

A Taste of Torah

Blinded Vision

By Rabbi Mordechai Mandel

Moshe said, "So said Hashem 'At about midnight I shall go out in the midst of Egypt. Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die...(Bo 11:45)'"

Rashi hones in on the word "about," pointing out that Moshe actually altered Hashem's statement. While Hashem had told Moshe, "Tell them that the plague will occur at [exactly] midnight," Moshe changed the statement to "... at about midnight." Moshe had a reason for doing so. He feared that the plague might occur a moment before or a moment after the astrologers' (mis)calculation of midnight. Had he said "...at exactly midnight," the astrologers would call Moshe a fraud for predicting the wrong time. Moshe therefore took precautions by replacing the word "exactly" with "about."

This is quite perplexing. Picture this. The Egyptians had just experienced nine plagues, one after another, each

one clearly G-d sent. They were just about to experience the grand finale; all the firstborns, including Pharaoh, were to die. One would be hard pressed to let this pass as a coincidence. Yet Moshe worried that if the final plague did not happen at the exact moment it was called to happen, the Egyptians would disqualify the entire event as not coming from G-d. And furthermore, they would sooner assume that Moshe, and not they themselves, was off in his timing!

Understanding the "nature of the beast" is apparently the answer here. It is possible for the human being to be "blind" and ignore the most blatant and open experiences, chalking them up as sheer "coincidences." This is the power of the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination), to make the Hand of Hashem seem to be mere happenstance. The realization of this ability should motivate us to have an acute awareness of possible pitfalls as we continue our ongoing battle with our own Yetzer Hara.

Ask the Rabbi

It's Almost True

From: Carson Hughes

Dear Rabbi,

Is a "white lie" a sin? This question was raised in our Sunday School class by a 7th grade student.

Dear Carson Hughes,

A "white lie" - a falsehood which

does not cause any harm - is not as serious as cheating or being dishonest in business, but it is still prohibited. Rabbi Yona Girundi in his classic "The Gates of Repentance" enumerates nine different levels of falsifying, beginning with dishonesty in crime and monetary matters and ending with a few types of "white lie." I very highly recommend the study of this passage.

In limited cases, lying is permitted;

Stories For The Soul

Against All Odds

While the Jews in Egypt could have feared Egyptian wrath when sacrificing the Egyptian diety (the lamb, as the Korban Pesach), they exhibited true dedication in fulfilling Hashem's will, regardless of the cost.

Jack and Miriam Stein, a young couple in New York, bought a house that had belonged to an elderly woman, whose son had inherited the house. The house was filled with knicknacks and old furniture, but the owner chose to sell it to them 'as is', leaving the mess and repairs to Jack and Miriam.

The new house was not far from their old home, so Miriam had her children play in the new house, while she went back and forth between the two, bringing things over and cleaning up.

One day, Miriam noticed her young daughter wearing a pearl necklace. Upon inquiry, Miriam was told that it had been found in a 'toy box' in the new house. When the little girl showed the toy box to her mother, Miriam discovered that rather than a toy box, the necklace had come from a strong box filled with jewelry and other valuables that totaled a quarter of a million dollars in value.

While family and friends were convinced that the treasure was included in the house 'as is', Jack wanted to rest assured that he was not keeping anything that did not belong to him. He went to ask the advice of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the leading halachic authority of the time.

Rabbi Feinstein ruled that he must return the money, and that is exactly what Jack did. The owner was stunned at Jack's honesty and speechless with gratitude.

There was a bit of irony here

Kollel Happenings

CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., JAN. 10

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., Jan. 10, at 12:30 p.m. at Colorado Capital Bank, 55 Madison Ave. The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at rya@denverkollel



BLOOD, BOILS & BEYOND AT JAN. 11 BAIS YAAKOV FOR ADULTS

"Blood, Boils and Beyond," a Bais Yaakov for Adults class for women, will take place on Tues., Jan 11. The class, led by Mrs. Avigail Steinharter, will be held at Aish Ahavas Yisroel, and will take a closer look at the Ten Plagues of Egypt. Cost is \$5 per class or \$25 for all six upcoming classes. To RSVP, contact Mrs. Esti Schwab at 303-668-1878 or estischwab@denverkollel.org



FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., JAN. 16 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on Jan. 16 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues

Borrowing Without Permission Part IV

There are a number of instances where it is permissible to borrow another's item without express permission.

An item which people normally don't mind if it is used because there is little possibility of its being damaged, such as a coat hanger, chair, or washing cup, may be used without permission.

Obviously, one may not use it at a time when the owner may want to use

it.

Furthermore, if one knows that this particular owner may object to the use of such an item, for whatever reason, he may not use it.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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for instance, where it will bring peace between people. Moshe's brother Aharon is praised for the way he made peace between quarreling parties: Aharon would approach one of the people and say, "The other person sent me to tell you that he apologizes and is truly sorry for the way he acted towards you." Then he would go to the other person and say the same thing. The next time the two people met on the street, they would ask each other for forgiveness.

Even when it is permitted to lie, one should avoid it if possible, as illustrated by the following incident in the Talmud. The wife of the great Talmudic sage Rav always did the opposite of what

he requested. If Rav asked for lentils, she made beans; if he asked for beans, she made lentils. When Rav's son, Chiya, grew up, he tried to correct the situation. Chiya told his mother the opposite of what his father wanted, thereby tricking her into making the correct food. Rav, realizing what Chiya had done, chastised him by quoting the verse: "They have taught their tongues to speak falsehood." Rav meant that a person should avoid lying even where it is permitted, lest he become accustomed to lying and lose his integrity.

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Stories for the Soul

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because a few years prior, Jack had requested from Reb Moshe a blessing for success in his Torah learning. Reb Moshe, who knew Jack from the neighborhood, replied, "You don't need a bracha for Torah, because you are already a Torah scholar; what you need is a bracha for livelihood." Now, Reb Moshe, who had given him a bracha for parnassa, was ordering him to give up this fortune.

Jack went back on with his life. He never spoke of this incident, but

enough people knew about it that word of Jack's exemplary integrity spread like wildfire both around the neighborhood and throughout the New York business community. People wanted to do business with him and he prospered. The event that had seemed to pull chances of wealth from before Jack's eyes turned out to be the catalyst for Jack's financial success.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman