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Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

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Chizuk - Inspiration

Rabbonim have responded differently to the great titles of honor that they have received. Rav Elya Lopian, for example, would often get letters that contained elaborate titles praising him; he made it a habit to fold down the top of such pages before reading them, thus avoiding seeing the praise. In contrast, the Chacham Tzvi read every title addressed to him, using the compliments as motivation to better himself so that the praise people attributed to him would at least be partially true in his eyes.

The term "Rav" is commonly used today, but Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, quoting the Chofetz Chaim, emphasized that only someone who decides Halachic matters or serves as a Rosh Yeshiva should be called "Rav." Using this title for anyone else, he warned, goes against the Torah's commandment to distance oneself from Sheker (falsehood).

Rabbi Mayor Feist took this ruling very seriously. For forty years, he got up early each morning to study Gemara Chulin, which covers the laws of Kashrus. When asked about his dedication, he explained that he was tested on this Gemara in order to earn his rabbinical ordination (Semicha) and the Semicha stated that he was an expert in Gemara Chulin. Since there was no expiration date on his Semicha, he reviewed these laws regularly to ensure that his Semicha would not contain a false statement.

Today, the title "Rav" is often given to people who may not meet such qualifications. How is this practice justified? Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained that nowadays, "Rav" is no longer limited to a Halachic authority or a Rosh Yeshiva; rather, the use of this title depends on community and generational customs. Additionally, because people today

understand and accept that honorary titles are used more broadly, using them does not amount to falsehood. Still, it's important to respect Torah scholars appropriately and avoid giving extravagant titles to those who have not earned them.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: If someone has passed away and is survived by very elderly parents, is one permitted to lie to the parents and fabricate an excuse for why they have not heard from their son or daughter to avoid causing them pain?

ANSWER: Although one can certainly see the notion of not wanting to cause the very elderly parents pain or anguish, unless it is clear that the distress of telling them may cause them an early death, it is forbidden to lie to them. This assumes that they have asked about why they have not heard their son or daughter. If they do not ask, one should not tell them (YD 402:12). However, according to both Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv ZT"l and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT"l, if one is asked, one can say that one does not know why he has not been heard from (as cited in Titain Emes L'Yaakov p. 242).

On The Parsha

The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, an affiliate of Harvard University, is one of the leading cancer research hospitals in the nation and publishes numerous cancer research papers and studies.

In January, 2024 however, 32-year-old Sholto David, who has a PhD in cellular and molecular biology from Newcastle University in England, made a startling discovery.

He presented evidence of widespread data manipulation in cancer research published by Dana Farber's leading researchers including the institute's CEO and COO. According to an article by Kelsey Piper, Dr. David reportedly contacted

the institute with concerns about 57 papers, 38 of which, were ones for which the institute had, "primary responsibility for the potential data errors."

Dr. David's concerns were valid. The institute requested retractions for 6 papers and initiated corrections for 31 others. This is alarming because cancer research is essential to discovering a cure. If research data is falsified, a potential cure for cancer could be delayed for years. Dr. David further notes that the institute's lies and falsehoods within the published papers were "pathetically amateurish and excessive."

The work of Harvard Business School's Francesca Gino was questioned as well. It appears that she flagrantly fabricated data in at least four of her published studies. Ironically, Ms. Gino is a behavioral scientist who focuses on the benefits of ethics and morality. And then, of course, there was the plagiarism scandal involving Harvard's President, Claudine Gay, who was forced to step down because of her plagiarism (and the controversy related to her handling of antisemitism on campus).

What could have brought these individuals to falsify and plagiarize without conscience and what does Bnai Yisrael have to protect itself against such wrongdoings?

Perhaps the answer can be found in a Rabbeinu Bachya.

Rabbeinu Bachya in his introduction to this week's Parsha analyzes various verses in Proverbs concerning lies and man's natural inclination. When discussing these verses, Rabbeinu Bachya makes the following observations,

"Man's natural inclination is to choose lies and deception... it adores rest and laziness, and it despises the giving of charity. The intellect [of a man] should warn the man to refrain from this type of rest and laziness (and to steer clear of lies and deception.)... [In order to do so] it should command the individual to make every effort [to give] charity. This is the meaning of the verse (Proverbs 11:4), 'charity shall save from death..' He (King Solomon who wrote Mishlei) cites a number of parables to convey this thought and further states (Proverbs 28:27) 'he who gives to the poor will not be in need..'"

Later in his commentary, Rabbeinu Bachya provides a fascinating explanation to the verses above on how giving charity helps one avoid lies and self-deception. He explains that the spiritual nourishment and elevation one gains in performing the Mitzvah of Tzedakah (charity) prevents and fortifies one against lying and self-deception - and that is why one should make, "every effort" to give charity. Rabbeinu Bachya also implies that the verse above, 'he who gives to the poor will not be in need..' can be explained in a similar way: the spiritual elevation one gains from performing the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, causes Hashem to view him more favorably and provide for him.

And this is what Rabbeinu Bachya means when he writes later on, "...that just as the body derives physical gratification from the consumption of honey, so the soul derives spiritual gratification from the absorption of words of wisdom. This is one of the meanings of the verse in Exodus (24:11) 'They saw Hashem and ate and drank.'" In other words, just as eating and drinking provided physical nourishment to them, so too a vision of Hashem provided them with spiritual nourishment.

It is the spiritual nourishment of the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, that feeds us and provides us with protection and strength to overcome lies and self-deception and make us an honorable people. Surely this is something unique to Bnai Yisrael and something that those from Harvard are not privy to.

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I have already committed to?"
"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"*

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