

# KEEP YOUR DISTANCE I

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

*And the men [i.e., the Divine emissaries] left. (Bereshith 18:16)*

Since the Divine emissaries were posing as Avraham's guests, there must have been a reason for their abrupt exit. Although Sarah laughed when she heard that she would bear Avraham a son, when confronted about her act, she denied having done so. Purely spiritual beings cannot tolerate the slightest hint of falsehood. For this reason they left immediately after these untrue words were spoken<sup>(1)</sup>.

This attitude towards falsehood is expressed in the very words of the Torah: "Midevar sheker tirchak <sup>(2)</sup> - Distance yourself from a false thing," which themselves express the repulsive nature of sheker - falsehood. The Torah's use of the term davar - thing - indicates that even the minutest hint of falsehood is to be avoided at all costs, while the word tirchak - distance yourself - comes to teach us how very disgusting sheker is <sup>(3)</sup>.

The Sefer HaChinuch speaks at great length about the loathsome nature of sheker: "Falsehood is universally scorned and hated, for nothing is so disgusting. All who affiliate themselves with any form of falsehood will find a curse and a plague upon their homes, for the Almighty is truth, and everything that is associated with Him is truth. Real prosperity is found only among those who are consistently truthful in their actions, who follow in God's ways of truth.

"All whose actions are contrary to God's actions - the masters of deception - will eventually face the opposite of prosperity; they will suffer from curse, plague, anguish, arguments, and pain. Because of the despicable nature of falsehood, the Torah commanded us to distance ourselves from it. This terminology is employed relative to no other prohibition. One should not so much as incline one's ears towards something which is potentially false, as our Sages tell us "Distance yourself from that which is abhorrent <sup>(4)</sup>."

---

(1) Chofetz Chaim commentary on Bereshith 18:16.

(2) Shemoth 23:7.

(3) Yad HaKetanah, Hilchos De'oth, ch. 10:1.

(4) Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 74.

Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Daniel Travis and **Torah.org**