

Kinder Torah[®]

Tazria

בס"ד

Can We Believe Your Oath?

One day in Beis Din . . .

"I found this tallis and it's all mine!"
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"Gentlemen, please stop fighting over the tallis. You must each take a shevuah (oath), and then we will divide the tallis and give you each half."

"What is the purpose of the oath?"

"To keep people honest. Without the oath, anyone can go and grab his friend's tallis and claim that it is his. Beis Din would have to divide it and give him half."

"But if the man is suspected of being a thief, he is dishonest. How can we believe his oath?"

The question is:

Can we believe the oath of a suspected thief?

The answer is:

The Gemora discusses this subject in Bava Metziah 5b and 6a. Someone who is truly a thief is not believed to take an oath. However, in our case we have a zechus for the man. The one who grabbed the tallis was uncertain if the owner of the tallis owed him money from an old loan. Therefore, his grabbing of the tallis was way of collecting the questionable loan. However, the Gemora asks, "If he will grab a tallis for collection of a loan that he is unsure of, he will also swear for the same reason." The Gemora answers that he will grab, but he will not swear. What is the difference? If he is wrong, he can always give the money back. However, he can never take back the words of the oath.

This puzzle and answer is for learning and discussion purposes only. Do not rely upon it for psak halacha! Consult a Rav to determine the correct halachic ruling.

Guard Your Mitzvos

"Thank you for asking me to come with you to the bank, Imma."
"The pleasure is all mine, Avi."
"What will we be doing at the bank today, Imma?"
"We must put something into the safe-deposit box, Avi."
"This will be a new experience for me."

Avi and his mother arrive at the bank. They walk over to the vault which houses the safe-deposit boxes, and approach the security guard.

"Yes, how may I help you, ma'am."

"I would like access to my safe-deposit box, sir."

"Sure thing, ma'am. May I see your key,

please?"

Avi's mother shows the security guard her key. He takes note of the number, and walks over to the vault. He first unlocks the iron gate which surrounds the vault. He opens the gate, enters, and approaches the combination lock. He quickly turns the combination, and in a matter of seconds, the vault is unlocked. The huge two-foot thick stainless steel security door swings open. Inside the vault are rows and rows of safe-deposit boxes, each one locked with two locks. He takes Avi's mother's key, along with his own, unlocks the locks, slides out the steel box, and hands it to her.

"Here you are, ma'am."

"Thank you, sir. I will only be a minute."

"Take as much time as you like, ma'am. There is a private booth over there for you to sit down."

Avi and his mother go into the booth.

"What do people keep in these boxes, Imma?"

"Valuables, Avi, such as gold, silver, gems, cash, stocks, and irreplaceable documents."

"I have never seen such high security, Imma."

"Yes, people are concerned about their valuables, Avi."

"I know that this may sound silly, Imma, but what is more precious, gems or mitzvos?"

"One mitzvah is worth more than all of the money in the world, Avi. We receive reward for mitzvos in Olam Habba (the World to Come). Even the smallest pleasure of reward over there is greater than all of the pleasures of this world combined. Additionally, the delights of this world come and go. A rich person becomes poor, a healthy person becomes sick, good neighbors move out, and unpleasant ones move in. Everything here is temporary. However, the pleasures of Olam Habba are eternal."

"That is what I thought, Imma. Now I am puzzled. Who do people put so much effort into protecting their worldly possessions, yet they leave their mitzvos unguarded?"

"Now you have me confused, Avi. Since when do mitzvos need protection? No one can steal a mitzvah from you. The Torah that you learn is yours forever. The acts of chessed (kindness) that you perform always stay with you. Can anyone take away the kiddush that Abba made last Shabbos?"

"True. However, I believe that there is one exception, Imma. We learned a section of Chovos Halevavos today – Shaar Hachneeah, chapter seven, point three. He says something that is both astounding and frightening."

"I am anxious to hear, Avi."

"When a person speaks loshon hora about

someone else, the speaker loses some of his mitzvos, and the one being spoken about gains those mitzvos. Similarly, some aveiyros get transferred from the subject of the loshon hora to the speaker."

"That is very scary, Avi. A person can work very hard on fulfilling a mitzvah. Then, a few moments later, he says a few derogatory words about someone, and he loses the whole thing. In its place, he finds . . . an aveyra. Oy vey!"

"Imma, can you imagine someone who works hard his entire life, performing every mitzvah that he can. However, he is not careful with his speech. After 120 years, he goes to his judgment, expecting to see the scales tipped in his favor, full of mitzvos. Instead he is shocked to see only a few mitzvos. On the other hand, the side of aveiyros is heavily laden. 'What happened?' he asks. 'Something is wrong here. I never did all of these aveiyros! And where are all of my mitzvos?!? My Torah learning, my chessed ... what happened to them? What is going on here?!?'"

"What terrible regret a person must feel. Oy va voy! Avi, you should know that the same Chovos Halevavos describes the reaction of a tsaddik to the news that someone had spoken loshon hora about him."

"What did he do, Imma?"

"He sent the speaker a basket full of delicacies and treats. Along with it he attached a note. 'I received the present that you sent me. You gave me a portion of the eternal merits that you have earned. Please allow me to express my gratitude with this humble gift.'"

"That sounds funny, but it is true. I have learned a valuable lesson here at the bank, Imma. I must protect my priceless mitzvos. I must use the best security guard – shmiras haloshon."

Kinderlach . . .

Our mitzvos are the most valuable thing that we own. We must safeguard them! What shall we do, lock them up? Even the strongest safe is not safe. A few words of loshon hora is like a major break-in. The safe is blown open and you lose the mitzvos. They get stolen and transferred to the one whom you spoke about. Kinderlach, our mitzvos need maximum security – shmiras haloshon – guarding our speech. Parashas Tazria is all about the terrible diseases that come from speaking loshon hora. We now know about another punishment for this aveyra. You lose the eternal reward for your mitzvos. Guard your mitzvos, kinderlach! How? By guarding your tongue! Don't settle for anything less than maximum security – total shmiras haloshon.



