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Shaarei Ezra

שערי עזרא

Parshat Toldot

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THE PRICE OF WORDS: FORCED TO SPEAK, TRUE TO FAITH

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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In the horrific riots in Amsterdam, there were incidents where terrorists forced Israeli boys to shout "Free Palestine." Two contrasting responses were recorded: one boy complied, while another refused. Today, we examine the Torah's perspective on how one should act in such situations.

The halacha (y.d. 157, 2) rules that one may not declare that they worship idols, even to save their life. The reason is that by making such a statement, one gives verbal admission to something fundamentally prohibited, which constitutes a denial of Hashem and violates the essence of Jewish faith.

The Radbaz (4, 123) addressed the following question: if a person is coerced by Muslims to verbally accept their faith, must they comply? Islam, being monotheistic and devoid of idol worship, complicates the discussion. On one hand, the principle of ya'avur v'al yehareg (transgress and do not be killed) allows one to violate most Torah prohibitions under duress, except for the three cardinal sins—idolatry, murder, and illicit relationships—where one must choose death over transgression. Based on this, one might argue that compliance is permissible since Islam does not constitute idolatry. On the other hand, one could argue that making such a declaration, even under coercion, might carry implications of denying Jewish faith or endorsing another belief system, which could render it akin to a severe transgression. The question remains whether this situation demands self-sacrifice or permits compliance to avoid harm.

The Radbaz concludes, after a lengthy discussion, that while one may transgress most mitzvot (except the three cardinal sins) to save their life, one may not verbally declare an abandonment of Hashem's religion for another. By stating a belief in Islam under coercion, one violates the very essence of faith in Hashem's religion. This, the Radbaz explains, is a transgression so fundamental that it requires self-

sacrifice, as it undermines the core of Jewish belief and loyalty to Hashem.

In addition, although we follow the opinion of the Rambam and Rashba, who maintain that Islam is not considered avoda zara (idol worship), there are a few rishonim who disagreed, arguing that it is. This includes the Ritva, the Eshkol, and the Ran. The Meiri also noted that many Sephardic sages held this view as well. According to those opinions, one should not admit to their religion, as doing so would be seen as acknowledging idol worship. It's important to note that Rav Elyashiv said (Ashrei Hayish y.d. page 92) that the above is true only if the person coercing is doing so with the in-



tent to change the individual's religious faith. However, if someone says they aren't Jewish for a different reason, it is permitted. For example, if a person is in the hospital and believes they will receive better treatment by claiming to be Muslim, this is permitted, as the intention is not to change their religion.

This leads us to the question: when the Israeli boys were forced to shout "Free Palestine," does this fall under the category of accepting their coercers' belief? Would this be seen as a denial of their faith, or is it merely a statement made under duress without accepting a new belief?

Well, obviously, we can all understand the big difference between the two cases. When a person says "Palestine should be free," there is no contradiction to one's religious belief. Such a statement doesn't inherently contradict Jewish religion, as it is not a denial of faith or belief in Hashem.

Moreover, anyone who studies history will quickly realize that the concept of "Palestine" and a "Palestinian nation" is a modern construct. The Arab villages that occupied Jewish land before Israel's independence did not have local citizenship; they belonged to either Jordan or were stateless.

Rabbi Shay Tahan

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THE PRICE OF WORDS: FORCED TO SPEAK, TRUE TO FAITH

The "Palestinian" movement emerged years after the establishment of the State of Israel, created in opposition to it. Therefore, saying "Palestine should be free" is meaningless, as there is no actual entity called "Palestine." Furthermore, Arabs in Israel are free; no one is holding them in bondage.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, although we are not allowed to accept a different religion or declare a statement that contradicts our faith, one is permitted to say "Palestine will be free." This statement does not conflict with Jewish belief, as it does not imply a rejection of our religion or an acceptance of another belief system. It is simply a political statement with no religious implication.

TRUTH BE TOLD: WHEN LIES SPEAK THE TRUTH

In Parashat Toldot, Yaakov takes the blessings from his father Yitzchak through deception. This event happens when Yitzchak, who is blind and aging, intends to bless his eldest son Esav before his death. Rivkah, Yitzchak's wife, overhears and devises a plan for Yaakov to receive the blessings instead.

Rivkah prepares a meal of Yitzchak's favorite dish, and she dresses Yaakov in Esav's clothes to disguise him. She also covers his hands and neck with goat skins to make him feel like his hairy brother. Yaakov then enters Yitzchak's tent, claiming to be Esav, and receives the blessings meant for his brother. Although Yitzchak is initially suspicious, he is ultimately convinced by the smell of Esav's clothes and the feel of Yaakov's disguised hands.

When Yitzchak asks Yaakov who he is, he responds, "I am Esav, your firstborn."

The episode raises ethical questions because Yaakov deceives his father to receive the blessings. It also highlights the dilemma of how Yaakov was permitted to lie to his father, especially when the Torah explicitly forbids lying.

Rashi attempts to address this issue by suggesting that when Yaakov said, "I am Esav, your firstborn," he intended to divide the sentence as follows: "I am"—referring to himself, Yaakov, who brought the food—and "Esav is your firstborn." However, anyone reading this understands that such manipulation would not hold up in any Beit Din or court. For example, if someone caught committing a crime claimed, "I didn't commit the crime," and later explained that they meant, "I am [the one who committed the crime]," and the victim didn't commit a crime," this would not justify their actions in any way.

Why, then, is Yaakov allowed to do this? Furthermore, Yaakov is famously called "a man of truth" (Ish Emet). How can this title align with behavior that appears so untruthful?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav Me'Eliyahu) teaches a profound and revolutionary concept. We often think that truth is defined as stating things as they are in reality, while a lie is stating something contrary to reality. Rav Dessler challenges this notion, asserting that this definition is flawed. According to him, truth means saying things that align with Hashem's will, even if they contradict reality. Conversely, a lie is saying things that do not align with Hashem's will, even if they are factually correct.

With this new insight, we can understand many aspects of Torah teachings. Firstly, it resolves the question of how Yaakov could deceive Yitzchak and say things that were not true, such as "I am Esav." The answer lies in the fact that his mother, Rivkah, instructed him to do so, based on her understanding that this was Hashem's will. Rivkah had received a prophecy that Yaakov was destined to receive the blessings, even if it meant taking them from Esav. Accordingly, Yaakov's actions were justified as fulfilling the will

of Hashem.

The Torah teaches us that even Hashem altered the truth for the sake of peace in the episode involving Avraham, Sarah, and the announcement of Yitzchak's birth (Bereshit 18). When Hashem informs Avraham that Sarah will bear a child, Sarah, overhearing this, laughs to herself and says, "*After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, and my husband is old?*" (Bereshit 18:12). However, when Hashem relays Sarah's reaction to Avraham, He says, "*Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child now that I am old?'*" (Bereshit 18:13).

Hashem changes Sarah's words, omitting her reference to Avraham's age, to preserve peace and avoid causing tension between them. This example is often cited in rabbinic literature to emphasize the importance of maintaining harmony, even if it means altering the truth. However, based on the above explanation, Hashem is teaching us that this is not merely an alteration but actually the ultimate truth. In such an instance, stating things as they are in reality, if it leads to discord, is considered a lie, while preserving peace aligns with Hashem's will and is therefore the true expression of truth.

The *Sefer Emet LeYaakov* provides an example to highlight this point. Imagine a situation where someone is chasing another person with the intent to kill, and you witness the victim hiding. When the pursuer approaches and asks if you have seen the person they are chasing, what should you answer? In such a scenario, the true response, as aligned with Hashem's will, would be to say, "No, he isn't here." This underscores that preserving life and fulfilling Hashem's will takes precedence over factual accuracy in such circumstances.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky (Masechet Kutim 30) adds that if one needs to change their words to fit Hashem's narrative, they should try to do so by using expressions with dual meanings, if possible. For example, when Yaakov said, "I am Esav, your firstborn," this can be interpreted as "I am Yaakov, and Esav is your firstborn." This is not considered lying, as we explained that altering facts is permitted in such scenarios. However, it is still correct to find ways to align with reality as much as possible.

It is also important to note that the Torah's warning against lying primarily applies to testimonies in a Beit Din or matters related to financial dealings. It is not directed at situations where someone might lie for reasons outside these contexts.

BAMBA BLESSINGS: PUFFED CORN, PUFFED QUESTIONS

What is Bamba and what is Its Bracha?

Almost all of us grew up eating the Israeli staple snack called Bamba. Bamba is a popular snack made primarily from puffed corn, known for its light, airy texture and distinct flavor. It is considered a cultural icon in Israel, often associated with childhood memories and casual snacking. As we open the bag to start munching on it, very few of us stop to ask, "What *bracha* should I make?" Instead, we typically say *Shehakol* and throw the first piece of Bamba into our mouths.

The question of the proper *bracha* (blessing) for Bamba has been discussed among halachic authorities. The two sons of Harav Ovadia Yosef disagreed on the principle of the halacha and also on what their father instructed to say.

The determination hinges on whether the corn ingredient, which undergoes the processes of puffing and grinding, affects its blessing. We should also note that the peanut flavor, though prominent, does not influence the halachic classification of the food. It is considered an enhancement rather than a defining feature of the snack. In *Yalkut Yosef* (Orach Chaim 202:9), Harav Yitzchak Yosef, the previous Rishon Letsion rules that the bracha for Bamba is **בורא פרי האדמה** (*Borei Peri Ha'adama*). He explains that the puffed corn retains its halachic identity despite undergoing significant processing. Since the corn remains the primary ingredient of the snack, it dictates the blessing.

The current Rishon Letsion, Harav David Yosef, in his sefer *Halacha Berura* (202;29), disagrees with the ruling of *Yalkut Yosef*. He emphasizes that the processing of the corn nullifies its halachic status, as the core ingredient changes form to the extent that it loses its original identity. Thus, the appropriate *bracha* before eating Bamba is **Shehakol**.

Let's try to further understand both opinions. The *Shulchan Aruch* (202, 7) speaks of dates that were crushed by hand until they completely lost their shape, yet it rules that despite the change in form, they still maintain their original *bracha* status. Therefore, one should recite *Borei Pri Ha'etz* when eating them. Of course, dates are just an example, and this ruling applies to all fruits or vegetables that undergo similar processing.

On the other hand, the *Rema* (Rabbi Moses Isserles) states that one should recite *Shehakol* on such foods. Therefore, according to Ashkenazim who follow the *Rema's* rulings, it seems that Bamba, which changes the shape of the corn, should require the *bracha* of *Shehakol*.

Thus, our discussion seems to be based on the opinion of the *Shulchan Aruch* and would primarily apply to Sephardim who follow his *psakim*. However, it would not be relevant to Ashkenazim, as they typically recite *Shehakol* when the shape of the food changes. Still, Harav Yitzchak Yosef notes that Bamba is unique, and even Ashkenazim should say *Ha'adama*. Let's explore why.

THE OPINION OF YALKUT YOSEF

The opinion of Yalkut Yosef is that Bamba follows the same halachic principles as dates. Although the shape of the corn has changed, it retains its original *bracha*. This is especially true when the corn is specifically grown for Bamba production; in such cases, even after its shape is altered, the *bracha* remains *Ha'adama*.

Harav Yitzchak Yosef argues that the corn grown for Bamba is not edible in its raw state and cannot be consumed unless it is processed into the Bamba snack. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this corn is specifically for Bamba, and its *bracha* should not change. Even the *Rema* spoke of cases like dates, which were edible as dates and later changed form. However, if the produce was not edible at all when it was grown, then its very first stage of becoming edible—through its transformation into Bamba—is when it first receives its status as food and its associated *bracha*.

He also recounts how his father, Chacham Ovadia Yosef, while sitting with his students, was offered Bamba and recited *Ha'adama* over it. Later, during Pesach, he gave Bamba to his young grandchildren (as *kitniyot* are permitted for Sephardim), ate from it himself, and again recited *Ha'adama*. He also instructed them to recite *Ha'adama* for Bamba.



THE VIEW OF HARAV DAVID YOSEF

Harav David Yosef ruled that the *bracha* for Bamba is *Shehakol* because the corn undergoes processes of puffing, grinding, and reshaping into the form of Bamba, completely losing its original shape. Additionally, it no longer tastes like corn, further justifying that the *bracha* should be *Shehakol*.

He further explains that his father, Chacham Ovadia, instructed him to recite *Shehakol* on Bamba. Moreover, even if one considers the *bracha* to be doubtful, the general rule is to recite *Shehakol* whenever there is uncertainty regarding the proper *bracha*.

Opinions of Other Poskim

According to Harav Meir Mazuz, the *bracha* for Bamba is also *Shehakol*. This is explained by his esteemed student, Harav Moshe Levi (*Sefer Birkat Hashem* 7:36), who reasons that not only is the corn significantly altered through processing, but the new shape is also combined with peanut flavorings, resulting in an entirely new product that is vastly different from its original form.

The renowned scholar Harav Offir Malka (in his sefer *Halichot Bra-chot*) agrees with this opinion and concludes that the *bracha* for Bamba is *Shehakol*. He summarizes the reasoning into three key points:

1. If the new shape no longer resembles in any way the fruit or vegetable it originated from, the *bracha* changes to *Shehakol*.
2. In this case, the flavor has also changed, and its name is no longer associated with corn—no one refers to it as corn. The product is transformed into dough, which alters its *bracha*.

BAMBA BLESSINGS: PUFFED CORN, PUFFED QUESTIONS

Regarding the claim of the Yalkut Yosef that the corn for Bamba is grown in a way that isn't edible, Harav Auerbach and Harav El-yashiv (Vezot Habracha page 252) held that it doesn't matter. They argued that we don't focus on the specific type of corn used, but rather on the general type, and the general type of corn is edible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, those who follow the opinion of *Yalkut Yosef* can recite *Ha'adama* on Bamba. However, since the majority of poskim disagrees with this ruling and hold that the proper *bracha* is *Shehakol*, it is more correct to say *Shehakol*, especially following the rule that whenever there is doubt about which *bracha* to say, we recite *Shehakol*. Nevertheless, if one recited *Ha'adama*, even according to this opinion, *bedieved* (after the fact), the *bracha* is valid.

A LIVING DEATH: A WARNING FOR GENERATIONS

In this week's *parsha* (*Toldot*), we encounter a profound lesson that appears both at the beginning and the end of the portion. This repetition emphasizes the importance of adopting the correct mindset and cultivating such outlook on life.

At the beginning of the *parsha*, we find Yaakov cooking lentils. Rashi (25:30) explains that this was because Avraham Avinu had just passed away, and it is customary for mourners to eat lentils. Rashi further notes that Avraham was originally destined to live another five years but passed away earlier. Why was this so?



Rashi

better for a person to lose years from their life than to endure the anguish of seeing their child—or grandchild—deviate from the righteous path.

At the end of the *parsha*, we encounter a similar concept when Rivka says to her husband, "I am disgusted with my life because of the daughters of Chet. If Yaakov takes a wife from the daughters of Chet, what is life to me?" (27:46). Rivka's words are not merely an expression of frustration or fear. If they were, the Torah would not have recorded them, as such re-

marks would not carry a timeless lesson for future generations. Instead, Rivka's statement conveys a profound and fundamental message: marrying a child to an unsuitable spouse is worse than death. Chazal emphasize this idea, teaching that a bad spouse is worse than death itself. Rivka's words remind us of the seriousness of choosing a spouse for our children. When arranging a *shidduch*, it must not be taken lightly. It is crucial to ensure that the prospective match is a *yerei Shamayim* with proper *hashkafot* and values, as the consequences of an ill-suited marriage can be more devastating than a living death. This highlights a profound lesson: it is

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