

## **But Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents. (25:27)**

*Rashi* explains that a *tam* is wholesome, a person who is not adept at deceiving. Thus, Yaakov *Avinu* is called a *tam*, because he did not deceive. Deception went against his grain. We find, however, in the following *parshah*, when Yaakov meets Rachel *Imeinu*, *Va'yaged Yaakov l'Rachel ki achi avihah hu*, "And Yaakov told Rachel that he was her father's brother" (*Bereishis* 29:12). *Rashi* clarifies this statement, quoting the *Midrash*, "If he (Eisav) comes for deceit, I, too, am his brother in deceit; but, if he is a decent person, I am also the son of Rivkah, his decent sister." In other words, Yaakov could be deceitful when necessary. If he was an *ish tam*, who was unable to deceive, how would he claim to be Lavan's brother in deceit?

In his *Divrei Yechezkel*, the *Shiniaver Rav*, *zl*, distinguishes between a *tam* and an *ish tam*. A person who is not adept at deceiving is a *tam*. Yaakov, however, is described as an *ish tam*. This is a more inclusive designation, whereby he is, above all, an *ish*, a man, a person who is in complete control of his *middah*, attribute of *tam*. When it was necessary and appropriate to behave in a wholesome manner, Yaakov exemplified *tam*, wholesomeness at its epitome. Deception was foreign to him. When Yaakov was challenged by a *rasha*, evil person, however, such as Eisav and Lavan, Yaakov was compelled to extract and retrieve what they had stolen from the realm of *kedushah*, holiness. In order to achieve this goal, he had to outdo them and actually beat them at their own game. Under such circumstances, he was forced to bend the truth, and he became adept at deception.

It all depends upon with whom one must deal. When one is compelled to deal with *reshaim*, wicked people, we must realize that *sheker* employed in the pursuit of *emes*, truth, is, in fact, *emes*. This does not by any stretch of imagination suggest that the end justifies the means. It does, however, posit that the "means" which on the surface appear deceitful, when used against a *rasha* – are not. They are *emes*. Yes, true and false are defined by the circumstances. To deceive an evil person who is bent on deceiving us is not deception. It is very much like saying: I never speed. If there is an emergency – does one speed? He certainly does. Otherwise, he is a fool. It is only considered "speeding" if one travels too fast for an inappropriate reason. If it is a matter of life or death, it is not defined as speeding. In fact, he who observes the speed limit might be called a murderer, if, as a result of his adherence to the law, someone who is in need of medical help succumbs. Did he drive fast? Yes. Did he speed with the negative connotation? No.

With this idea in mind, we have a pathway towards understanding one of the Torah's greatest ambiguities: Yaakov *Avinu* surreptitiously received the *brachos*, blessings, from Yitzchak, in what Eisav considered to be a swindle. First, some background. Yitzchak *Avinu*'s original intention was to bestow the *brachos* upon Eisav. At Rivkah *Imeinu*'s instruction, Yaakov entered clothed in Eisav's finery. When Yitzchak asked, "Who are you?" Yaakov responded, "I am Eisav – your firstborn." In this way, Yaakov successfully wrested the *brachos* from Eisav. Clearly, even to the uninitiated, Hashem wanted Yaakov – not Eisav – to receive the blessings. The question which gnaws at the reader is why it had to take place in what appears to be a deceptive manner. Why

should we eternally be blamed by Eisav's descendants as deceivers who are descendants of one who committed an act of treachery against an unsuspecting brother? Could Hashem not have arranged for the blessings to be transferred to Yaakov in a more dignified manner? Furthermore, Yaakov is the Patriarch most associated with the *middah*, attribute, of *emes*, truth. As the *ish tam*, wholesome man, prevarication was to him an anathema. *Chosamo shel HaKadosh Baruch Hu emes*, "The seal of Hashem is truth." Obviously, if Hashem orchestrated events in a deceptive manner, it was for a good reason.

The *Sfas Emes* (cited by *Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita*) writes the following: "Regarding the matter that Yaakov took the blessings by means of deception with the approval of the Almighty, we derive herein that, in order to achieve the truth, we are indeed permitted to do so by means of deception, since the desire to arrive at the truth is in no way considered *sheker*, falsehood. On the contrary, this constitutes the *tikkun*, spiritual repair, of *sheker* – using deceptive methods in order to arrive at the truth. By using *sheker* as a means of unearthing the truth, *sheker* is rectified."

We must add that it is not everyone who is able to decide when *sheker* may be employed in order to rectify or abolish *sheker*. Yaakov *Avinu* was the epitome of *emes*. Only someone of his truthful standing could render the decision to use *sheker* to battle Eisav's *sheker*, in order to retrieve the *brachos* that were rightfully Yaakov's.

*Horav Pinchas Koritzer, zl*, would constantly exhort his *chassidim* to speak only the truth. Truth was the pillar of his *Chassidus*. He insisted that, if all Jews had been free of falsehood, *Moshiach* would have long ago arrived. The primary obstacle to our final Redemption is the lack of truthfulness.

*Rav Pinchas* had a number of *talmidim*, disciples, who exemplified the *middah* of *emes*, but none so like *Horav Raphael, zl, m'Bershid*. He was careful to limit his speech, and, when he did speak, it was with carefully measured, well-thought-out words. The following vignette is an indication of his total commitment to veracity in speech. He entered a room during a rainstorm. Someone asked him if it was raining. *Rav Rapahel* replied, "When I was outside, it was raining then." He had just that moment crossed the threshold, but he was not outside. He could not, in all honesty, attest to the current pouring rain. Truth had to be pure and adulterated; otherwise, it was not the truth. Ninety-nine percent true is one hundred percent false!

The following story is frightening in the sense that it demonstrates to the reader to what lengths someone can go to adhere to the truth – regardless of the circumstances. A certain member of the Jewish community was caught by the authorities while dealing with illegal merchandise. [We must add that the term "illegal" was then an arbitrary term which was decided by any official who needed an excuse to bleed the Jewish community.] The charges were serious, and the chances of his escaping serious punishment were, at best, slim. The judge had told the defendant's lawyers that the evidence was so damaging that no testimony in the world could change the outcome. The judge asserted, "Only if *Rav Raphael* were to testify on his behalf is there a possibility of a positive outcome."

The judge trusted *Rav Raphael* due to his sterling character. The lawyers, willing to grasp at any straw, told their client that if the *Rav* could be “convinced” to testify on his behalf, he had hope. The defendant proceeded to *Rav Raphael*’s home and poured out his heart, describing what would happen to him personally and the repercussions that would affect his wife and young children. It was clearly a case of *hatzolas nefashos*, saving a life!

*Rav Raphael* was confronted with a life-altering decision. For his entire life, he had gone to great lengths to maintain veracity in every area of life. How could he now, in his advanced age, turn his back on the *middah* of *emes*. On the other hand, how could he allow another Jew to fall prey to the punishment that was in store for him? The gentile wanted nothing more than to set an example of the thieving Jew. How could he look into the crying eyes of the man’s wife and children, knowing that he could have saved their husband and father and had not done so? *Rav Raphael*’s pure heart was torn between his love for a fellow Jew and his commitment to integrity. How much could his heart handle?

The night before the trial, *Rav Raphael* locked himself in his room and, throughout the night, he prayed with extra devotion and ceaseless bitter weeping. He cried out to Hashem, “*Ribono Shel Olam!* Take my *neshamah* away! It is better that I should die than utter a lie!”

Hashem listened and accepted *Rav Raphael*’s request [obviously it was his time, and this holy man merited to die *Al Kiddush HaShem*, sanctifying the *middah* of *emes*]. That very night, the holy *Rav Raphael*’s *neshamah* came home to a better world, a world in which truth reigned supreme. He had given his life to maintain the *middah* of *emes*. [What is most frightening to me is how many people will not understand this story – or *Rav Raphael*.]