

“Calev silenced the people toward Moshe.” (13:30)

Calev sought to attract the people's attention, in order to listen to what they were saying against Moshe: “Is it this alone that the son of Amram has done to us?” Calev gave the inaccurate impression that he would now disparage Moshe (here it was a matter of pikuach nefesh of Klal Yisrael). They were wrong. He only wanted their attention, so that he could reveal the wonderful things that Moshe had done for them. Is one permitted to resort to subterfuge, to give the impression that he is not very observant, only to clarify the matter shortly thereafter? The following halachic query was presented to Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, by a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who was seeking a rabbinical position in a community whose religious observance was, at best, left of center. The attitude of several of the board members was antagonistic towards the Torah community. They hammered the candidate with questions that had little to do with the rabbinical position. Their intention was to sidetrack the prospective rabbi to observe whether he would compromise his stance in regard to religious issues. In short, they sought to “weed out” any candidate who might be too frum, observant.

The question that the candidate posed to Horav Zilberstein was a practical one. Was it permitted to respond in the affirmative to the questions, thereby giving the impression that he was a progressive and liberal rabbi who would have no problem compromising in areas of Torah law – if that was what was needed to keep the congregants in good spirits. After the position was his and he would have an opportunity to endear himself to the congregants, he would, of course, show his “true colors.” He would explain to the membership that the only authority in regard to Jewish law was Daas Torah, the authority of Torah interpreted by the gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants of each generation. Yet, regrettably, when he would be questioned, he would be compelled to present himself as one who is estranged from the Torah way of life.

Horav Zilberstein responded that it is forbidden to present oneself in a negative light even if it is only for a short time. He supported his psak, halachic decision, citing a Mishnah in Meseches Ediyos 5:6. Akavia ben Mahalalel testified concerning four things: he was in dispute with the Sages regarding four areas of Jewish law. They said to him, “Akavia, withdraw these four things in which you are in dispute and we will promote you to be the Av Bais Din, head of the Rabbinical court.” He said to them, “It is better for me to be called a fool all my life than I should become a wicked man in the presence of the Almighty even for one hour. Let not men say: ‘He withdrew his opinions for the sake of getting power’.”

Chazal attempted to persuade Akavia ben Mahalalel to change his view. Iyun Yaakov understands from the Mishnah that the request was temporary in nature. They wanted him to change his view for one hour, during which they would elect him as the Av Bais Din. Afterwards, he could revert to his original decision. He responded that he would rather be called a fool for the rest of his life than to compromise his opinion of halachah and consequently be viewed as a rasha – even for one hour. We may add that certainly what was expected of Akavia was in no way as potentially damaging to halachah as what was expected of this young rabbi. Yet, one's commitment to

halachah must be unwavering. This does not apply only to rabbis; it applies to their congregants, as well.