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Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I work in an office that keeps a stocked food pantry so employees stay on-site during lunch and continue working. Although there is plenty of food in the pantry, I prefer scrambled eggs as a midday snack rather than use what is in the pantry. Since there are no cooking appliances, I brought a Betty Crocker appliance from home that I bought at Bingo for \$24.99. I did not ask the CEO or HR for permission to cook on the premises. Some coworkers were unhappy about this and suggested that using the office in this way without permission may be dishonest and may even constitute Gezel (theft). What are your thoughts on the matter?

ANSWER: Using a facility (or your office in your case) without permission or not in conformance with its terms and conditions is a form of trespassing.

What exactly is the Halachic violation that one engages in when trespassing? The Talmud (Bava Basra 88a) records a debate between Rabbi Yehudah and the Sages as to whether borrowing an item without permission (Sho'el Shelo Mida'as) renders a person a Gazlan, a thief which is the Sages view, or whether he simply has the status of a borrower and has essentially done nothing wrong which is Rabbi Yehudah's view. Both the Rif and the Rambam rule like the Sages, and the Shulchan Aruch adopts the same position in four places (C.M. 292:1, 308:7, 359:5, 363:5). This is the accepted view – a Sho'el Shelo Mida'as is considered a thief.

Is the Sho'el Shelo Mida'as designation applicable in all cases of borrowing an item without permission including borrowing an item that has no value associated with it? The Chazon Ish (B.K. 20:5) writes that the designation of Sho'el Shelo Mida'as (one who

borrowed without permission) applies even when the item that is borrowed is not something that generally has a market value, and even if the value is less than that of a Perutah (a few cents).

However, it may still be argued that in order to be considered a Sho'el Shelo Mida'as, you have to physically borrow an object without permission even if the object has no or little market value. Therefore, the question of what exactly is the Halachic violation that one engages in when one has not borrowed an actual object without permission, such as borrowing another's property without permission, i.e. trespassing, remains?

The Rashbam in Bava Basra 57b discusses property jointly owned by two partners. He explains that if one partner allows the other to place animals on the property without explicit permission, we are lenient and do not treat it as trespassing. In that case, the person is not considered a Sho'el Shelo Mida'as, since partners generally permit each other to use their shared property. By implication, when no such partnership exists, placing animals—or oneself—on another person's property without permission falls under the category of Sho'el Shelo Mida'as.

Accordingly, trespassing would be considered Sho'el Shelo Mida'as. Therefore, when you scramble eggs for your mid-day snack in non-conformance with your office's terms and conditions for using its facilities, you are trespassing and considered a Sho'el Shelo Mida'as.

In addition, since you had no right to use the office and scramble your eggs, we should calculate the value of the electricity that you used when doing so.

You noted that you use a Betty Crocker appliance to scramble your eggs. These countertop appliances are often rated at about

1,200 watts (1.2 kW). Based on roughly 7 minutes of cooking time to scramble the eggs, we estimate the electricity used would cost roughly 22 cents per week. While this is a trivial amount, the company may be entitled to reimbursement for the electricity that was used depending on the circumstances.

Chizuk - Inspiration

An administrator at a major construction company noticed that the steel beams arriving for a high-rise project did not meet the required specifications. Their quality was substandard. He realized that company leaders were cutting corners to save about \$3 million. After reviewing the numbers, he concluded that if an earthquake struck, the building would likely collapse and hundreds of people could die.

His boss pulled him aside and said, "Stay quiet, and there is a promotion waiting for you. Speak up, and you will never work in construction again."

The administrator had two children in college, a mortgage to pay and other financial responsibilities. Nevertheless, the next morning, he shut down the project, filed a report with the city, and refused to back down. True to his word, within a week, his boss fired him and blacklisted him across the construction industry. For two years, the administrator could not find steady work.

Then the earthquake struck. The building, now constructed with proper materials, stood firm while others did not. People in the industry came to understand what the administrator's decision had prevented. Today, the administrator runs the area's most successful safety consulting firm. By risking everything, he saved hundreds of lives through honesty, integrity, and the courage to do what was right regardless of the cost.

On The Parsha

"Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them:" (BaMidbar 6:23)

This verse records Hashem's command to the Kohanim (priests) to bless Bnei Yisrael. Rashi points to the unusual spelling of the word "say" in the phrase "say to them": it appears as אָמַר with a "Vav," rather than the shorter אָמַר. Based on the unusual spelling, Rashi identifies an important instruction that is being given to the Kohanim: "Do not bless them (Bnai Yisrael) hastily or become confused about your duty to bless each individual and the congregation as a whole. Rather, bless them with concentration

(בְּכִבְיָה) and with a whole heart toward each person (בְּלֵב שְׂלֵם)."

The Kohen performs what appears to be a fixed ritual: a blessing to the people using prescribed words with no room for personal invention. He recites a formula given by Hashem, so it may seem that nothing can go wrong.

Rashi's reading of the full and longer spelling of the word אָמַר challenges that assumption. The danger is not that the Kohen will say the wrong words—he cannot, because they are fixed. The danger is that he will say the right words mechanically yet be distracted by the number of people before him to be blessed, and become confused about his obligation to bless all of them collectively as well as each individual. If that were to occur, his mouth would speak the blessing without the conforming intent of his heart – a form of dishonesty.

This reveals a striking insight: dishonesty does not always require a false statement. A Kohen who blesses quickly and without attention says nothing untrue—every word is valid and divinely ordained. Yet Rashi still treats this as a serious flaw, one the Torah signals through a single extra letter.

This is the essence of integrity: alignment between what a person says and what he truly means. Integrity is not fulfilled by speaking truth alone. A person can say things that are entirely true and even beautiful yet still be hollow without the conforming intent. The words of Rashi above stating that the Kohen must bless בְּלֵב שְׂלֵם — "with a whole heart" — expresses this precisely. The word שְׂלֵם, means whole and undivided and stands opposite the divided state Rashi warns against: when a person's mouth says one thing while his heart is elsewhere. A blessing must come from a whole heart, with no gap between the words spoken and the intent behind them.

"May I back out of a school carpool that I have already committed to?"

"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"

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