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## Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: Unauthorized authentic shoes ("UA Shoes")

are produced by shoe factories when they produce excess pairs of shoes beyond what the brand companies have ordered. After fulfilling the brand's quota, the excess leftover shoes remain in the factory - physically identical to the "authentic" shoes, however they have not been authorized for sale by the brand. Third parties often acquire and sell UA Shoes below the retail price of the authorized shoes.

May one purchase or sell UA Shoes since they lack the authorization from the brand to do so?

ANSWER: The Smah (Choshen Mishpat 228:16), Ramah (Choshen Mishpat 331), and Rav Elyashiv's rulings suggest that UA Shoes are Halachically (according to Jewish law) permissible when there is:

1. **Clear labeling** on the shoes that says, "Unauthorized Authentic," "Factory Surplus," or similar;
2. **Appropriate Discount Pricing** reflecting their unauthorized status;
3. **Market understanding** that these are not authorized retail items; and
4. **No false claims** about brand authorization or warranty.

The principle from the Smah (ibid) mentions that marketplace customs are very important - as UA Shoes become more understood and regulated in the market, disclosure requirements may evolve and there may be other conditions added to the above to meet changing marketplace guidelines.

However, following the Shaarei Teshuva's (3:181) strict stance on the prohibition of Geneivas Da'as (deception), any attempt to present UA Shoes as an authorized pair of shoes would be absolutely forbidden. This effectively means that even if all of the conditions above were met, one would still not be allowed to sell or buy UA Shoes if there is a reasonable possibility that one's counterparty to the transaction does not understand the nature of UA Shoes.

## Chizuk - Inspiration

During the era of the Cantonist Decrees in Czarist Russia, Jewish

boys as young as twelve were forcibly conscripted into the army for 25-year terms. The true purpose of these drafts was to convert Jewish children to Russian Orthodox Christianity through isolation from their communities and relentless pressure. According to Halacha, saving these young souls from spiritual destruction was not only permitted but obligatory.

Reb Baruch Yosef Kozliner, a Torah teacher in Disna, Belarus, secretly dedicated himself to the sacred work of saving these young children. Working with the Lubavitch Yeshivah, he arranged draft exemptions for Jewish students through forged documents and bribes to government officials. Despite handling substantial sums of money, Reb Baruch never took a single kopek for himself.

There was trouble for the Jewish community of Disna when government officials were tipped off about the draft exemption scheme. Investigators from Petersburg suddenly arrived in Disna and arrests swept through the town. Nearly everyone involved in the exemption scheme was imprisoned. Terrified, Reb Baruch fled to Lubavitch to seek the counsel from the Rebbe Rashab (Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson).

After hearing Reb Baruch's urgent plea to daven for his safety, the Rebbe Rashab asked him two questions: Had anyone seen him leave town and had he acted honestly with the funds he was given to save the Jewish children?

When Reb Baruch confirmed that only his wife knew of his trip and that he had taken care to be very honest with the money entrusted to him to save the Jewish children, the Rebbe Rashab unexpectedly advised him to return back to Disna immediately — directly into the apparent danger of incarceration from which Reb Baruch had been fleeing from.

Reb Baruch did not understand the advice but obeyed, nonetheless. Back in Disna, he waited anxiously as more arrests occurred every day, thinking that he would be next at any moment. Then, through Divine Providence, a miraculous turn of events unfolded.

A corrupt official in Disna who had once taken bribes himself, had in his pocket a letter detailing Reb Baruch's activities, and was ready to hand it to the investigators which would most certainly lead to Reb Baruch's arrest. However, his secretary discovered a letter exposing the official's own past corruption and confronted him about it. In a panic, the official begged the secretary to hide the incriminating evidence against him. The secretary listened to the official and gave him the incriminating letter – now the official had both letters in his pocket.

At the precise moment when the secretary gave him the letter, the government investigators burst through the door. Flustered, the official reached into his pocket to produce the letter against Reb Baruch—but instead, pulled out the letter incriminating himself. The official was arrested on the spot and the evidence against Reb Baruch vanished forever in the official's pocket.

Reb Baruch was never arrested. He merited extraordinary Divine protection due to his complete honesty in the handling of the funds to save the Jewish children.

### On The Parsha

In the conversation between Balak's delegation and Bilaam that takes place in this week's Parsha, we witness a profound revelation of human character. One particular moment, illuminated by Rashi's penetrating insight, shows us how our words often reveal more about ourselves than we intend.

When Bilaam responds to Balak's second delegation that came to request that he curses the Jews, Bilaam declares: "Even if Balak gives me a house full of silver and gold, I cannot do anything small or great that would transgress the word of Hashem" (Bamidbar 22:18). On the surface, this sounds like a noble statement of religious devotion. However, Rashi sees it differently:

"This shows us that he (Bilaam) was greedy and coveted other people's money. He said, 'He (Balak) ought to give me all of his silver and gold, since he would have to hire many armies and even then, it is questionable whether he would be victorious or not, whereas I would certainly succeed.'"

Bilaam's attempt to sound holy and pious actually revealed his mercenary heart. While claiming that he could not be bought, his words betray exactly what he claims to reject.

Rashi's insight reveals an interesting truth about human

nature: we often expose our deepest desires precisely when we try to deny them. Bilaam's mention of "a house full of silver and gold" wasn't necessary to make his point about following Hashem's directives. A simple, "I cannot transgress Hashem's word," would have been enough. But his greed that was lurking just below the surface, compelled him to reference and quantify the silver and gold that he was supposedly rejecting.

How often do we protest too much, revealing the very motivations we are trying to hide? Often, one insists that, "It is not about the money, it is about the principle," while detailing every financial aspect tangentially related to the principle one is espousing. Another person may claim "I do not care what people think," while obsessing over public perception. Our denials often become our very confessions.

Bilaam's words reveal something else that may even be more troubling than simple greed—they reveal a twisted view on how to leverage the spiritual gifts that he was granted. Bilaam saw the prophetic ability that he had, not as a spiritual gift and privilege, but rather one that could be harnessed for material gain and exchanged for a, "...house full of silver and gold."

This mixing of money and the sacred spiritual gifts that one may have been granted, represents a fundamental corruption of spiritual purpose. When we begin to view our talents, insights, or spiritual gifts primarily through the lens of how they can benefit us, we transform Hashem's Brachos (blessings) into business ventures and spiritual callings into careers.

Bilaam's tale is so tragic because he genuinely possessed spiritual gifts. He could indeed communicate with the Divine. Yet this very ability became a source of material ambition rather than spiritual growth - a fundamental corruption of his spiritual purpose.

*"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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