

## חשיבות מדת האמת

### הרב שרגא נויברגר

Since we are children, we are taught that when Yaakov Avinu came to receive the *Birchas Bechora* from Yitzchok Avinu, he did not lie. On Yaakov's phrase, (בראשית כז, יט) "אנכי עשו בכרך..." Rashi explains, "I am the one who has brought you food, Esav is your bechor." I believe we are taught incorrectly that this is an example of Yaakov Avinu not telling a *sheker*. In truth, in the pure sense Yaakov really did tell the truth because what he said qualified as *ratzon Hashem*. Yet, according to what we commonly refer to as "telling the truth", Yaakov did indeed "lie" because he did say a misleading phrase.

His actions were fully justified and even verified as being *ratzon Hashem*. When he voices concerns over tricking Yitzchok, Rivka tells him that she knows from *nevua* that he is supposed to do so. The *mekubalim* draw a comparison from Avraham Avinu's *nisayon* of the *Akeida* to Yaakov Avinu tricking Yitzchok. Just as Avraham Avinu had to totally override his character and *mahus* of חסד to offer Yitzchok at the *Akeida*, so too did Yaakov Avinu have a great *nisayon* to defy his very nature as the איש אמת in employing falsehood to get the *Birchas Bechora*.

The Gemara (מכות כד.) *darshens* the words of, (תהלים פ' טו) "...לא רגל על לשונו..." as referring to Yaakov Avinu. Rashi says that Yaakov did not want to lie to his father, but Rivka forced him to because she had a *nevua* that he was supposed to. We see clearly that which Yaakov said constituted a lie (in the proverbial sense). R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg points out that precisely this incident, where Yaakov had to deviate from the truth, is what shows his *midas ha'emes*. We see how deeply he felt about cleaving *emes* because *emes* is *ratzon Hashem*. Therefore, if the *ratzon Hashem* is to get the *brachos* and that is his *avoda*, then that itself becomes the *emes*.

When Rashi explains Yaakov's phraseology as, "I am bringing you the food; Esav is your bechor..." he is teaching us another layer. Even when one is allowed to be משנה מפני השלום, or has a *mitzvah* to, it is to be down with the smallest amount of deviation possible. That is how important מדת האמת is. Therefore, Yaakov Avinu minimized the change by saying a phrase which could be interpreted to be factual. Not because he was telling "the truth," rather because he was reducing the change from "truth" which needed to happen.

I would like to *shtell-tzu* an interesting thing. The Gemara (ב"מ כג) says there are three things which one can "change his words" for. One of those is which *mesechta* one is learning. (There is a *machlokes Rishonim* whether it is an *inyan* of *anava* or to prevent him from not being able to answer the question.) When the Rambam brings down this *halacha* in הל' גזילה ואבידה, he gives the example of one who is learning מס' נדה should say he is learning מס' מקואות. I posit that Rambam chose this specific example to teach that the lesser change from actuality, the better. Since מקואות and נדה are connected, it is better to swap one with the other than for a different *mesechta* which is not as closely related. Even though there is a *heter* to be משנה, it should be used sparingly in order to maintain the מדת האמת.

I recently saw an interesting story from R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg to explain *pshat* in a *posuk*. There was once a person who was some type of “Bible Critic” who wrote that when Avraham Avinu told Sara to say she was his sister, he exhibited selfishness because the *posuk* says, (בראשית יב, יג) ”למען ייטב לי בעבורך...” and that means that Avraham was looking to gain prestige and material gifts from the ruse. R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg called him in to inform him that he misread the *posuk* and completely misunderstood the *lashon haTorah*. He proceeded to tell the man the following story.

During the time of the Gra there was once a young Jewish girl who was kidnapped and set to be married to a *Goy*. A group of young *Yidden* went to the Gaon and as for a *bracha* to be *matzliach* in saving her by taking her back on the day of her “*chassunah*” from the *goy*. The Gaon gave them his *bracha*. On the appointed day, the young *Yidden* disguised themselves as an honor guard and executed their mission successfully. When the Vilna police were trying to figure out what happened after the *Yidden* got away, they decided it must have been *Yidden* and that the Gaon must have approved it. So, they arrested the Gaon and threw him in jail. At his trial, the judge asked him if he was involved and the Gaon was silent. They thought he didn’t understand the language and brought an interpreter who translated it into Yiddish and still the Gaon was silent. A *neis* happened and the judge decided that since the Gaon was silent, it must mean that they did the rescue mission without his knowledge. When the Gaon came home, his *talmidim* asked why he didn’t just say that he had nothing to do with it? Besides for it qualifying as *משנה מפני השלום*, this case was also *פיקוח נפש*. Certainly, they would believe the Gaon because they were *machshiv* him so much. The Gaon was, for a third time, silent and did not answer.

R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg then related how a historian went and checked the Vilna Court Archives about this case and wrote that no one has found a reason for the Gaon’s silence, but he wanted to offer a *pshat*. Even though it was *muttar* for the Gaon to lie in that case, since he was such an *איש אמת* he could not utter an untruth even when he was allowed to. Why didn’t he at least answer his *talmidim* when they asked him? Because, as great was the Gaon’s *מדת האמת*, so was his *מדת הענוה*. Therefore, he was *shoseik* even afterwards.

R. Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg then said that Avraham Avinu only said those words “...למען ייטב לי בעבורך...”, because he knew how difficult it would be for Sara Imeinu to deviate from the *אמת* because of her own *gevaldigge* *מדת האמת*. Yet, he felt that her *מדת החסד* would overpower it. So, if it was just for her own benefit, she would rather stick to the *emes*, but once Avraham framed it as doing a *chessed* for him, then she was willing to say it. Therefore, it was not selfishness on Avraham Avinu’s part, rather just the opposite! It was actually a *tovah* he did for Sara by presenting her a way to allow herself to do it.

We can take the *mussar* from Yaakov Avinu’s *hanhaga*, and Sara Imeuni’s *hanhaga*, that our own *מדת האמת* should be so strong as to make it difficult for us, as well, to be *משנה* even when we are within our rights to. We should deeply appreciate how *choshuv* *מדת האמת* truly is.