno writes that one must distance himself from anything that might lead to falsehood. Sometimes we do something innocuous, but it creates a situation in which someone else is compelled to lie – albeit inadvertently. *Sefer Chassidim* mentions an all-too common situation, whereby one notices a group of friends speaking furtively among themselves. Of course, he wants to know what it is they are shrouding in so much secrecy. If he approaches them and asks, “What are you talking about?” he knows that he might cause them to lie. Let’s face it, if they wanted him to know the topic of their conversation, they would have included him. Apparently, they want to keep it from him. So, why is he bothering to ask?

Chazal teach (*Bava Metzia* 59a), “From the day the *Bais HaMikdash* was destroyed, the Gates of Prayer have been sealed...” Nevertheless, the Gates of Tears remain open. What this means is that prayer no longer has as ready access as it used to during the Temple’s tenure. The *Shaarei Demaos*, Gates of Tears, remain open and ready to accept the Jews’ tearful entreaty. **Horav Bunim, zl, m’Peshischa**, wonders why there is a need for gates, if they always remain open. Just do away with the doors. He explains that there are sincere tears and there are insincere tears. Often, one cries for the wrong reason or misguided motivation. Those tears do not gain access – the gates close on them.

When **Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl**, *Rosh Yeshivah* and founder of Telshe, Lithuania was *niftar*, passed away, suddenly – on a fundraising trip to England, it was a great shock to the Telshe community. The town and its *Yeshivah* were thrust into mourning and sadness. It is told that his grandson, **Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl**, who would one day be co-founder of Telshe, America, who was seventeen years old at the time, broke into uncontrollable weeping. He was very close with his *zaide* and the loss had a profound effect on him. His father, *Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl*, son-in-law and successor to *Rav* Leizer said to him, “It appears to me that you are crying a bit overzealously. Are you really that broken-up, or are you trying to impress people with how sad you are over the loss of your grandfather?”

Many years later, *Rav* Eliyahu Meir remarked, “My father was correct. I was zealous in my display of grief.” The *Rosh Yeshivah* was known for his adherence to honesty. *Rav* Eliyahu would not sway one iota from the truth, regardless of the repercussions. He had strong opinions and was very critical of secular Zionism. A prominent rabbi once told him, that in America one must please his financial supporters. To be so critical of their secular beliefs might undermine his ability to sustain the *yeshivah*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* answered, “My revered father told me that I do not have to be a *Rosh Yeshivah*, but I do have to be an *ehrlicher Yid*, honest Jew.”

Integrity – whether in business, or in interpersonal relationships – is a Jewish standard of life. *Emes*, truth, is one of three *amudim*, pillars, upon which the world stands. This means that a lack of

honesty can weaken the world's support system. The *Yalkut Me'am Loez, Shemos*, states that it is because of the prevalence of falsehood among our people that we are still suffering from the miserable *galus*, exile. I am not even referring to outright, open lies, whereby one prevaricates for monetary or political gain. These are white lies, and lies that are expressed to fool or simply impress people. At the end of the day, a lie is a lie – regardless of its motivation, one who lies distances himself from Hashem. Indeed, this very idea is homiletically interpreted by **Rav Zushe, zl, m'Annipole**, into the *pasuk*, *Mi'dvar sheker tirchak*. He explains that one *mi'dvar sheker* – from a word of falsehood; *tirchak* – one becomes distanced from Hashem.

In his book, *Echoes of the Maggid*, Rabbi Paysach Krohn presents a few vignettes which demonstrate the level of honesty reached by our Torah leaders. One might ask why I present stories of Torah leaders; why not expound stories of “regular” people whose commitment to honesty is integral? It is to demonstrate that their sense of honesty remained uncompromised regardless of their distinction- unlike secular leadership whose commitment to integrity diminishes with their ascension up the ladder of prominence and power.

Rabbeinu Bachya writes (*Kad HaKemach*), “All those who maintain lives committed to honesty and integrity will have their prayers answered.” This is derived from the *pasuk* we say thrice daily in *Tefillas Ashrei*, *Karov Hashem l'chol korav, l'chol asher yikrahu b'emes*, “Hashem is close to all those who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him – *b'emes*, with truth.” This means Hashem listens to all those who can claim that they live their lives with integrity.

Three short vignettes which are inspiring and are especially significant when we take into account how great were these individuals and how incredibly important it was to them not to bend the truth – one iota. This in itself is a commentary on their illustrious nature.

The **Chazon Ish** would have a *minyan*, quorum of ten men, for *mincha*, afternoon service, every afternoon at his house. The *minyan* took place at 12:30 p.m. Once, they were short a tenth man. The clock was running. It was 12:45 before a tenth man to complete the *minyan* showed up. As they were beginning *tefillas ashrei*, the opening prayer of *Minchah*, the *Chazon Ish's* brother-in-law, *Horav Shmuel Greineman, zl*, turned to him and said, “I have a 1:00 p.m. meeting with someone. If I remain here for *Minchah*, I will be late for the meeting, thus keeping the person waiting. What should I do?”

The *Chazon Ish* gave a classic reply. “Coming late for a meeting is deceitful. An honest man must keep his appointments in a timely fashion. It is better that this *minyan* be adjourned today than you be involved in a *sheker*, falsehood.” When we come late to an appointment, we are not only sending a message to the other person that his feelings mean very little to us, we are also transgressing a Divine principle. In other words, we are acting inappropriately to Hashem, as well as to our fellow man.

A number of years ago, I quoted a frightening statement, from the *Bnei Yissachar*, **Horav Mendel**

m'Rimonov. Often quoted by the Manchester *Rosh Yeshivah*, **Horav Yehudah Zev Segal, zl**, who would observe the strange occurrence of young, sweet, innocent children, who, as they mature, somehow begin to stray from the Torah way. "It is because of *timtum ha'lev*, stuffed/numb heart, which is the result of *maachalos asuros*, eating forbidden food." How do observant children obtain forbidden food? He explains, "They eat food purchased with funds secured through dishonest dealings." In other words, a father makes a "deal." Someone loses money – someone benefits from his loss. He feeds his ill-gained profits to his children. They now become the losers. It is as simple as that.

Rav Segal was *naeh doresh, naeh mekayeim*, practiced what he preached. His life, among many other things, was a lesson in honesty. He was once traveling intercity by train. The conductor would come by and collect the fares and issue tickets to the passengers. *Rav Segal* commenced the trip in the second-class economy section, but later during the trip, moved to the first-class section which had many seats available. The passengers in his car redefined the nature of second-class. The noise was unbearable for a man attempting to concentrate on his learning.

Hoping the conductor would come through the first-class section and collect the added fare, the *Rosh Yeshivah* turned to his *sefer* and learned for the rest of the trip. When he reached his destination and realized that the conductor had not come by, he proceeded to the station master to pay the difference in price. Despite being told repeatedly that it was unnecessary, he insisted on paying the money. As the *Rosh Yeshivah* left the booth, the stationmaster exclaimed, "That man is one in a million!"

Someone once called **Horav Yaakov Kaminetzsky, zl**, and asked if he could call in sick for Purim so that he could spend the day with his family. "Surely it is more appropriate to spend *simchas Purim* with one's close family and friends than to be working in an office," he asked. *Rav Yaakov* replied that it is patently prohibited to call in sick if one is not sick. It is dishonest.