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On The Parsha

There was a groom in Vilna that married into a very wealthy family.

However, soon after the marriage took place, the groom abandoned his wife and disappeared, likely because he was overly anxious or scared and perhaps regretted getting married (however the story as told, does not give the reason why he deserted his wife).

After two years had passed, the groom relayed the story of the abandonment to another man whom he had happened upon. That person happened to look very similar to the groom. Nefariously, the man was planning on returning to the abandoned woman in an attempt to impersonate the groom. In order to do so, the imposter asked the groom about every detail of the wedding and marriage and committed it to memory. When the imposter returned to the woman, she was impressed by his ability to recall the details of their wedding but was still unsure whether he indeed was her long-lost groom. The imposter was brought to the Vilna Gaon ("GRA") for questioning. The man answered the GRA's questions. However, when the GRA asked the imposter to identify the place in the synagogue where he usually sat, the imposter was unable to answer the GRA. The ruse was over and the imposter had been caught.

The GRA was asked to explain how he knew to ask this particular question to the imposter. The GRA explained, "When an evil person prepares to lie and deceive, he has no concept of holiness in mind." Knowing that when someone is engaged in falsehood, holiness and spirituality cannot also "be on their radar", the GRA suspected that the imposter had not obtained from the groom details related to spirituality such as where he sat in the synagogue.

We see this principal at work in this week's Parsha. The Torah tells us: "And they [the brothers of Yosef] told him [Yaakov] all of Yosef's words... and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent... and the spirit of Yaakov, their father, was revived." (Bereishis 45:27)

The brothers of Yosef stood at an incredibly high spiritual

level. As the Ramban notes, they were so holy that their names were inscribed on the High Priest's breastplate (Choshen Mishpat) - a testament to their spiritual greatness. Yet, even they demonstrated this fundamental principle about falsehood - it inherently creates a barrier to spirituality which cannot be focused on when engaged in falsehood. Namely, when the brothers lied to Yaakov about Yosef's death, their message to him was devoid of any spiritual details (e.g. the brothers could have told Yaakov that they came upon Yosef while he was learning and saw that an animal had attacked him). The fact that there were no spiritual details in their accounting of what happened to Yosef, gave Yaakov pause (and hope) that perhaps the brothers may have been lying and Yosef was still alive.

With this in mind, we have a deeper understanding of why Yosef, when he wished to convey to Yaakov later in the Parsha that he was still alive, used a sign that relates to spirituality, namely he sent wagons to signal to Yaakov that he remembered the last thing that Yaakov and Yosef learned together (which were the Halachos of Eglah Arufah – the decapitated heifer). As the GRA explains (as cited in the Kaftor VaFerach): "And when Yaakov saw the sign of holiness, he understood that this time the words were true." As we have stated, Yaakov believed that it was true that Yosef was still alive, because had it been a lie, the message could not have contained details of spirituality, i.e. what Yaakov and Yosef had been learning.

This is an important lesson for all of us to internalize. If we are involved in falsehood, it creates a barrier that precludes us from focusing on our spirituality. We cannot compartmentalize this and comfort ourselves by thinking that we are still good people focused on our spiritual growth, if at the same time we act dishonestly or unethically in our everyday affairs.

Chizuk - Inspiration

During World War II, Rav Michel Dov Ber Weissmandl ZT"L who was a remarkable Gadol (Torah luminary), was part of an underground group in Slovakia called, "The

Working Group". The group's mission was to save Jews through negotiations with the Nazis. In 1942, they managed to gather a large sum of money - approximately \$50,000 which was an enormous sum at that time. They planned to use the money to bribe the Nazis to stop the deportations of Jews to the concentration camps.

During one critical negotiation, a Nazi official demanded to count the bribe money that he received before proceeding. While counting, he accidentally counted one stack of bills twice, resulting in a total sum that was several thousand dollars more than was actually there. The Nazi seemed pleased with the larger amount of money.

Amazingly, Rabbi Weissmandl, despite knowing that the extra money might help save more lives and that the Nazi would never know the difference if he did not speak up, immediately pointed out his counting error. When asked why he had been so honest in his dealing with an enemy, Rabbi Weissmandl explained that maintaining absolute honesty, even in dealings with enemies and even when lives were at stake, was essential. He believed that compromising on truth, even for seemingly justified reasons, would ultimately undermine their entire rescue effort.

And his belief was proven to be correct. Remarkably, this act of honesty actually helped establish credibility with the Nazi official, leading to successful negotiations that helped delay deportations from Slovakia for a significant period of time which saved many Jewish lives.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: In our circles, the custom is to give the Kallah (bride) a diamond bracelet upon the engagement and then a diamond ring later on. We have a number of boys to marry off in our family and we simply will not be able to afford a diamond bracelet and a diamond ring for the Kallahs of each of our boys. We will likely buy lab-grown diamonds instead of natural diamonds which are significantly cheaper. If we buy these diamonds for the Kallahs, are we obligated to tell them? If we do not tell them, are we guilty of the transgression of, "Gneivas Da'as" (engaging in deception)? You likely know that a lab-grown diamond is the same as a natural diamond in all material respects other than the fact that a lab-grown diamond is grown in a lab, while a natural diamond is mined from the earth.

ANSWER: The best thing to do is to tell the Kallah that she is getting a lab-grown diamond. As you likely know, the value of a diamond is determined by, "The four Cs" – Cut,

Carat, Color and Clarity. Similarly, in marriage, "Clarity" i.e. transparency and disclosure is key to building a trusting marital relationship.

However, let us discuss if one is obligated to do so to avoid transgressing Genaivas Da'as. It is an established Halacha in numerous places in Shulchan Aruch, that the parameters of what is considered to be Genaivas Da'as are determined by "Minhag HaSochrim" – the custom that happens in the business world. There is a Smah in Choshain Mishpat 228:16 on Shulchan Aruch 228:6 that states that when everyone (or perhaps most people) know that white color is added to meat to make it appear fattier then it is permitted, because that is the Minhag HaSochrim - what sellers generally do.

Applying the concept of Minhag HaSochrim to our case, whether you would be obligated to tell the Kallah about the lab-grown diamond, would depend on the socioeconomic status of the boy's family. If the father of the boy is a professional, or the family is well-off then there would be an obligation to tell the Kallah, as people would assume that the Kallah is wearing the real thing – which would be the Minhag HaSochrim so to speak, for a wealthy family. However, if the boy is studying in Yeshiva and the family is in Chinuch (Jewish education) and not known to be wealthy – it would seem that that the general assumption is that the boy had purchased a lab-grown diamond and therefore, there would not be an obligation to tell the Kallah.

As an aside, if the boy buys his Kallah a cubic zirconia or moissanite stone, there would be an obligation to inform the Kallah even if the boy was not from a wealthy family, as those are cheaper alternatives to lab-grown diamonds and people would not assume that is what a boy, even if they were from a poor family, would buy for his Kallah.

As mentioned to begin with, even in a case where it is not Genaivas Da'as, it is still best to be open and honest. It is best to advise the Kallah on what she is receiving to help build a trusting marital relationship.

*"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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