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Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

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Chizuk - Inspiration

In 1949, Rav Chaim Shmulevitz ZT"l ("Rav Chaim") delivered a Shiur (Torah class) at the Mir Yeshiva in Yerushalayim. By then, he had been giving Shiurim for roughly two decades—in Mir, Shanghai, and now Eretz Yisrael. Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski ZT"l had once stood in his honor when he was still young, explaining that one rises when a person who carries the knowledge of the Mir Yeshiva's entire library enters the room.

One example of Rav Chaim's vast erudition, arose when the Yeshiva hastily packed its Sefarim (Hebrew books) while fleeing the Nazis. A student suggested renting a wagon to take as many Sefarim as possible. In the rush, they left behind a Ketzos, a renowned Halachic commentary of more than 1,000 pages. When Rav Chaim learned of this, his extraordinary knowledge and brilliant mind enabled him to rewrite the whole Ketzos from memory.

During one of his Shiurim, a Talmid (student) raised a difficult question that challenged an important part of the Shiur that Rav Chaim was developing.

Rav Chaim stopped and stood silently for several minutes, wiping his forehead as the entire Beis Medrash (study hall) waited. He then told the Talmid that the question was excellent and required further thought. He did not brush the question aside or respond with a superficial answer that may not have been true. Rather, he finished the Shiur successfully based on an analysis of a related matter, and the Shiur held together despite the challenge of the Talmid.

Most Maggidei Shiur (teachers of Torah classes) might have left the matter there: the Shiur had been brought to a successful conclusion, and the Talmid's question would likely have been forgotten. Rav Chaim, however, went home

and spent the night absorbed in finding the answer to it. When he concluded that he had no answer, he sent a family member to find the Talmid with this message: "You are right. The question has no answer, and I retract that part of the Shiur."

The next morning, Rav Chaim publicly told the Yeshiva that he had been wrong. Although he could have waited until then to inform the Talmid, he did not want the Talmid to spend even one night believing Rav Chaim was correct if it was not true.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Virtually every company with a website is offered third-party advertising. One lucrative "advertorial" promotes a weight-loss tea. However, the advertorial is designed to resemble an actual news story: it describes a fictitious medical student who "invented" the formula, a fictitious institute that conducted "clinical trials," and forty-four fake reader comments—all directing readers to a "70% discount" link with a deadline to purchase while supplies last. The product itself exists but appears to be an ordinary senna-based laxative tea. As an observant Jew, may I run such an ad on my website?

ANSWER: The ad itself constitutes forbidden speech. The Rishonim (Halachic authorities who lived between 1000–1500 CE) debate the scope of the prohibition "Midvar Sheker Tirchak—stay far away from a false matter" (Shemos 23:7). The Orech Meisharim (9:1) limits the application of the prohibition to judges adjudicating a case; the Sefer Yereim (#235) applies the prohibition to everyone when financial harm may result; and the Chareidim (Mitzvas Asei 4:26) applies it to everyone even without financial harm. The Chofetz Chaim, in Ahavas Chesed, follows the view of the Charedim that it applies to everyone even if there is no

financial harm. The Chofetz Chaim is typically considered to be normative Halacha. Yet this case is forbidden even under the more lenient view of the Sefer Yereim referenced above, because it does indeed cause financial harm: readers of the ad end up spending money to buy a product based on fabricated claims and clinical trials. In Sefas Tamim (ch. 7), citing the Sifre on the positive commandment “V’Halachta Bidrachav”—to walk in Hashem’s ways—the Chofetz Chaim adds that falsehood is also a Bitul Asei (nullification of a positive commandment), because truth is one of His ways and by telling a falsehood one has not walked in His ways.

It also constitutes Geneivas Da'as (deception). Shmuel in Chulin (94a) establishes that Geneivas Da'as applies to gentiles as well, so it is irrelevant that most readers that visit your website and view the ad may not be Jewish. The Chashukei Chemed on Kesuvos 15b and the Hisorerus Teshuvah (I:118) further note that gentiles themselves are commanded against deception as it is considered a form of theft which is one of the obligations of the Seven Noachide laws which were given to Gentiles.

Further, the Mishna in Bava Metzia (59b) forbids mixing old produce with new and presenting the package as entirely new—a far milder deception than marketing a laxative tea as a patented, clinically tested, prize-winning drug. Whether Geneivas Da'as is a Torah prohibition (Yereim, Ritva) or a Rabbinic prohibition (SMaK), the Shaarei Teshuvah (3:181) rules that even Mutar L'shanos Mipnei HaShalom (permission to lie for the sake of peace in certain circumstances) does not permit Geneivas Da'as.

Finally, if the website is known to be run by a Torah-observant Jew—or even if not known, one should assume it will become known—the further concern raised in the Rema's responsum (#10) and the Chashukei Chemed applies: deception associated with the name of religious Jews carries its own serious implications.

On The Parsha

Near the beginning of this week's Parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu describes Hashem as follows (Devarim 32:4): “The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice; a Hashem of faithfulness in Whom there is no wrong, ‘Tzaddik V’Yashar Hu’ - righteous and upright is He.”

Rashi, based on the Sifrei, explains that “a Hashem of faithfulness” means that Hashem can be trusted to reward the righteous in the World to Come, while “in Whom there is no wrong” means that even the wicked are rewarded in this world for any good they have done. The Gemara in Taanis (11a) interprets the verse similarly: no debt goes unpaid, and no account is rounded off.

In his introduction to Sefer Bereishis in Haamek Davar, the Netziv cites the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 25a), which calls Bereishis—the book centered primarily on the Patriarchs (“Avos”)—the “Sefer HaYashar,” the book of the straight and upright. The Netziv asks why the Avos are called “Yesharim” rather than, for example, “Tzaddikim,” and why Bereishis is not therefore called “Sefer HaTzaddikim.”

His answer begins with our verse. The phrase “Tzaddik V’Yashar Hu,” the Netziv writes, helps explain the destruction of the Second Temple. That generation included Tzaddikim, Chassidim, and people devoted to Torah study, but unfortunately, they were not Yesharim in their dealings with others.

There were Tzaddikim in that generation, but because baseless hatred was in their hearts, they were not Yashar and looked down on those whose religious observance differed from their own. Hashem is Yashar, the Netziv writes, He does not tolerate Tzaddikim who behave this way.

Rather, Hashem covets Yesharim, like the Avos. They dealt honestly and uprightly with everyone—even idolaters. That is why the book in which the Avos feature most prominently in, is called the Sefer HaYashar.

*“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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