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On the Parsha

“When a person has on the skin of the body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affliction on the skin of the body, it shall be reported to Aharon the priest or to one of his sons, the priests.

The priest shall examine the affliction on the skin of the body: if hair in the afflicted patch has turned white and the affliction appears to be deeper than the skin of the body, it is a leprous affliction; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce the person impure.” (Leviticus 13:2-3)

The commentaries point out that that the 2nd verse above could have just said, “The priest shall examine the skin of the body” without the words, “the affliction on (the skin)” as we already know that we are talking about the affliction from the description of the affliction in the 1st verse above. The Toras Kohanim explains that the words are repeated to emphasize the importance of accurately identifying the nature of the affliction (i.e. is it pure or impure). The Mincha Belula states that we learn from these extra words that the priest may not view more than one affliction per day. This was out of concern that the priest may experience a type of burnout. That is to say, that if the priest would view too many afflictions, it may overtax him and cause him to diagnose the affliction incorrectly.

A study led by researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine surveyed 6,695 active physicians and 3,574 of them — about 55 percent — reported symptoms of burnout. The study found that those physicians suffering from burnout reported having caused, twice the level of medical errors than those who were not subject to burnout.

The Torah was well aware of the potential for priestly burnout and the errors it can cause and that is why the priest was limited to diagnosing one skin affliction per day.

An error is usually unintentional, but when it happens, it is essentially a “non-truth” that can put into motion other non-truths as those that commit mistakes, often fail to admit them. Instead, they conceal them with further lies.

In any event, to err is to be human. When mistakes are made, the correct approach after making an error is to immediately admit to it as the great Amoraim did in the Talmud (see Eiruvim 104a; Zvachim 94b; and Niddah 68a). Similarly, the Rambam writes several times in his responsa (e.g. responsa #49) to the Sages of Luniel, “I have erred, and correct it in your writings.”

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: There is a thrift shop in my neighborhood in which people drop off all different types of clothing. In some instances, very high-end designer clothing is dropped off, often worth hundreds of dollars more than the thrift shop prices them at. Often, I shop at the thrift store and search for these items and make a handsome profit when I resell them.

My first question is, am I obligated to tell the thrift shop owner that in certain cases, he is seriously underpricing his items for sale? My second question is, I am often asked about an article of clothing that I bought at the thrift shop. To some, I reveal my secret and tell them of the bargains that I find at the thrift shop. To others I say, “I got this at a boutique store that I visit occasionally.” Am I permitted to conceal that I shopped at the thrift store by saying that I purchased the item at a boutique store?

ANSWER: There is a concept in Halacha called, “Ona’ah” which is the practice of overpricing or underpricing an item by more than one-sixth of the market price. If an item is underpriced to a point where Ona’ah would apply, one should tell the owner that they have underpriced the item to protect the owner from being taken advantage of. Regarding overpricing, one should inform the owner when Ona’ah is occurring as the overpricing of an item to such an extent is not permitted.

However, it is important to note that Ona’ah relates to pricing deviations from what the Halacha would consider to be the “market price” of a product. There is great debate as to how to apply the concept of a Halachic market price in

today's contemporary commerce. You should consult your Rav for further details.

Regarding thrift shops, I would like to suggest that the "thrift-shop market" is different in nature than other types of markets. The Minhag (custom) of thrift shops is that they acquire things for free or nearly free and batch-price them, i.e., regardless of quality or brand, all shirts are generally priced the same, all pants are generally priced the same, etc. The Ramah in Choshen Mishpat 331 cites a Yerushalmi in Bava Metzia that when the pricing custom is different than the conventional pricing at the market, the concept of Ona'ah does not apply. Accordingly, since the thrift shop market, "marches to a different drummer" so to speak, the concept of Ona'ah would not apply and you would not have to inform the owner that he is underpricing his items.

Similarly, the Pischei Teshuvah in Choshen Mishpat 232 rules that the practice of selling "closed box Esrogim" where batches of Esrogim are all sold in closed boxes for the same fixed price without considerations to quality, are also exempt from Ona'ah. For example, should one open the box and examine the quality of a particular Esrog subject to this pricing system and find it way less valuable than the fixed price, it would still not be considered Ona'ah, since the accepted Minhag of the seller is to sell all the Esrogim at the same fixed price without regard to the actual market price.

Regarding the second question that you asked, if you are concealing where you bought your item because you are embarrassed to admit that you bought item from a thrift store, then the following would apply. You would not be able to lie straight out to save yourself from embarrassment. However, you would be able to say something that can reasonably be interpreted in different ways. In your particular case, a "boutique store" can be defined in two ways. It can be defined as either 1) "a small shop dealing in fashionable clothing or accessories" or 2) "a small-scale retail store that specializes in a specific product category or niche." Since the thrift shop is definitely a niche type of store, you have not lied when you called it a "boutique store" even though you hoped that your listener believed that you referred to the 1st definition of a boutique store rather than the 2nd definition which is what you intended.

Chizuk - Inspiration

The Steipler Gaon recounted the story of an individual whose general dedication to Torah observance had waned slightly after he had left the Yeshiva. However, there was one area of his observance that remained as strong as ever. He had become a businessman and remained exceptionally honest in all of his business dealings.

When asked why he remained rigorously observant in matters of honesty he replied, "Years ago, while in Yeshiva, I had a Rebbe that would sternly warn his students, 'Please make sure that you learn diligently and not waste time! Your parents are paying me to teach and study with you. If you do not learn diligently, I can be considered a thief for getting paid and not doing my job. I do not wish to be a thief and take money that does not belong to me.' My Rebbe's example of honesty stands before me in every business deal that I do and is something that I aspire to."

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the seventh chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sefas Tamim.

"Therefore, man should see to it to accustom himself to speak truthfully, as much as possible and admit the truth no matter what happens to him, either for good or for bad (apart from three things that Chazal permitted him to lie about: his learning, his relations with his wife, and his hospitality (Baba Metzia 23b), and also to keep the peace).

This character trait will bring a person to do everything that is good and to refrain from everything that is bad. For example, it once happened that someone who committed every possible sin went to his rabbi to teach him the way to repent. The rabbi told him that his atonement would come as a result of being extremely careful from staying far away from a false word. In so doing, he became a sincere repentant since he washed his hands of everything evil in order not to put himself in a position where he would have to lie to avoid the embarrassment of doing something wrong. Thus, truth is like the foundation of a building, and one who embraces truth will find favor in the eyes of Hashem and man. Therefore, one must be careful to always speak the truth, which is the source of all exemplarily character traits, and Hashem will grant him success with His compassion and kindness, Amen."