

GUARD YOUR LIPS I

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

...And Lavan returned to his place; and Yaakov went on his way... (Bereshith 31:55, 32:1)

For many years, Yaakov had, out of necessity, employed cunning strategy in his dealings with Lavan. Nevertheless, the moment he left, he immediately reverted to the absolute honesty that was his natural characteristic. This can be gathered from the Torah's words, "And Yaakov went on his way."¹

It was no small feat for Yaakov to walk away from a two-decade sojourn with Lavan, totally uninfluenced by Lavan's wiles. Dealing with crooked people, on any level and to any degree, holds untold potential for harm to one's spiritual well-being. When someone is less than honest and fair with us, and we are forced to respond in kind, we must take extreme care that this behavior does not infiltrate our personality. Yet how do we accomplish this? How can one emerge unscathed from a situation in which one had to deal with or live among crooked people?

If we find ourselves unable to avoid such a situation, we should devote some time exclusively to studying the subject of the importance of truth, thereby strengthening it within ourselves, so that the falsehood to which we have been exposed will find no safe haven in our souls. We learn this strategy from King Dovid himself, for after he had to feign insanity in order to save himself from his son Avshalom, he composed Psalm 34, which stresses pure, fair, true and exalted speech.² In this psalm, King Dovid warned that just avoiding falsehood is not sufficient; if we desire a quality life in the truest form, we must guard our lips from any type of prohibited speech. This involves knowing which types of speech are in fact prohibited, and learning all the halachoth that apply. Making it a practice to study the laws of permissible speech on a regular basis is invaluable in helping one to respond properly in the many complicated circumstances that are bound to present themselves in our lives.³

1. *Meshech Chochmah*.

2. Heard in the name of Rav Matisyahu Solomon.

3. Chofetz Chaim, Chovoth HaShemirah.

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