

SIGNS OF TRUTH II

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand pieces of silver. Let it be a kesuth einayim for you and for all who are with you, for all that has been done." (Bereshith 20:16)

The commentators search to find a reasonable explanation for the idiom kesuth einayim (literally "a covering for the eyes"). Some interpret its usage as referring to the fact that Avraham had proven that Sarah was indeed his sister. Avimelech's attitude toward this was that Avraham could justify referring to Sarah as his sister when he was speaking with people who knew them, for they would realize that Sarah was also his wife. However, he advised Avraham, telling people who did not know them that she was his sister would surely cause them problems (as it had in Gerar, where Avimelech was king). Avimelech therefore gave Sarah such a large gift that she would never forget what had happened in his land. His gift would serve as a constant reminder of the complications that can result from misleading others.¹

In the course of our day-to-day routine it is very easy to forget about the Torah injunction to distance ourselves from falsehood. It is therefore recommended that we make personal signs to help us remember to always speak the truth. We can write notes to ourselves, for example, and look at them before engaging in any business transaction. One who occupies himself in Torah study throughout the day can keep such signs on his table or on the walls of the beith medrash to remind him to speak only the truth.²

In addition to the reminders that we can make, the Torah has given us a number of signs in the form of mitzvot. This is expressed eloquently in the piyut of Yam L'Yabasha (commonly recited after a brith milah), in which we say that God has placed signs of truth on the body and garments of a Jew, with the commandments of brith milah and tzitzith. Introspection and thought about all of these signs will help us to recognize the crucial importance of truth in our lives.

On a very solemn note, the contemplation of death can be a jolting reminder of man's true purpose in the world. The connection between death and truth can be seen in the word emeth - which is an acronym for aron (coffin), mitah (the stretcher that the deceased is carried on in the funeral procession), and tachrichim (shrouds).³ All three of these are physical reminders that a person's time in this world is limited, and that he should make it his business to find and pursue truth.

1. Rashba cited in the Beis Yosef's commentary on the Torah on Bereshith 20:16.

2. Orchoth Tzadikim, Shaar HaEmeth.
3. Baal Haturim, Bereshith 47:29.

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