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On the Parsha

"And the one to whom the house belongs comes and tells the Kohen, saying, 'Something like a lesion (Negah) has appeared to me in the house.'" (Vayikra 14:35)

The Alter of Slabodka (Ohr HaTzafun page 12 cited in Chochmas HaMatzpun pages 73-74) says that Chazal explain that even a Torah scholar who knows with certainty that his home has been stricken with the dreaded affliction may not categorically declare, "It is the Negah that I see." Rather, he should say, "It appears to me like the Negah."

The Tosfos Yom Tov citing the Gevuras Aryeh explains why the homeowner has to hedge his language: "Since it is the Kohain that must view it and establish that [the house has the Negah and] is impure, if the homeowner were to precede the Kohain with a declaration of certainty and state that it is the Negah, it would appear to be a lie [as it is not an actual Negah until the Kohain says that it is].

[Furthermore, since the Torah does not qualify when the homeowner needs to hedge his words, we must assume that he would need to hedge his words in all cases.] Therefore, even in a case where the homeowner is a Torah scholar [who knows exactly what the Negah is supposed to look like] and therefore it is clear to him that the Kohain will declare that it is the Negah, [nevertheless, if the Torah scholar homeowner does not hedge his language and say, 'it appears to me to be a Negah,'] he would be included within the verse in Tehillim (101:7), 'He will not dwell within My house; he who practices deceit, who speaks lies, will not be established before My eyes.'"

However, there is an additional lesson to be learned. As mentioned above, since the Torah does not qualify when the homeowner needs to use his "hedging language," we must assume that it applies in all cases. This would even include a case where the Kohein is

ignorant and does not understand the principles and appearances of what the Negah looks like! In such a case, in addition to the Torah scholar homeowner who, "knows exactly what he saw," we have a Kohain who does not know what he is looking at and would therefore certainly rely on the homeowner who is a scholar. Even in such a case, where we are almost 100% certain that the Kohain is going to say that it is a Negah, the homeowner still has to use his, "hedging language" because it has not happened yet i.e., the Kohain has not declared it to be a Negah.

We see from here how careful the Torah tells us to be with our words. Even if the homeowner's words are true (he knows for sure that his house has a Negah and he knows for sure that the Kohain is going to declare it a Negah) the fact that they are not completely true (the Kohain still hasn't declared his house to have the Negah) results in the Torah commanding him to hedge his language. Otherwise, as we have said above, such a person could be considered as one who, "... will not dwell within My house; he who practices deceit, who speaks lies, will not be established before My eyes."

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am in my seminary year in Israel and my parents are really worried about me. They are real worry warts and the current situation in Israel is not helping. They want me to stay inside my seminary building almost all of the time. I lie to them and tell them that I am inside to reassure them. However, the truth is that I do go out of the building to the Makolet (grocery/convenience store) to get food, supplies and whatever else I want. Am I allowed to lie to my parents under these circumstances?

I think my parents are being unreasonable. My seminary is in Jerusalem and if the fighting was near to us, that would be one thing, but the conflict is in Gaza, fifty miles away.

ANSWER: It may be difficult to tell if your parents are being unreasonable as it is the tendency of young men and women to see things in this way. You should ask your question to an impartial, responsible adult. If he or she agrees with you that your parents are being unreasonable, you would be allowed to lie in such circumstances, since it puts your parents at peace and avoids causing them pain (Mutar L'Shanos Mipnei HaShalom – One may lie in certain circumstances to maintain the peace). You should, however, take measures to ensure that this does not become habitual.

We find support for lying in certain circumstances to maintain the peace from Hashem Himself who lied to Avrohom about what Sara had said about him (See Bereishis 18:13) to keep the peace between Avrohom and Sara.

Furthermore, when Dovid asked Shaul HaMelech for permission to battle with Golyas, the Midrash Tanchuma (Parshas Emor Siman 4) explains that Shaul agreed to let Dovid fight and clothed Dovid with his royal tunic and weapons. The royal weapons and tunic should have been too big for the younger and smaller Dovid. However, a miracle transpired, and they fit Dovid perfectly. Immediately, Shaul looked at Dovid enviously because he saw this as a sign that Dovid would succeed him as King of Israel. When Dovid noticed that Shaul's face was white with envy, he downplayed the significance of the miracle, by lying and saying that they were still too heavy for him to fight in and therefore he was not destined to be the king after him.

Rav Chanoch Zundel Ben Yoseph ZT"l, author of the Aitz Yoseph and Anaf Yoseph commentaries, explains that Dovid lied so as not to add to the pain of Shaul and awaken his jealousy. It seems that the possibility of this happening was enough to invoke the dispensation of lying to maintain the peace.

You may also be interested in the ruling of Rav Yisroel Feinhandler in Avnei Yashpeh Vol. VI CM 145:5 who rules in a similar case to the one posed in your question, that lying would be permitted.

Chizuk - Inspiration

As a young man, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, was informed that he was being considered for the position of Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva Kol Torah in Jerusalem and he was invited to deliver a Shiur (class) before the heads of the Yeshiva.

Not long after the Shiur had begun, Rav Yona Merzbach, one of the founders of Kol Torah, interrupted the Shiur with a challenge to Rav Shlomo Zalman about something that he had been asserting. After a few seconds of silence, Rav Shlomo Zalman declared, "Ta'isi (I am mistaken)." He then began a new topic which was the focus of the remainder of the Shiur. When he returned home and his Rebbitzin asked him how he had fared, Rav Shlomo Zalman replied, "Not so well. The Shiur had hardly begun when I admitted to a mistake. Actually, I had three different answers to offer the one who had questioned me. However, I felt that my answers were not truly responsive to the question and that the strength of the question being asked indicated that there was a fault in my line of reasoning."

Nevertheless, Rav Shlomo Zalman was chosen to be Rosh Yeshiva. Years later, Rabbi Merzbach told Rabbi Yehuda Addas, Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah, "Do you know why Rav Shlomo Zalman was appointed to his position? When I asked him a question and he responded, 'I am mistaken,' it was clear to me that with such a level of Emes (truth), he should be our next Rosh Yeshiva.

It was not often that Rav Shlomo Zalman retracted an explanation in favor of a student's opinion. But on those rare occasions that he found a student's reasoning to be superior to his own, he admitted his mistake joyfully and without hesitation.

He once told a student, "I suspect that in the World to Come, I will not receive reward for the times when I admitted to the truth [as it comes easy to me]. What shall I do? I enjoy letting someone know that he is right."