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**Serious Business:
Jews on the Edge of
the Law**

Speaker:

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Date: Wednesday, September 17

Time: 8:00pm

Place: Morg Lounge

Moderator:

Rabbi Dr. Michael Shmidman

Coordinator:

Rabbi J. Cheifetz

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Serious Business:
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1. Some of those Orthodox Jews are really sly. You know all those federal programs that give out money to different people for different reasons? Like the Pell Grants, so that people can go to college, and the school lunch money, so that kids can eat lunch? Well, these Jews decided that they had the most worthy cause of all (more worthy than going to college, at least): supporting yeshivot and tzedakot. So they fashioned an ingenious scheme to siphon money from these federal programs into their own institutions. It was a foolproof plan, no one would ever know!

(Now it's plastered in big letters across the front pages of every newspaper in the city. And it seems that, since you wear a yarmulka, non-frum acquaintances and even *goyim* are treating you as the spokesperson for the Jewish faith.)

Do you defend the actions of the Orthodox Jews to your non-religious and *goyish* acquaintances and friends? Are there situations in which charges leveled at Jews might simply be cases of anti-Semitism? After all, *halacha b'yadua she'eisav sonei yaakov*. Can these Orthodox Jews be defended on the grounds that they were only cheating the government? Or on the grounds that they were cheating to support Torah institutions and not for private gain?

2. The year: 1982. President Reagan just made his "evil empire" speech and Cold War tensions are at an all-time high.

Meanwhile, in Washington Heights, you are preparing to go to the USSR to try to teach Torah and give *chizuk* to the Jews who are there. Shortly before your trip you are approached by a Russian man who wants you to bring a notebook computer with you, to sell on Russia's black market. The profit margin is quite high, and you are tempted. There is only a slim chance of being caught, and at worst, he says, they will just confiscate the computer.

Do you do it? After all, it's only the communist government that you will be cheating. What if you were thinking of bringing it in to Israel instead of Russia? How is this case any different from illegally bringing tefillin into Russia? Are you allowed to break the laws of a country in order to support Torah? What about the United States?

3. You're fresh out of SSSB and have signed on to work for a medium-sized accounting firm. Things go OK until tax season starts. One day, however, your boss instructs you to make some, ah, "adjustments" to the numbers of one of your firm's big clients. (These "adjustments" are illegal.) Some careful inquiries at the water cooler reveal that you are not the only one who has been asked to participate in this scam. Moreover, the firm has done this before, and the last time someone refused to participate, he lost his job.

Do you do it? What if this illegal act is common practice in the business world? What if its legality is questionable, instead of being blatantly illegal? Does it make a difference if you are supporting a family? What if you won't be fired for not doing it, but you will be offered a promotion for agreeing to the request, and the promotion will let you give more tzedakah and do more mitzvot?

Concluding Questions:

The fact that these scenarios were selected reflects a sense that this type of behavior does exist in our community and raises broader questions about what our response should be: Do we acknowledge these problems despite the risk that this may be used against us? At a time of Orthodox-bashing, should we call attention to our weaknesses? Does it make any difference whether you are responding to someone within our community, an individual outside our community, or in the public media?

while morality/hal'ic quality of act maybe irretrievable, extenuating circumstances can mitigate...
yet - argument that Frum Jews used to cheating b'co of oppressive goyim
to phony > 10 many yd in USA. where's z'chun?