

Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva... I will guard you wherever you go... for I will not forsake you. (28:10,15)

Yaakov *Avinu* was compelled to make a hasty departure from Be'er Sheva. He would have loved living in the vicinity of his parents, but that would have meant putting his life in mortal danger. After Yaakov's "appropriation" of the *brachos*, blessings, Eisav swore that he would seek ultimate revenge. This was Yaakov's cue to take an extended trip. He stopped in Beis El, and, while he was there, he was privy to an incredible dream in which Hashem assured him of His Divine protection and blessing. It should have been all good, with the Patriarch calm and looking forward to settling down and enjoying the blessings. On the contrary, we find Yaakov distressed and filled with fear. *Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl (Pri Tzaddik, Vayeitzei)*, explains that Yaakov was not so much concerned with his own life, as he was anxious that his own sins had brought him to this precarious situation. He cites the *Midrash Tanchuma* which is, at best, puzzling. The disciples asked their *Rebbe*, "What is the law concerning one who murders unintentionally?" The *Rebbe* replied, "One who kills unintentionally must flee to one of the *Arei Miklat*, Cities of Refuge, lest the *go'el ha'dam*, blood avenger, exercises his right to take revenge and kill the murderer." At this point, the *Midrash* interjects and makes what seems to be an unrelated statement, "Yaakov fled to Charan to escape from Eisav. When Hashem saw Yaakov in great distress, He appeared to him."

A superficial reading of this *Midrash* would have one think that Yaakov *Avinu's* escape to Charan was in some way connected to the law of the *rotzeiach b'shogeg*, unintentional murderer, which could not have been further from the truth. Yaakov killed no one. If anything, it was the evil Eisav who planned to murder Yaakov – intentionally. If anyone should be required to flee, it should be Eisav. This, too, is unlikely, since anything that Eisav would do would be intentional. The dispensation of *Ir Miklat* does not apply to *meizid*, acting intentionally.

Rav Tzadok offers a powerful and illuminating exposition on original sin, its ramification, its effect on Yaakov, what we should learn from it, and how our lives should change accordingly. The origin of death lies in the sin of eating from the *Eitz Ha'daas*, Tree of Knowledge. As a result of eating from its prohibited fruit, death became part of life. From that moment, the concept of living forever was tabled and closed. Man would have to die. The mastermind behind the sin, the creature responsible for this first insurrection, was the serpent, who through guile and prevarication was able to convince Chavah to take a bite. Out of the goodness of her heart, she shared with her husband, because, after all, that is what a good wife does.

The serpent was cunning. It knew that a little lie would go a long way. It therefore told Chavah that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge possessed unusual mystical powers, and if one were to partake of its fruit, he/she would become G-d-like and be able to create universes. The serpent was audacious enough to say that Hashem was envious and could not tolerate any other creation. Thus, by prohibiting them from eating of the Tree's fruit, He was actually preventing them from becoming His equals.

This was not only a lie – it was the first lie. Imagine the evil of the serpent. The world had just been created, and it had to inject its own brand of evil in it. Death was Hashem's response to this evil. As a result, falsehood, deceit and deception – in their various forms – are considered the forces of death. [When a person lies, a little of him dies.] *Chosamo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes*; the seal of Hashem is truth. Anything less than one hundred percent truth remains a lie.

Rav Tzadok cites an incident from the *Talmud* (*Sanhedrin* 97a) that buttresses this idea. In a certain community the citizens adhered to the highest standards of truth. The people did not tolerate any form of falsehood. Apparently, no one in the city had ever died young, through either illness or accident. One of the *Talmudic* sages, who was known for extraordinary integrity, moved to the community when he married one of the local women. They were blessed with two sons. On one occasion, a neighbor came to visit his wife. Out of deference to her privacy, he told her that his wife was not home. (He felt that it was innocuous. She needed to rest, and he did not want to disturb her. Unfortunately, such “white” lies happen all of the time.) Immediately, his two sons died. When the citizens of the community became aware of the tragedy that had befallen the sage and his wife, and, by extension, the entire community, they realized that someone had uttered a word of untruth. The *tzaddik* was asked to leave the town. A breach in the standards of veracity catalyzes a visit from the Angel of Death.

Titein emes l'Yaakov, “Attribute truth to Yaakov (*Michah* 7:20). The Patriarch was the personification of honesty and probity. Although they were twins, Yaakov and Eisav could not have been more different. Yaakov represented truth; Eisav was the embodiment of everything false. Every day he would play out a ruse of fooling his father to believe that he was righteous and saintly. Truth lengthens life. Falsehood and deceit bring on death. Yaakov perceived that he was in danger of suffering an untimely death. This was an indication that somehow, somewhere, he must have been negligent in the area of truthfulness. The only time that his actions “bordered” on deception was when he presented himself as Eisav in order to obtain his rightfully deserved *brachos*. He had never lied. Every word that he uttered was true. Nonetheless, the entire scenario was a beguiling charade which might be perceived as verging on falsehood. For someone of Yaakov's spiritual stature, any form of unintended falsehood would be reckoned on the Heavenly scale as unintentional murder, which required the perpetrator to suffer the consequences.

Yaakov was not taking chances. If he was wrong, he would do what was necessary to expunge the taint on his character. When he saw that he was confronting adversity and trouble, he felt it was due to his unintentional lying. Hashem, Whose seal is truth and is the ultimate Arbitrator of truth, appeared to Yaakov in a dream and assured him that he need not worry. He would not be taken to task for his actions. He performed them under extenuating circumstances; they were appropriate and necessary. Hashem thus restored Yaakov's self-confidence, so that the Patriarch remained the exemplar of truthfulness and probity.

Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, exemplified the *middah* of *emes*. Indeed, every aspect of his life was regulated by truth. *Rav Gifter* would underscore the inexorable striving one

must maintain in his search for the truth, applying an incident that occurred with *Horav Shimon Shkop, zl*. *Rav Shimon* was a *maggid shiur* in Telshe for twenty years. Following his first *shiur*, he was walking down the street. He felt that he had rendered a good *shiur* and was now mulling it over. In the course of his walk, he met the nephew of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*. Their conversation focused on *Rav Shimon's shiur*. As he was about to take leave of *Rav Shimon*, the nephew gave him a strange blessing. "May you be *zoche*, merit, never to say the 'truth' in your *shiurim*." This blessing did not seem like a blessing. A *shiur* was all about explaining the passage in the *Talmud* in such a manner that all ambiguities were clarified, i.e. one presented the truthful understanding of the *Talmud*.

Seeing the look on *Rav Shimon's* face, the nephew explained that if he ever felt that he had discovered the truth, then possibly he would stop looking for it – which must never happen. One must constantly delve, search and yearn to find the truth. He must never feel that he has found it. The standard for truth is very high. It could also (in the minds of some people) be very low. As long as one strives to reach higher and higher, he will ultimately achieve a level of uncompromising honesty based on Torah values.

Rav Gifter demanded that truth be the moral compass of every endeavor. No area of life and human endeavor exists for which truth does not serve as its barometer. Telshe *Yeshiva's* official letterhead originally bore the name Rabbinical College of Telshe. He changed the letterhead to Telshe *Yeshivah*, because he felt that the term Rabbinical College unintentionally gave the message that Telshe is a school that produces rabbis. *Rav Gifter* felt that this was deceptive. The purpose of a *yeshivah* is to produce the next generation of Torah adherent Jews.

The *Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl*, had two sons whose adherence to *emes* was classic: The *Shiniaver Rav, zl*, and *Gorlitzer Rav, zl*. The *Gorlitzer* once asked his brother, "We are both products of the same family and the same upbringing. Why is it that we hardly ever render the same opinion? I will explain to you the reason for this. When you see a mountain replete with *sheker*, falsehood, but buried deep within it is a miniscule element of *emes*, truth, you will do everything within your power to extricate it because of your deep abiding love for the truth. I, on the other hand, if I will see a mountain filled with truth, but I sense a tiny element of falsehood buried deep inside, will reject the entire thing. One drop of *sheker* tarnishes the entire mountain of *emes*." They both sought the unvarnished truth. The *Shiniaver* loved *emes*, and the *Gorlitzer* despised *sheker*. Two varied approaches to one objective.