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Chizuk - Inspiration

We know that at times, it is permitted to say a falsehood to keep or create peace (Mutar L'Shanos Mipnei HaShalom). What follows is a famous story that illustrates the foregoing beautifully.

The parents of a child with special needs approached Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT"l for guidance on institutionalizing their son, who was causing unbearable difficulties for the family and the community. The mother was initially reluctant, wanting to keep her child at home. Rav Shlomo Zalman gently convinced the mother that the institution could provide the best care for the boy, benefiting him, his parents, and the community.

However, a crucial detail concerned Rav Shlomo Zalman: the child's feelings about being institutionalized. The parents questioned whether that mattered given his significant cognitive impairment. Rav Shlomo Zalman countered that regardless of his condition, the boy should not feel abandoned or betrayed.

Accordingly, Rav Shlomo Zalman devised a plan. He spoke to the boy, Akiva, introducing himself as the "Gadol Hador" and informing him that he was being appointed as his representative in the special school. The Rav even bestowed a symbolic "Semichah" upon the boy, emphasizing his important role as a rabbi in his new home.

Rav Shlomo Zalman permitted himself to tell a lie by applying the principle of Mutar L'Shanos Mipnei HaShalom so that the boy would not feel abandoned or betrayed by being institutionalized. In fact, there may be no better example of this application as there was much Shalom created on that and many subsequent days. The boy, feeling empowered as Rav Sholom Zalman's emissary, enthusiastically embraced his new role in his new home. He helped other residents with tasks like putting on Tefillin and ensuring that Kashrus was kept. This sense of purpose and engagement led to continued

improvement in his mental health and well-being.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I have perfected the ability to imitate a police siren on a PA system. I have installed a PA system within the front hood of my car and I am able to hold the microphone out of the line of sight of others. When I see another driver do something illegal, I have a little fun with it and do my siren bit. After the driver hears what he or she is certain is a police siren, the driver becomes startled, acts guilty and begins to drive overly cautiously, thinking that they are about to be pulled over by a cop – it is good for a laugh. Is this forbidden because of the prohibition of Geneivas Da'as (deception)? Perhaps I am doing a Mitzvah by scaring the driver into driving more carefully in the future?

ANSWER: This practice is forbidden under the prohibition of Geneivas Da'as (deception) and would certainly not qualify as a Mitzvah – It would more likely qualify as a Mitzvah HaBa'ah B'Aveira (a Mitzvah brought about through a sinful action).

Geneivas Da'as is considered a serious violation that applies universally. The Shaarei Teshuva (3:181) states that Mutar L'Shanos Mipnei HaShalom is not to be used when it comes to Gneivas Da'as. Your siren imitation is likely considered to be Gneivas Da'as because you are creating a false impression by making other drivers believe there is a police presence when there is none. This constitutes intentional deception, as you are deliberately trying to fool people and it affects their behavior as you have reported that the drivers change their driving conduct based on your deception. Your "Mitzvah" argument does not apply in this situation. You are not preventing immediate danger, so this is not a case of Pikuach Nefesh (saving another from a life-threatening situation). You are also not a law enforcement officer and therefore lack authority to enforce traffic laws. Additionally, in this case, your end-goal is to deceive someone for a laugh and make someone think that the police are around when

they are not, unlike in certain other cases where a deception may be employed for an end-goal that is a greater good.

In addition, your police siren imitation could easily lead to a Chillul Hashem (desecration of Hashem's name) if discovered, as people would view this as dishonest behavior by someone presumably committed to Jewish values. This practice should be discontinued immediately.

On The Parsha

In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah warns us about those who would entice us to idolatry. Describing this dangerous influence, the Passuk states: "If your brother, the son of your mother, tempts you in secret... saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods...'" (Devarim 13:7).

Rashi on this Passuk observes that, "The Torah speaks of what commonly occurs, for usually the one who entices another (to sin) speaks clandestinely... and similarly, (King) Solomon (in describing what generally happens when one entices another to sin), says: 'In the twilight, in the evening time, in the blackness of night and the darkness.' (Mishlei 7:9)."

We see from the above, that wrongdoers typically operate under cover, in secret. This observation can be applied in our own lives when we are uncertain about whether an action we are about to take is right or wrong.

Dishonesty and wrongdoing often have an inherent relationship with darkness and secrecy. Those who would corrupt others instinctively seek concealment because wrongdoing cannot bear examination, often even from our own selves.

Consider what happens when we are about to do something questionable. We automatically lower our voices, check if anyone is listening and wait until others have left the room. We may use euphemisms instead of directly stating what we are about to do, and we time our actions for when we will not be observed. This is not always a conscious calculation – it is often an automatic psychological response.

Building on these observations, we can develop a powerful tool for self-examination. When we find ourselves gravitating toward secrecy, we should introspect and ask ourselves: "Why am I being secretive about this? Is the action I am about to take problematic? Do I have a real reason to be secretive or am I just protecting myself from justified scrutiny?"

We might also do well to ask ourselves whether we would be comfortable if there was full transparency into what we were about to do. How would we feel if our spouse, parent, or teacher knew? As Rav Henoch Leibowitz ZT"l used to say, "Would you still do what you are about to do if your action was recorded front and center in the New York Times?"

The opposite of the above is also true. When we are acting with honesty and integrity, we generally do not operate secretly. We speak about what we are about to do openly. We are comfortable with appropriate transparency and do not fear reasonable scrutiny. We can articulate our reasoning to others, and our private thoughts align with our public values.

This "secrecy test" can illuminate many areas of our lives and provide insight into what we are doing when we may not realize it. For example, in our business dealings, we may ask ourselves why we have not mentioned a particular detail in a contract that we are about to sign with our counterparty (perhaps we are willfully omitting the detail to deceive him). When speaking about another, we may catch ourselves whispering about him (perhaps we may be speaking Loshon Hora about him).

May we merit to live as people of truth and integrity, and therefore act openly, confident that our actions can withstand the scrutiny of others because they are just and align with our Torah values.

*"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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