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On the Parsha

The Olah sacrifice is one of the sacrifices in this week's Parsha that can achieve atonement on the part of the person who brings it. The Olah sacrifice can be brought using a Kosher male domesticated animal. The Midrash explains why it must be brought using a domesticated animal (a Behaima) and not brought using a non-domesticated animal (a Chaya).

The explanation is that a domesticated animal is fed by its master and is therefore given food that the owner wants to give him. A non-domesticated animal, such as a deer, eats from wherever it can obtain its food which can include vegetation that is ownerless, such as in a forest, or vegetation that is owned, such as in someone's backyard. A deer eating vegetation from someone's back yard would presumably be eating without the owner's permission and would be considered "stealing". Atonement is something that must be pure and free of any tinge of sin. Accordingly, the Olah sacrifice which achieves atonement on one's behalf, must be free of all impurities and any form of corruption which would include the figurative theft discussed above. Therefore, the Olah sacrifice may not be brought using a non-domesticated animal.

The Torah also allows the Olah sacrifice to come from a Kosher bird if the person who brings the Korban is poor and cannot afford the requisite domesticated animal. The Midrash notes further that if one was to bring a bird, its innards were not to be offered as part of the sacrifice, while if one was to bring the domesticated animal, the innards would be offered. The reason for this is that the innards of a bird presumably benefited from stolen food as birds that were brought for the Olah sacrifice were typically wild and trapped by the owner soon before bringing them as a sacrifice. Since they were wild and ate wherever they could find food, they presumably ate from another's food source without permission which would be considered "stealing". As we said above, a sacrifice that brings atonement must be free of all impurities and any form of corruption - even the figurative theft discussed here.

Chizuk - Inspiration

The Chazon Ish (Igros Vol. III #92) writes that respecting the advice of the Sages on matters of Kashrus and other areas of Halacha while not respecting their advice on everyday issues and general life amounts to apostasy (Kefira). As an example, a Yeshiva Mashgiach once applied the verse, "Do not stir from the matter of which they [the Torah authorities] tell you neither to the right nor to the left" to include matters of politics. We must follow the Torah's perspectives alone and not let ourselves be affected by politicians or politics of the "right" or of the "left".

As an example, the sophists in ancient Greece, represented the political perspectives of ancient world Conservatism which stated that lying or dissembling is an absolute necessity for leaders and politicians and anyone else who wishes to succeed. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant who represented the political perspective of Liberalism, stated that lying is always wrong and immoral and should never be done even to save a life. Therefore, if a "murderer at the door" asks where someone is hiding, you must answer him truthfully because lying is always immoral. The fallacies of the opinions above are readily apparent.

The Torah, on the other hand, is immutable truth and the Sages who represent Torah provide us with specific balanced guidance on how to act depending on the circumstances. They generally advise us to tell the truth, but there are notable exceptions. When Avrohom Avinu travelled with Sarah Imeinu to Egypt to escape the famine, he appropriately told the Egyptians that Sarah was his sister rather than his wife so they would not kill him before taking her to Pharaoh. During the Holocaust, Rav Michel Dov Ber Weissmandel ZT"l and many others, forged papers to procure visas enabling many Jews to flee the Nazi occupation. Rebbitzin Rischel Kotler A"H, "married" several Yeshiva students during the Holocaust in order to provide them with papers that would ultimately save their lives.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I work for a school in a wealthy community. A wealthy individual bought a house in the area and wanted to enroll his children in the school. My boss told me to tell the wealthy individual that there is no room for his children and that he must pay for another classroom to be built if he wishes to enroll his children. I know that this is a lie. There is plenty of room to accommodate his children. How should I proceed?

ANSWER: Regarding the verse in Parashas Mishpatim (Shmos 23:7) “Midvar Sheker Tirchak” — stay away from a false matter, there is a debate as to how we are to understand this charge. The Chofetz Chaim rules that with this verse, the Torah means to prohibit one from lying. This is in accordance with the view of some Rishonim. Other Rishonim believe that with this verse, the Torah means to provide one with good advice – it is not advisable to lie, but the Torah does not mean to prohibit one from doing so. A third opinion believes that the Torah means to prohibit one from lying but only in the context that the verse was stated in. Since the verse was referring to a judge during his deliberations, the Torah is saying that a judge is prohibited from lying when adjudicating the law. Generally speaking, the view of the Chofetz Chaim is the view that we follow and therefore, in accordance with his opinion, it is a general Torah prohibition to lie.

Under pressing circumstances, some authorities may consider the other opinions and rule that one may consider a lie as not being prohibited by the Torah, however in your case, there is the additional component of actual theft, as a lie is being used to elicit money unduly from the wealthy parent. He would be donating money under the false pretense that the school needs funds to build an extra room so he may enroll his children. This is actual theft and the Torah absolutely forbids any act of theft — even in a case such as yours, where you are not stealing but rather enabling a theft by relaying the falsehood of your boss to the wealthy parent.

Further, since you are enabling a theft, there are also serious questions and debates on whether the prohibition of “Lifnei Iver Lo Titen Michshol” – do not put a stumbling block before the blind, would apply.

You should tell your boss that you will not lie and that your boss will have to tell the wealthy parent the message himself. If you are concerned that your boss will fire you if you say this to him, then you still may not lie as you may not illicitly take money from someone else under any circumstances. Instead, you may choose your words carefully and tell the wealthy parent that your boss, “Told me to tell you that there is no room for your children unless you donate for an additional classroom.”

Parenthetically, the Shulchan Aruch rules that a charity collector (Gabbai Tzedakah) who collects Tzedakah from someone who cannot afford it by pressuring him and guiltting him into doing so, is also in violation of theft.

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the Chofetz Chaim’s Sefas Tamim with the start of the fifth chapter.

“In this chapter there is an explanation of two obvious and clear reasons that drive man to steal and extort.

The first reason is maintaining a high standard of living and in particular, a standard beyond one’s means. Even those people who have the material means for a lavish lifestyle must minimize luxuries for the following reasons:

- A. Circumstances in life can turn around, especially in our times;
- B. An opulent lifestyle inevitably produces arrogance and the enticement of the Yetzer Hara;
- C. It causes other people with lesser means to be envious of them and copy their lifestyle and in so doing, to live beyond their means. They in turn, will resort to extortion, cheating and stealing, and they will not pay their debts; and
- D. It causes suffering and shame to poor families.

The second reason is a lack of a correct understanding of the laws of theft, cheating, paying salaries etc. Therefore, in any cases of uncertainty in a monetary issue involving transactions with his friend, one should not assume any leniencies for himself, but rather he must pose the question to a Torah scholar to resolve.”