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Chizuk - Inspiration

In the small Polish town of Radin where he lived, the Chofetz Chaim once received a letter containing a substantial sum of money. The sender had addressed it to "The Famous Rabbi of Radin." The Chofetz Chaim's heart raced when he saw the unexpected bounty as his struggling Yeshiva desperately needed the funds.

Upon opening the letter, the Chofetz Chaim realized there was a problem. While he was indeed a rabbi in Radin, there was another distinguished rabbi in town who also had a significant following. The ambiguous address meant the sender might have intended the money for the other rabbi.

The Chofetz Chaim immediately set out to clarify the sender's intentions. He sent a messenger through the cold and snow-covered roads to contact the sender in a distant town, explaining the situation and asking who the money was meant for.

For weeks, the Chofetz Chaim waited to hear back from the messenger, watching his students in the unheated study hall, knowing that the money sitting in his drawer could be used to buy firewood and food. Yet he refused to touch the money until he knew with absolute certainty it was his to use.

Several agonizing weeks later, the reply finally arrived - the sender had indeed intended to give the money to the Chofetz Chaim. Only then did he accept the funds for his Yeshiva.

When his astonished students asked why he had gone through such trouble, especially when the money had been delivered to him directly and therefore was most likely his, the Chofetz Chaim's eyes blazed.

"The Torah teaches us that even the slightest possibility of possessing something that is not rightfully ours must be eliminated," he declared. "It doesn't matter that the money

was probably meant for me, or that our Yeshiva desperately needed the funds. When it comes to questions of honesty, 'probably' isn't good enough."

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am a lice-checker, and I had just finished doing a lice-checking in a school. My next stop was to the Sheitel Macher (wig seller) to pick out a Sheitel. I spotted a new Sheitel that was gorgeous and sparkly. Realizing that a Sheitel is not usually sparkly, I took a closer look. Wouldn't you know, the "sparkle," was in reality, white lice nits (eggs) – the Sheitel was infested! Even worse, the Sheitel was already marked "Sold." Do I need to inform the Shaitel Macher about what I saw and insist that she tells the customer who was about to pick it up?

ANSWER: You are obligated to inform the Sheitel Macher about what you saw and tell her to inform her customer accordingly. If you do not take action, there are a number of prohibitions that you would be committing if you remain silent.

1. There is the Mitzvah of, "Love your brother, like you love yourself." This prohibition would apply because if you were the customer, you would want the Shaitel Macher to inform you. Accordingly, you should want the same for your friend and should therefore insist that the Shaitel Macher tells her customer.
2. There is a Mitzvah found in the verse in Parshas Ki Taytzai (Devarim 22:2) which discusses the Mitzvah of "HaShavas Aveida" - returning a lost object, with the words "VaHashaivoso Lo" – and you shall return it to him. The Gemorah in Sanhedrin (73A), includes within its understanding of these words, the obligation of returning "his own life to him as well (or saving him from danger or damage)." Accordingly, if you do not do your part to prevent the customer from damage (in this case, from buying an infested Shaitel), you would

be transgressing this prohibition.

3. There is a Mitzvah of, “Lo Suchal LeHisalaym” – a negative commandment associated with the positive commandment of Hashavas Aveida referenced above, and that is “You cannot shut your eyes to it (his danger or damage).” Accordingly, if you fail to say something, you have “shut your eyes,” to the customer’s damages and transgressed this prohibition.

4. And finally, “Lo Saamod Al Dam Rayacha” – Do not stand idly by your brother’s blood. Applied here, you are not allowed to stand idly by while the customer walks out with an infested Shaitel.

If after the Sheitel Macher tells the customer, and the customer wishes to negate the sale, she may do so because of the Halachic concept of “Mekach Ta’us” – an erroneous sale.

A related question, would the Sheitel Macher be allowed to delouse the Sheitel without telling the customer about the lice? The answer to that question is “No,” as delousing shampoo when applied to dead wig hair, may lessen the life-span of the Sheitel and reduce its value. If the customer was not informed, this would be tantamount to selling a used Sheitel as if it was new, which of course is not permitted.

On The Parsha

In Parshas Vayakhel, as the Mishkan (Tabernacle) is being constructed, we encounter a profound lesson about integrity through the design of the Aron (Ark). The Torah tells us that Betzalel “overlaid it with pure gold,” – not just on the Aron’s exterior, but also throughout its interior. This physical characteristic of the Aron carries a deep spiritual message that resonates throughout Torah thought.

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that just as the Aron was gold both inside and out, a Torah scholar – and by extension, every Jew – should ensure that their inner character matches their external appearance. True integrity means maintaining consistency between who we are in private and who we present ourselves to be in public.

The Aron being made from gold is also significant. Gold is valued not only for its external beauty, but also for its aligned internal beauty, which is its inherent worth as a commodity. Similarly, our character is truly valuable when

our inner virtues align with the beauty of our outward, public actions.

Rabbeinu Bachya also draws a parallel between Torah and glass, noting that a container of glass reveals everything inside of it. This transparency represents the ideal of truthfulness – nothing hidden, nothing disguised. Just as one can see through glass to its contents, our words and actions should transparently reflect our true thoughts and intentions.

Today, where appearances can be carefully curated and public personas meticulously crafted through public relations firms, the lessons of this week’s Parsha challenge us to pursue authenticity. The construction of the Aron was not just about building a physical structure. It was also about imparting lessons for how we should live our lives – with integrity, consistency, and truth.

In our relationships, our business dealings, our religious observance, and our private thoughts, we are called to align our inner and outer selves – to be consistent like the Aron, overlaid with gold both within and without.

Mussar – Introspection

This week, we continue with translating the Chofetz Chaim’s Sefer entitled, “Sefas Tamim.” Sefas Tamim, from which our foundation takes its name, focuses on the importance of honesty in word and in deed.

“Understand something else clearly; Heaven’s law applying to theft is exceedingly severe, to the point where even an indirect cause of a loss to one’s fellow Jew, or even less than this (meaning, even a more remote case of loss) is included in the prohibition of theft. This concept is taught in Gemorah Baba Kama (119a) ‘Rebbe Yochanan said: Anyone who steals from his fellow Jew, even if the value of what he steals is only one Peruta (a coin worth about 2 cents) it is as if he has murdered him...”

*“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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