

פרשת וארא

It has been called the biggest lie in modern society, and not only one with tremendously detrimental consequences, but one that few are impervious to, an untruth of a generation. What is this fabrication? "I have read and understood the terms of service." An academic experiment¹ conducted three years ago showed that 74% of individuals skipped privacy policy and terms of service when joining a fictitious social networking service, either choosing to bypass with a 'quick join' clickwrap, or spending about 125 seconds reading a document that takes an average person 45 minutes to fully read. In fact, a study² conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2019 revealed that just 9% of adults say they always read a company's privacy policy before agreeing to the terms and conditions, with 13% saying they do it often, 38% saying they sometimes read the policies, and more than a *third* of adults (36%) saying they never read a privacy policy before agreeing to it, leaving many Americans with little to no understanding of what companies are doing with the data collected about them, oblivious to what they possibly could have agreed to.

Parshas Va'era has its own "terms and conditions" moment, beginning with a discussion between Hashem and Moshe that involves the well-known five stages of redemption promised to the generation that left Egypt: והבאתי & ולקחתי, וגאלתי, והצילתי, והוצאתי.³ However, a fascinating question is posed concerning the mention of the last stage of Hashem's promise. After all, this generation of Bnei Yisrael that Hashem is addressing never made it into Eretz Yisrael, as they all died on the journey to the land, and only their children's generation were able to enter. Does this mean that Hashem chose to not keep His word to Moshe? This question becomes especially mystifying when we see that Hashem said "לכן" in פסוק ו in the form of an oath, according to a *medrash*;⁴ how could such a promise be broken?

The Ohr HaChaim answers⁵ with a fascinating juxtaposition, pointing out that the phrase "והבאתי" is prefaced by a crucial prelude one pasuk earlier: "וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם המוציא אתכם ממצרים." Bnei Yisrael can only experience the full glory of being brought into the land that Hashem promised to their ancestors years earlier as an inheritance on the condition that they acknowledge Him as their G-d who redeemed them from the servitude of the Egyptians; there is a massive "if" inserted into this assurance. Hashem was very assiduous in making sure to insert this condition not as an incidental afterthought but rather as the very crux of his promise, forcing the nation to pay attention and fulfill their part of the agreement before they gain entry and access into Eretz Yisrael.

We often find ourselves going through the motions throughout our daily lives, unsure of what exactly we are saying or the spiritual obligations that we are accepting, heedless to the potential that can

¹ Obar, Jonathan A. and Oeldorf-Hirsch, Anne, *The Biggest Lie on the Internet: Ignoring the Privacy Policies and Terms of Service Policies of Social Networking Services* (June 1, 2018). Information, Communication & Society, pp. 1-20, 2018., TPRC 44: The 44th Research Conference on Communication, Information and Internet Policy, 2016.

² Pew Research Center, November 2019, "Americans and Privacy: Concerned, Confused and Feeling Lack of Control Over Their Personal Information."

³ שמות ו:ח-ו

⁴ שמות רבה ו:ד

⁵ אור החיים שמות ו:ח ד"ה והבאתי

⁶ שמות ו:ז

emerge from our reliance and recognition of Hashem, a positive commandment according to the Rambam's *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*.⁷ Are we fully aware of the potential rewards that emerge from acknowledging Hashem's presence every day? While being religious may often come easily to us on a daily basis, being observant may not be as simple; although such cognizance of Hashem is vital to our spiritual sustaining, it can still be challenging to maintain. Nonetheless, we must strive to understand preserve such divine awareness, knowing that our religious terms and conditions *do* in fact apply.

רמב"ם משנה תורה הלכות יסודי התורה א:ו,ז⁷