

GUARD YOUR LIPS II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

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

The previous essay related that if people are forced into situations in which they must deceive someone else, they should immediately try to do something to counteract the negative repercussions of their act. Yaakov himself acted in accordance with this principle, as can be seen from the following scenario: When Yitzchak asked Yaakov if he was Esav, Yaakov replied Anochi, Esav Bechorechah, literally "It is I, Esav your first-born." The question begs to be asked: since Yaakov was interested in avoiding even the slightest trace of falsehood, why didn't he leave out the word "I" and answer "Esav, your first born," a seemingly equally effective answer to Yitzchak's question?

Yaakov's intention in using the word "Anochi" was very specific. He meant to imply, "It is I who will eventually accept the Ten Commandments." Since the prohibition of idol worship, the first of the Ten Commandments, starts with the word Anochi, Yaakov's use of the word Anochi alluded to this.¹ Yet the question remains: at this auspicious moment why did Yaakov feel it necessary to hint at the fact that he would eventually accept the Ten Commandments, specifically the prohibition against idolatry?

Our Sages tell us that the transgression of deceiving someone is on par with that of idol worship.² Although Yaakov was Divinely commanded to take the blessings from Esav, since he had to use means that seemed crooked, he felt it necessary, on the spot, to strengthen his recognition of the seriousness of falsehood by referring to the prohibition against idolatry.³

In addition to this, immediately after Yaakov deceived Esav he ran to the Yeshivah of Shem and Ever. His time spent studying there enabled him to overcome any adverse effects that might have lodged in his soul as a result of his misrepresentation of the truth. At the same time, it bolstered him so that he would be able to deal with Lavan while remaining true to himself. Both Shem and Ever had lived through generations when the entire world was marked by corruption. They were eminently qualified to give Yaakov the tools he would require to deal with the crooked society in which he was destined to live.⁴

¹ Bereshith Rabbah 65:18.

² Sanhedrin 92a.

3 According to Rashi's commentary, which does not quote this Midrash, it must be assumed that Yaakov felt that in order to insure with one hundred percent certainty that Yitzchak would give him the blessings, it was necessary to add the word "I" to his statement.

4 Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky: Titein Emeth L'Yaakov.

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