

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



PARSHAS
VAYECHI

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
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A PROBLEM OF PALTRY PROMISES

Sadly, *Parshas Vayechi* records the passing of Yaakov Avinu, the last of our forefathers. Before he died, Yaakov had Yosef vow to bury him in *Eretz Yisrael*. Now it was time for Yosef to make good on that promise. He approached Pharaoh with his request, and explained that he made a promise to his father and meant to keep it.¹

Pharaoh, in response, dismissed Yosef's obligation, stating that he should renege on his promise through the process of *sheilas chacham*.² However, Yosef was undeterred, and reminded Pharaoh of another promise Yosef had made.

When Yosef and Pharaoh met for the first time, they conversed in all the known languages. However, when Yosef challenged Pharaoh to speak in *Lashon HaKodesh*, Pharaoh was at a loss. Subsequently, Pharaoh had Yosef promise that he would not reveal this shortcoming to anyone.

"If I ask a *chacham* regarding the promise I made to my father," reasoned Yosef, "why would I not also ask about the promise I made to you?" Pharaoh, understanding Yosef's implication, withdrew his protest, and allowed Yaakov to be buried in Israel.³

The Steipler⁴ (R' Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, 1899–1985) points out Yosef's audacity — he was threatening the most powerful man in the world! Was he not afraid?

The Steipler explains that Yosef was not threatening Pharaoh at all. Rather, Yosef was highlighting a simple facet of human behaviour. Simply put, there is no barrier holding a person back from violating his word, even if it was sworn testimony with all the assurances in the world. Therefore, the most important factor in keeping any promise is the individual and their relationship to the truth.

Accordingly, Yosef explained, if he was released from his vow to his father, it would impact his reverence for the truth, and the importance of keeping one's word. That impact may very well carry over to other pledges that Yosef made, and one day, he may reveal Pharaoh's secret, simply because of his carefree attitude towards keeping one's word.

Our word is our word, and once solemnly given, should be adhered to as best as one can. For even if one has the best and most reasonable excuses, once one's word is broken, the truth may become just another 'nice thing.'

1 *Bereishis* 50:5-6

2 Under certain conditions, a qualified Torah authority may release one from a vow.

3 *Sotah* 36b

4 *Birchas Peretz, Parshas Vayechi*

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Becoming more honest is a noble goal, but challenging. Falsehoods are generally said on the spur of the moment, and are not necessarily calculated. Once one realizes what they've said, it's already out!

Instead of avoiding lies, one suggestion may be to focus on speaking the truth. It is very natural in common parlance to exaggerate or estimate. When asked the time, a typical response may be to estimate to the nearest five minutes.

However, if one wants to strengthen their feelings towards the truth, they can choose a period of time in which they commit to speaking only the absolute truth.¹ In the example above, when asked the time, the response would include the exact minute.

By having a set time in which truth takes priority, one will instil into and inspire oneself with a healthy respect for the truth and what it means to be truthful. These feelings can then carry over to other parts of the day, strengthening one's feelings for the importance of speaking the truth.

1 Heard from R' Binyomin Luban, quoting R' Bentzion Bruk, *Rosh HaYeshiva* Yeshivas Novardok, Israel

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Study at least 15 minutes from a Mussar Sefer every day. Through Mussar, one comes to Cheshbon HaNefesh, and even a modest amount of Cheshbon HaNefesh saves a person from much hardship. - Excerpt from R' Schachna Kolodetzky zt"l's ethical will to his children.

HONESTY AND EVASION

Simcha Hamm* always had a thing for numbers, how they always fit so neatly with each other, how mathematical equations worked in simple yet wondrous ways. Ever since he was little, he liked counting and sorting. And so it was no surprise that he became an accountant, though he wasn't your typical pencil pusher.

Sam, as he was known to his clients, was highly specialized in forensic accounting. He was brought in to untangle complicated messes and had testified in court on multiple occasions. However, he still did the standard accounting duties for his clients, figuring their taxes and how to save as much money as possible. His clients were generally quite well-to-do, and they paid him handsomely for his efforts.

One such client was Mr. Gerald Briggs, a serial entrepreneur who had started and sold multiple companies. Mr. Briggs was not just a lucrative client, but he was quite valuable to know professionally. If Mr. Briggs liked you, his recommendation would put you on the top of everyone's list.

Simcha always met with his clients in person after completing their taxes. They expected that level of personal involvement, and it was always easier to communicate in this fashion than over the phone or through email. So, one cold wintry morning, Simcha made his way to Gerald Briggs' office.

After being allowed in by the secretary, Simcha sat down across from his client, with a massive oak desk between them. Simcha pulled out a folder from his attaché case, handed it over and proceeded to explain each line, why certain expenses were included, and why certain deductions were allowed. Forty-five minutes later, Mr. Briggs sat back and smiled. "Well done, you've done an excellent job, and explained it quite well. But here's what I'd like you to do for me."

Leaning over and grabbing a pen from the leather pen stand, he continued, "Sam, take this pen. I'm going to walk out of this office for a little break, I'll be back in about twenty minutes. When I am back, I want you to put a different, and much lower number on these tax forms. Understood?"

Simcha sat there in shock. He knew exactly what was being asked of him, and he knew that we would not do it.

"I'm sorry Mr. Briggs. I cannot do that."

"Sam, we both know that you will never be caught! With your forensic knowledge, you'll be able to hide whatever magic you pull off. And if you don't agree, we both know that you will lose the connections I can provide for you."

Simcha stood up and turned to leave. "I am not afraid of losing any connections, Mr. Briggs. I am afraid of losing my integrity."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- If one is careful to avoid even thinking falsehoods, Hashem will act according to that person's will.¹
- Even if one lies for a good cause, they are still accustoming themselves to spreading falsehoods.²

¹ *Orchos Tzadikim*, Gate of Truth

² *Yevamos* 63b

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