

EMES - THE WHOLE TRUTH

Background

According to the Halacha, a person is obligated to keep to a transaction even if the circumstances have changed and the transaction is no longer in his best interests. For instance, imagine I sold you my property, and before you took possession, the value dramatically increased. Since both of us are aware of the changing nature of the value of real estate, I am obligated to give you the property as you purchased it. So, too, I am obligated to keep my word. If I promise to sell you an item at a given price, even if the sale has not yet been enacted, it is improper for me to go back on my word.

Questions

What connection do these concepts have on the events that occurred here? First off, Rav Safra said nothing, so there was no contractual obligation or verbal agreement to sell his item. Secondly, if in fact Rav Safra were somehow obligated to keep to the price of his thoughts, the Gemara should have brought this as an example of a high level of “not stealing.” Yet the Gemara brings this as an example of *emes* – truth. What does this have to do with truth?

ספר תהילים פרק טו

א) מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְדוּד מִי יְגוּר בְּאֵהָלָךְ מִי יִשְׁכֵּן בְּהַר קִדְשֶׁךָ

ב) הוֹלֵךְ תְּמִים וּפְעֵל צְדָק וְדָבַר אֱמֶת בְּלִבָּבוֹ

1. *A song to Dovid: HASHEM, who will dwell in Your tent? Who will reside in the mountain of holiness?*

2. *One who goes with earnestness, does business with honesty, and speaks truth in his heart.*

תלמוד בבלי מסכת מכות דף כד/א

ודובר אמת בלבבו כגון רב ספרא

One who speaks truth in his heart: like Rav Safra

רש"י מכות דף כד/א

רב ספרא - בשאלתו דרב אחא (שאלתא לו) והכי הוה עובדא דרב ספרא היה לו חפץ אחד למכור ובא אדם אחד לפניו בשעה שהיה קורא ק"ש ואמר לו תן לי החפץ בכך וכך דמים ולא ענהו מפני שהיה קורא ק"ש כסבור זה שלא היה רוצה ליתנו בדמים הללו והוסיף אמר תנהו לי בכך יותר לאחר שסיים ק"ש אמר לו טול החפץ בדמים שאמרת בראשונה שבאותן דמים היה דעתי ליתנם לך

Rav Safra: *In the Shaltos of Rav Acha, this was the event of Rav Safra:*

Rav Safra had an object that was for sale. A man passed before him when he was reading the Shema and said, "Give me that object for so much money." Rav Safra didn't answer because he was saying Shema. The man assumed that Rav Safra didn't respond because he didn't want to sell at that price. The man added to his original offer, and said, "Give it to me for so much money."

After Rav Safra finished reading Shema, he said, "Take the object for the original amount that you offered because I had in mind to sell it to you for that price when you first said it."