

DEALING HONESTLY

106

לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי ש"י בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

THE GREATNESS OF THIS MITZVAH

One Yid, who was very occupied with his business throughout the entire week, only had *Shabbos* to devote himself to learning *Torah*. Feeling very bad about this, he asked a *chochom* what he could do that would be equivalent to all other *mitzvos* and will bring him to *Olam Haboh*. The *chochom* answered, "Being that you are a businessman, make sure to deal honestly with both *Yidden* and *goyim*, tilt the scale to benefit your customer, and always do your business dealings with a smile." The *chochom* concluded, "If you do so, may my portion in *Olam Haboh* be like yours."

(ספר חסידים אות שצה)

When a person passes on to the next world, the first question the *Beis Din* on high will ask him is, 'Did you deal honestly in business?'

(שבת לא ע"א)

The *Torah* relates how Lavan treated Yaakov Avinu, tricking him countless times. Nevertheless, Yaakov Avinu remained honest with him, never taking anything he was not entitled to. He watched over Lavan's sheep in the sweltering heat and bitter cold, and replaced any lost sheep, even when it was entirely not his fault.

(ויצא לא, לב-ג)

At the time of the *histalkus* of the Rebbe Maharash, the Rebbe Rashab was only 22 years old. Years later, after accepting the *nesius*, he said, "The Mittlerer Rebbe writes that doing business sincerely is greater than learning *Torah l'shma*, surely then it is more difficult. Therefore, I was afraid to accept this upon myself, and since one has to make a *keili* for his livelihood, I chose the *nesius* instead."

(שמועות וסיפורים ח"א ע' 78)

The *tzaddik* Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov said: Just as non-kosher food corrupts a Yid's mind and heart, so too, food bought with dishonest money has a negative effect on all those who benefit from it.

(חמשה מאמרות)

BRINGS SUCCESS

The *Torah* promises that if a person performs his dealings honestly, he will gain more money for business, but if a person is dishonest he will lose his money. Furthermore, one who deals honestly will be rewarded even for business he did not do, for had he done so, he would have surely been honest.

(ויקרא רבה טו,ז, ס' חסידים אות תתרס"ב)

Once, as Eliyahu Hanavi was walking on his way, a man approached him and began asking many questions in *Torah*. Eliyahu Hanavi answered each one, and the man then related the following:

"A goy once came to my home to buy a large amount of dates. I only had a small measuring container, and therefore needed to measure small amounts and then total all the measurements together. Because of this, and the fact that my house was dark, I miscalculated and gave the goy less than I was supposed to. Later, I used the money to buy a jug of oil, and put it in the same place where I had sold the dates. A short while later, the jug broke, and all the oil spilled out."

Eliyahu Hanavi explained to the man that the *Torah* forbids stealing from a *goy*, just as it forbids stealing from a *Yid*.

(תנא דבי אליהו פרק טו)

Two business partners went to the *tzaddik* Reb Meir of Premishlan to ask for a *bracha* regarding their business venture. "Have you written out your partnership contract?" the *tzaddik* asked. "No," they said. Reb Meir took out a piece of paper and wrote the letters: *Aleph, Beis, Gimmel, Daled*, and then handed the sheet to the businessmen.

Seeing their confusion, he explained, "In these four letters, the secret to success is hidden. Each one is an initial: *Aleph* – *emunah*, *Beis* – *bracha*, *Gimmel* – *g'neiva*, and *Daled* – *dalus*. If your transactions are honest, then *bracha* will come upon them; if you cheat, then you can expect to become poor."

(סיפורי חסידים זוין תורה ע' 237)

In *Shulchan Aruch*, it is *paskened* that it is forbidden to mislead another (*Yid* or *goy*) in business dealings, even when it involves a very small amount. If a customer is expecting a certain product, it is forbidden to sell him something of lesser quality. One is not allowed to polish a product so it appear to be of superior quality.

A worker must work faithfully, doing his job with utmost diligence. If one gives his word to make a deal, he should keep it ("הן צדק") and a *yirei shamayim* should even keep a decision he made in thought! ("ודובר אמת בלבבו")

(שו"ע אדמו"ר הזקן בכ"מ בחו"מ, ובאו"ח סי' קנ"ו)

The *Amora* Rav Safra had an item for sale. One day while reciting *krias shma*, someone approached him and offered to buy it for a certain price. Rav Safra did not respond, and the man thought that he wanted more money, and quoted a larger figure. When Rav Safra finished, he sold it to man at the first price, since in his mind he had

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agreed to that offer.

(מכות כד ע"א ברש"י)

Shlomo Hamelech writes, "Treasures of wickedness will not avail, but *tzedakah* will rescue from death." The Me'iri explains this to mean that money acquired in a dishonest manner will not bring benefit to a person; only money acquired in righteous fashion will do one good.

Another explanation: *Tzedakah* given from dishonest money will bring no benefit, as it will go to undeserving recipients. However *tzedakah* given from righteously earned money, will reach sincere causes and thereby protect the giver from death.

(משלי י, ב, מאירי שם, שבט מיהודה שם)

MAKING A KIDDUSH HASHEM

Chazal explain that *mitzvah* of loving Hashem requires that a Yid should act in a way that makes Hashem beloved by others. When a person learns *Torah* and deals honestly in business, people will say, "How great is he who learns *Torah*; how wonderful are his ways! Woe to one who does not learn *Torah*! We promise that we will learn and teach our children *Torah* as well." But when *chas v'shalom*, a person who learns *Torah* does not act honestly, people will say the opposite, causing a *chillul Hashem*.

(תנא דבי אליהו פרק כ"א)

The Rebbe explained that dealing honestly means going even beyond the requirement of *halacha*. One should do so even when dealing with *goyim*, thus creating a *kiddush Hashem*.

(תו"מ תשמ"ד ח"ב ע" 126)

The *tanna*, Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach, sold flax and would carry it himself from place to place, so his *talmidim* offered to buy him a donkey to ease his work. They went to the marketplace and bought a donkey from an Arab merchant. When they returned home, they noticed that the merchant had accidentally left an expensive jewel hanging on the donkey's neck. Excitedly, they came to Rabbi Shimon, telling him that Hashem had sent a *bracha* and he would no longer have to work. Rabbi Shimon asked, "Did the owner know about it?" "No" they replied. "If so, you must return it immediately, for he sold you a donkey and not a jewel." When the *goy* received the gem, he exclaimed with admiration, "Blessed is the G-d of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach."

(דברים רבה ג, ב, בשילוב ירושלמי בבא מציעא פ"ב ה"ה)

AT ALL COSTS

King Alexander the Great once visited the King of Katzia to observe his country's customs and rules. Just then, two people were admitted to have their judgment rendered by the king. "My master, the King!" called out the plaintiff. "I bought a desolate piece of land from this man here, dug it up, and discovered a buried treasure. So I told him to take the treasure; I bought a ruin and not a treasure!" "Just as you are afraid of getting punished for stealing, so am I!" responded the other. "I sold the ruin to you, including everything in it, from the depths of the earth, until the sky!"

The king asked one man if he has a son, and the other, if he has a daughter. He advised that their children get married and the treasure be given to the new couple. King Alexander looked on in amazement. "Didn't I judge well?" queried the King of Katzia. "Sure! But if I would've been the arbitrator, I would've killed them both, and taken the treasure for the kingdom's coffers..."

The King of Katzia then asked, "Does the sun shine in your country?" "Yes," King Alexander replied. "Does it rain?" He nodded affirmatively. "Do you have animals?" "Yes," he said. "Well then, the sun shines and the rain falls in merit of those animals," the King of Katzia declared.

(ויקרא רבה כז, א)

Reb Boruch (the Alter Rebbe's father), at fourteen years of age, left his hometown Vitebsk, and traveled through many villages. Arriving in Dobromysl, he settled down to learn in the *beis medrash*. One day, a man came over to him and introduced himself, "My name is Eliezer Reuven, and I have a smithy on the outskirts of town. I live nearby, and I could use some help, so if you would care for such a job, I would provide you with food and drink and a place to sleep." Baruch was overjoyed, for this was exactly what he had wanted. He was prepared to do the hardest labor as long as he would earn his own piece of bread, without having to rely on anyone's *tzedakah*. Baruch agreed, but asked to be paid with money, so he would not have to eat and sleep in the homes of strangers.

Baruch soon arrived at the smithy and worked conscientiously throughout the day, and in the evening, he would go to the *beis medrash* to learn. He now had the opportunity to observe Eliezer Reuven and began to feel a great respect for him. All day, as the smith stood hammering the red-hot iron, he would recite *Tehillim* by heart, *kapitel* after *kapitel*.

The smith's customers were the peasants of the surrounding villages, who would bring their wagons and tools for fixing. Baruch noticed the exceptional honesty and devotion with which Eliezer Reuven treated his customers, never overcharging them even a fraction of a cent. Once, Baruch noticed something which made a deep impression on him. A peasant from a nearby village had brought his horse to the smith for shoeing and at the same time to have the wheel of his wagon fixed. Another peasant had brought his horse to have four new shoes put on. When the time came to ask for the money, Eliezer Reuven charged the second peasant the amount he should have charged the first one, overcharging him six groshen.

Both peasants had already left when Eliezer Reuven realized his mistake. He was so upset about it that, despite the smallness of the overcharge, he immediately set off on foot to the village where this peasant lived (about three miles away) to give him back the overcharged amount. Baruch was astounded. He had never seen such meticulousness on the part of an ordinary person. He asked the smith if he really thought it had been worthwhile to walk the six mile distance (there and back) for a matter of six groshen. Eliezer Reuven replied, "About the people who lived before the *mabul*, it is written that they were so rotten, they were not even bothered when robbing from someone less than a *prutah* (small coin). Do you want me to behave even worse than the wicked people of that generation and rob a man of six groshen?"

(ספר הזכרונות ח"א ע' 75)

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