

Do not aggrieve one another. (25:14)

The Torah details the prohibition against cheating a fellow Jew in business by overcharging. One should seek every avenue to help a fellow Jew – not to cheat him. What kind of person cheats his brother? This probably sounds like a naïve question. Obviously, one who has fallen so financially in arrears that his only way out is to take advantage of others who are unaware. What about *bitachon*, trust in Hashem? *Horav Yitzchak Yaakov Ruderman, zl*, explains that the answer is in the juxtaposition of the laws of *onaah*, cheating, upon the previous stated laws of *shemittah*, the seventh year rest period for the land.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *emunah*, faith in Hashem, is a prerequisite for carrying out the *mitzvah* of *shemittah*. Otherwise, how can a person just sit idly by and not plant his field? What will he eat? How will he feed his family? The Torah tells us not to worry. Hashem will bless the crops of the sixth year, so that it will suffice for the next two years. Likewise, one who cheats his fellow demonstrates by his actions that he has no faith in Hashem; therefore, he must cheat and steal.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*hakdamah*, preface, to *Shaar Ha'Bitachon*) explains that the *middah*, character trait, of *bitachon* leads one to *menuchas ha'nefesh*, peace of mind. The mind of one who does not have *bitachon* cannot possibly function properly. Furthermore, one cannot learn Torah. If the intellect is not free of worry then the Torah has no place to enter. The person thus denies himself the opportunity for spiritual growth. A mind that is constantly preoccupied with “deals,” that is busy calculating every possible avenue for “making a buck,” does not have much faith and trust in Hashem. Furthermore, as explained by *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, one who lacks faith and trust is incapable of forming deep and genuine relationships with others. He views every agreement as something one makes for the sake of convenience, and he is always on guard against changes, which will indicate a parting of the ways from partners involved in previous deeds.

A person who realizes that his *parnassah*, livelihood, is decreed from Heaven Above lives a serene life. It will either come, or it will not. There is nothing he can do about it but pray. One who lies and cheats in order to “supplement” his earning is a *kofer*, denier of Hashem. It is as simple as that. *Horav Yechiel Michel Gordon, zl*, (*Rosh Yeshivas Lomza*) was wont to say, “For whom shall I have greater compassion: the thief or his victim? I would say the thief. For the victim is dealing with a Heavenly edict (that he now lose his money). The edict will change and, next time, Hashem will decree that he have money. His situation is temporary, and there is nothing that he could have done to alter it. The thief, however, is in serious shape. If this money is not his (by decree), then he has gained nothing by stealing, since the money he has in his possession is not “rightfully” (Heavenly mandated) his. If, on the other hand, the money is “his,” then he would have rightfully received it through another appropriate Heavenly channel. By stealing money which Hashem would have given him anyway, he is acquiring *Gehinnom*, punishment in Purgatory, for himself for no “reason” (rather for no gain, since the money that he stole would have eventually made it into his possession through kosher means).”

Our *gedolim*, Torah giants, who understood the meaning of *bitachon* in Hashem lived joyously, despite not knowing from whence the next dollar/*shekel* would come. They were acutely aware – and totally believed – that Hashem would provide for their needs. In fact, any infringement on this relationship with the Almighty caused them angst. They were serene and calm, knowing that He was taking care of everything.

The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, had a *kollel* in Yerushalayim in which he learned with some of the city's greatest scholars. The future *Roshei Yeshivah* were primarily students of his. Every *erev Rosh Chodesh*, he gave each member of the *kollel* a stipend. If the money was readily available, he paid without problem. If he did not have it, he borrowed it, and later, when he raised the money, he paid it back. There was no such thing as not paying on time. He saw to it that his scholars received their stipend in a timely fashion.

One *erev Rosh Chodesh*, he had no money; neither did he have anyone from whom to borrow. It was a dire situation. One of his students remarked, "Would it not be wonderful if a wealthy Jew from London would visit and give the *Rosh Yeshivah* a check for \$5000 that would cover expenses for next six months? The *Rosh Yeshivah* would have no financial worries and could learn stress-free."

The *Brisker Rav* replied that, had this occurred, he would not have taken the money from the philanthropist: "I am not selling my *bitachon* in Hashem for \$5000. Every *erev Rosh Chodesh*, I have the 'opportunity' to turn to Hashem in prayer, asking Him to alleviate my concerns, to help me cover my budget. If I would have the money, I would have no reason to pray for budgetary concerns. I would not give that up!"

The legendary *Mashgiach* of Mir and Ponevez, *Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl*, was a serious person. His mind was always either engrossed in learning or preoccupied with Heavenly matters. His *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, was always noticeable and manifest on his countenance. Smiling and joviality were not expressions one expected to see on his face. Thus, it startled *Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, when he visited *Rav Chatzkel* (as he was referred to lovingly) to see the *Mashgiach* with a broad smile on his face.

Seeing the startled look on *Rav Sholom's* face, the *Mashgiach* took him by the hand and said, "Shortly after I married, life was difficult from an economic standpoint. We had no money; the cupboard was bare. I accepted a position from which I earned a monthly stipend. This provided us with funds, but I was spiritually miserable. Having money on a regular basis caused me to diminish my closeness with Hashem. Then war broke out. What a blessing! No more position; no more money. I lived together with Hashem. I felt His Presence in my life. The war ended, and I once again became a *mashgiach* with a regular salary. This cast a pall over my relationship with Hashem. Now, *Baruch Hashem*, it has been eight months since the *Ponevezer Rav* told me that he has no money to pay salaries. I am back with Hashem! Is there any greater sweetness than that? How could I not smile!"

