

When we are first introduced to the personality and unique qualities of Yaakov *Avinu*, we are told that “Yaakov was a *tam* man, dwelling in the tents (Gen. 25:27).” Rashi explains the term *tam* to mean that he was straight-forward. As opposed to Eisav who was a master manipulator, Yaakov was not adept at trickery. His heart and mouth were one. It would appear that Yaakov was a naturally straight-forward, truthful individual.

Lest one think that this characteristic of Yaakov was corrupted later in his life, the *Midrash Rabah* (Vilna edition *parshah* 70 number 7) relates an incident where a certain non-Jewish fellow asked Rabbi Meir, “Do you not maintain that Yaakov was completely truthful, as it says, ‘Give truth to Jacob (Michah 7:20)’?”

“Certainly.” Responded Rabbi Meir.

“But did he not say, ‘From whatever You (God) give me I will give You one tenth’? But he had twelve sons, and only the tribe of Levi was given to God, he should have given a tenth of the remaining two!”

The Midrash goes on to relate Rabbi Meir’s response in defense of the pure truthfulness of Yaakov.

From this Midrash we see that based on the verse in Michah, Yaakov is viewed as always telling precisely the absolute truth, even later in his life.

The Midrash (Tehillim Psalm 15 *parashah* 6) also comments on the verse in Tehillim (15:2), “He speaks truth,” as a reference to Yaakov.

The Yalkut Shimoni (*Shelach, remez* 743) says that every *tzaddik* grasped his unique characteristic, and “Yaakov grasped truth, as it says, ‘Give truth to Yaakov’”.

I hate to say it, but it would seem that someone ought to give truth to Yaakov, because he could sure use some in this weeks *par’shah*! If Yaakov is the paradigmatic man of truth, why do we find him outright lying to his father? Eisav is correct when he says, “This is why he is called ‘Yaakov (a reference to the heal of the foot)’ , because he has tripped me up by the heal twice (Gen. 27:36)!”

In what would appear, at first, to be a desperate attempt to defend the behavior of Yaakov, Rashi explains that Yaakov never lied.

When Yitzchok asks, “Who are you, my son?”

Yaakov responds, “I, Eisav your firstborn.”

While this may appear to be an outright lie, Rashi explains that it was true, in a sense. Yaakov

meant, “I [am Yaakov], Eisav is your firstborn¹.”

When Yaakov says, “I have done what you said to me,” implying that he hunted, captured and cooked the meal that he had placed before Yitzchok, Rashi explains that, again, nothing was false. It is true that he had done many things that Yitzchok had told him, albeit at other times.

When Yitzchok, one last time, asks, “Are you my son Eisav?”

Yaakov responds, “I.”

Rashi comments, “He did not say, ‘I am Eisav.’”

It would seem from Rashi that Yaakov never once lied.

Is this explanation of Rashi satisfying? At the end of the day, the intent of Yaakov is that Yitzchok should understand his words to mean something else! Just because we can construe the words of Yaakov in such a way that they are true statements, Yitzchok certainly did not understand them that way, and for good reason – Yaakov was trying to deceive him! Yaakov is lying, because he is manipulating his words to be deceptive! So the question remains, where is this pure truth of Yaakov?

One wonders in general, why is Yaakov attempting to trick Yitzchok? Rivka calls to Yaakov and insists that he receive the blessings from Yitzchok in this manner. Yaakov is concerned that he will be discovered, but Rivka reassures him. This is not Yaakov’s idea at all, Rivka was the mastermind. She had received a prophecy from Sheim and Eiver that the elder will serve the younger (Gen. 25:23), and she felt obliged to ensure its fulfillment. It would appear that she never related this prophecy to Yitzchok.

Rav Dessler (vol. 1 page 94) points out that we are used to defining the “truth” as what really happened, or what we really think, while “falsehood” refers to misrepresentation. However, a more accurate definition of “truth” is “what God wants”. Ultimately, absolute truth is whatever God desires. Therefore, when the Torah instructs us to misrepresent a situation, doing so is consistent with the truth. For example, the Talmud (Yevamos 65b) tells us that it is permitted, or even a *mitzvah* to misrepresent something for the purpose of *shalom*. We see *permission* to misrepresent to further *shalom*, from the fact that, after Yaakov was buried, Yosef’s brothers told him that their father had commanded Yosef to forgive them (Gen. 50:17). This was not true, but they said it to assure peaceful relations in the family. We see a *mitzvah* to misrepresent for *shalom*, from the fact that when Shmuel the prophet was instructed to anoint David as the next King of the Jews, he was concerned that if discovered, this would be viewed as a rebellion against King Saul, and he would be executed. God then instructs Shmuel to lie as to the reason for his arrival, so that he will not be suspect. We also know that God Himself misrepresented the comments of Sarah when He related them to Avraham, by leaving out her statement that Avraham is old.

1. The additional term “firstborn” is unnecessary, after all, there was only one Eisav, so obviously if his name is Eisav, then he is the firstborn of Yitzchok. Why did Yaakov feel it necessary to add “your firstborn”. The answer is that it enabled him to be making a true statement, “I am I, Eisav is your firstborn”.

In these situations, the statements were false, they were lies, but on the other hand, they were the correct behavior in the eyes of God.

If so, whenever we are doing a behavior desired by God, we are furthering “truth,” despite any perceived “falsehood” involved. When one sees a bride that is not particularly attractive, Bais Hillel instructs us nonetheless to declare her, “Beautiful and pleasant (Kesubos 17a).” This furthers the desire of God that there be proper *shalom bayis*. So despite the fact that the statement is a misrepresentation of the facts, the behavior is the “truth.”

Rivka had a prophecy that delineated the proper development of the world. “The older shall serve the younger.” To further the truth, she instructed Yaakov to misrepresent himself to Yitzchok. Apparently, this was the only way to go about producing the desired result. Therefore, the behavior of Yaakov in this context was the “truth.” Just like one is permitted, or obliged to misrepresent something to produce *shalom*, so too it was permitted for Yaakov to lie, in order to further the desire of God, as expressed in the prophecy to Rivka.

Based on this, we now wonder why Yaakov bothered to legitimize his words!? If it was truly permitted to lie, because that was the desire of God, why did he need to justify every word as true?

My Rebbe, Rav Aharon Kahn, provided the following insight.

The Talmud (Yevamos 63a) relates that Rav was married to a woman who would frustrate him. When he would request a certain dish for dinner, she would prepare whatever could possibly be perceived as the exact opposite. When his son, Chiya, was old enough to realize this, he began relating his fathers request as the opposite, so that his mother would prepare what Rav really wanted.

Rav commented to Chiya, “You know, Imma is getting better!”

“Actually, I told her you wanted the opposite...” Chiya let on that it was actually his doing.

“Why didn’t I think of that?” Wondered Rav. “Nonetheless, you should not behave in this manner, as the verse states in criticism of the Jews, “They accustomed their tongues to speak falsehood (Jer. 9:4).”

One wonders why Rav didn’t quote the verse from the Torah, “You shall distance yourself from falsehood (Exodus 23:7)²” as the source of the prohibition to lie? Why did he quote a verse from Jeremiah?

The Maharsha answers that since it was permitted to lie in this context, the prohibition was inapplicable. What Rav was teaching his son, Chiya, was that despite the permitted nature of the act,

2. While at first glance, based on the context one might suggest that this verse is directed at judges, and does not serve as a prohibition for the individual, see how Bais Shammai utilize it in Kesubos 17a in response to Bais Hillel’s claim that one should lie about the beauty of a bride.

when one lies, he habituates himself to falsehood. A lie becomes easier. It loses its taboo status.

Now we can understand Rashi. Rashi is not a desperate attempt to reconcile Yaakov's comments with the truth. Yaakov was lying, he was misrepresenting himself to his father. However, as pointed out by *chazal*, Yaakov is the paradigmatic man of truth. He therefore misrepresented himself to further the ultimate truth of God's will, but simultaneously assured himself the maintenance of his sensitivity to truth by justifying every word as ultimately true as well. He refused to risk habituating himself to falsehood, despite the obligatory nature of his misrepresentative actions. Therefore, he expressed every word in a way that was also the truth. This is the extent of truth for an *ish ha-emes*, a man of truth.