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Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am dating a girl whose sister lives in Florida and needs a job. She is applying for a sales position at Sephora, the makeup store. Someone mentioned that it can be challenging to get hired in Florida without knowing Spanish because many people there speak it. However, at this particular Sephora, the customers do not speak Spanish, so not being able to speak the language should not matter. Is it okay for her to claim on her resume that she speaks Spanish even if she does not?

ANSWER: No, this is not permitted. This is a clear-cut case of both *Geneivas Da'as* (deception) and *Sheker* (falsehood), and it is strictly forbidden. The rationalization that the store's customers are not Spanish-speaking anyway, does not make it permissible.

The prohibition of *Geneivas Da'as* is central to the Torah's framework for ethical behavior. The esteemed sage Shmuel, in Chullin 94a, affirms this principle by asserting its universal applicability, extending it to both Jew and Gentile alike. Notably, Shaarei Teshuvah (3:181) maintains that even instances where untruths are generally permitted for the sake of peace (*Mutar L'shanos Mipnei HaShalom*) they remain prohibited in instances when *Geneivas Da'as* is involved.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ZT"l explains in his *Igros Moshe* (Choshen Mishpat Vol. I #30) that cheating on school tests is essentially stealing from a future employer. This is because the future employer expects the applicant to have completed their education honestly and hires them based on that assumption, ultimately paying them under false pretenses. The same logic applies here: if someone claims on their resume to speak Spanish but does not, the employer is being misled and ends up paying for a skill the employee actually lacks, even if speaking Spanish is not really necessary.

However, if the applicant can acquire a foundational proficiency in Spanish, then it would be appropriate to indicate "rudimentary Spanish" or "basic conversational Spanish" on her resume, accurately reflecting her capabilities. If required, she would be able to provide an honest account of her language skills to potential employers. Many organizations recognize the value of even basic language proficiency, and this method allows her to improve her employability without violating the principles of *Sheker* or *Geneivas Da'as*.

On The Parsha

"Now all those descended from Yaakov were seventy souls, and Yoseph, [who] was in Mitzrayim." (Shemos 1:5)

This verse appears repetitive, since it is well established that Yoseph was in Mitzrayim - the entire end of Sefer Bereishis describes his rise to power there. What is the reason the Torah chooses to reiterate this point?

Rashi addresses this question directly: "... Did we not know that he (Yoseph) was in Mitzrayim? But [this clause comes] to inform you of Yoseph's righteousness. He, the Yoseph who tended his father's flocks, is the same Yoseph who was in Mitzrayim and became a king, and he retained his righteousness."

Of note, Rashi does not simply say that Yoseph remained righteous in Mitzrayim. He says: "He, the Yoseph who tended his father's flocks, is the same Yoseph who was in Mitzrayim and became a king." Rashi's emphasis is on sameness - on maintaining his same identity across radically different circumstances.

Let us examine the radically different circumstances that Yoseph found himself in. As a seventeen year old shepherd in Canaan, he lived under his father's authority, tending flocks, surrounded by brothers who hated him. He had no power, no wealth, no status outside of his family.

In Mitzrayim, he became viceroy over the most powerful civilization on earth. He controlled the food supply of an entire nation. He wore royal garments, rode in Pharaoh's second chariot, and had every person bow before him. He had unlimited access to wealth, pleasure, and power.

How many people can remain the same under such radically different circumstances?

Rashi is teaching us that this consistency of character—being "the same Yoseph" - defined Yoseph's righteousness. Yoseph is often referred to as, "Yoseph HaTzaddik". The Hebrew word "Tzaddik" is related to "Tzedek" which means straightness, correctness, alignment. A Tzaddik is one whose inner character remains aligned, remains straight, regardless of external circumstances.

Many people maintain their principles when they are powerless but abandon them when they gain power. When they have nothing, they speak of justice and fairness. When they acquire

wealth and status, they discover reasons why the rules should not apply to them. Their earlier righteousness was not conviction but convenience - they had nothing to lose by being principled. Yoseph had much to lose. Maintaining the moral standards of a shepherd's son when you are a king means forgoing pleasures and advantages that are now within easy reach. It means holding yourself to constraints that no one around you shares or would impose upon you.

On the other hand, many people maintain their dignity when they are honored but lose themselves when they are humbled. Yoseph endured being thrown into a pit, slavery, false accusations and imprisonment. A lesser person might have emerged from such experiences bitter, cynical, or morally compromised - feeling that the world owed him something, that normal rules no longer applied after such suffering. Nevertheless, Yoseph remained consistent in character, exhibiting neither entitlement nor moral decline in either prosperity or adversity.

Yoseph's righteousness was not superficial in any way - his Middos Tovos (good character traits) were deeply rooted and therefore the shepherd-Yoseph and the king-Yoseph were "the same Yoseph," which defined his righteousness.

A related thought appears in the Mishnah in Avos (2:4): "Do not place your trust in yourself until the day you die." One interpretation of this teaching is that nobody can be certain of their own righteousness until it has been tested through every situation - whether it is poverty or wealth, shame or honor, powerlessness or authority. For example, a person may act righteously now because they are poor, but they could behave differently if their circumstances change and they become wealthy. Therefore, unless today is the final day of one's life, future challenges may still test one's integrity and one may not remain righteous in those circumstances..

Chizuk - Inspiration

A young rabbi was in the process of buying his first home - a simple place that fit both his family's needs and his limited finances. As he sat in the mortgage office going over the closing paperwork, he carefully examined all of the numbers: the principal, the interest rate, the amortization schedule, and the monthly payment.

Then, something caught his attention. He looked over the calculations again and realized there was a major mistake in the contract - a miscalculation by the mortgage company that happened to benefit him. With the stated loan length and interest rate, his monthly payment should have been higher. The lender had unintentionally undercharged him by several hundred thousand dollars over the full term of the loan. Had he simply signed the closing paperwork as it was, he would have secured far more favorable terms than deserved and would have saved a

considerable amount of money.

Nevertheless, as a man of Emes (truth), he spoke up and said to the loan officer, "Excuse me, but I think there is an error here. The numbers do not seem right."

The officer glanced at the paperwork and said confidently, "Rabbi, everything has been checked by our team. These numbers come from our systems and are verified by professionals."

"Nevertheless," the rabbi continued in a composed manner, "I would appreciate it if you could review the calculations once more. The monthly payment appears inconsistent with the stated interest rate and the length of the loan."

"Rabbi, with respect, we routinely handle these calculations, and our software is designed to ensure accuracy. I am confident that there are no errors."

Despite this assurance, the rabbi remained firm, "I would be more comfortable if the figures were independently verified. Please verify them again."

With a reserved sigh, the loan officer excused himself, carrying the closing paperwork to a senior colleague for an additional review. Several minutes elapsed as the rabbi waited patiently, confident in his position.

Upon the officer's return, his demeanor had shifted; the previous assurance was replaced with evident discomfort and embarrassment.

"Rabbi," he began quietly, "I must apologize. You were correct - there was a significant miscalculation on our part that could have resulted in considerable financial loss for our company. I am uncertain how you detected the issue so quickly."

The rabbi responded with composure, "These things happen from time-to-time. I am pleased the error was identified prior to the execution of the agreement."

Because of the rabbi's attention to detail and commitment to Emes, the correct figures were recorded, the paperwork signed, and the transaction was concluded fairly and honestly.

*"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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