

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Essay 10. Falsehood leads to premature death

גמרא פרק י"א דסנהדרין הנה ההוא אתרא וקושטא שמייה דלא הוה משנו בדבורייהו, ולא מיית איגיש דהתם בלא זמניה.
יש לדקדק מה ענין זה לזה.

There is a **Gemara in the 11th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin:**

Rava says: Initially I would say [that] there is no truth [anywhere] in the world. [There was] a certain one of the Sages, and Rav Tavut is his name, and some say Rav Tavyomei is his name, [who was so honest] that if they were to give him the entire world, he would not deviate [from the truth] in his statement. [He said to me:] One time **I happened** [to come] **to a certain place, and Truth is its name, and** [its residents] **would not deviate** [from the truth] **in their statements, and no person from there would die prematurely.** I married a woman from [among] them, and I had two sons from her.

One day his wife was sitting and washing the [hair on her] head. Her neighbor came [and] knocked on the door. He thought: [It is] not proper conduct [to tell the neighbor that his wife is bathing]. He said to her: She is not here. [Since he deviated from the truth] his two sons died. The people [residing] in [that] place came before him [and] said to him: What [is the meaning of] this? He said to them: This was [the nature of the] incident [and told them what happened]. They said to him: Please leave our place and do not provoke [premature] death upon these people.

- Sanhedrin 97a

We need to check what one thing has to do with another, i.e., the connection between falsehood and premature death.

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וַיֹּאמֶר שֶׁהוֹאִיל שֶׁהִמִּיתָהּ לֹא בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם אֲלָא מִחֲמַת שְׁקָר שְׁדִיבֵר הַנְּחָשׁ לְחַנּוּהָ, "וְהִיִּיתֶם כְּאֱלֹהִים", עַל כֵּן נִגְזַר שֶׁבְּכֹל מְקוֹם שֶׁנִּמְצָא שְׁקָר תִּהְיֶה הַמִּיתָה קְרוּבָה לְבוֹא. וּמִטַּעַם זֶה "דְּבַר שְׁקָרִים לֹא-יִכּוֹן לִנְגֹד עֵינָיו", שְׁמִי שְׁדוּבֵר שְׁקָרִים תּוֹפֵס אוֹמְנוֹתָיו שֶׁל יֵצֵר הָרַע, דְּהֵינּוּ הַנְּחָשׁ שֶׁפָּתָה לְחַנּוּהָ בְּשִׁקְר וְנִתְקַלַּל בְּאֲרוּר דְּכַתִּיב "אֲרוּר אַתָּה" וְכוּ', וְאִין אֲרוּר מִתְדַּבֵּק בְּבְרִיךְ.

It can be said that since death only came into the world because of a lie that the serpent spoke to Eve, “and you will be like divine beings,”¹ therefore it was decreed that wherever a lie is found, death will be nearby. For this reason, “he who speaks untruth shall not stand before my eyes,”² that one who speaks lies grasps “the craft of the evil inclination.”³ This is the serpent⁴ that seduced Eve with a lie and who was cursed, as it is written, “You will be cursed more than all cattle and all the wild beasts: on your belly shall you crawl and dirt shall you eat all the days of your life,”⁵ “and the cursed shall not be attached to the blessed.”⁶

וְזוֹהוּ הַטַּעַם נָמִי שֶׁאֲמָרוּ ו"ל בְּמִסְכַּת שְׁבֵת קוּשְׁטָא קָאִי, שְׁקָרָא לָא קָאִי, שֶׁהוֹאִיל שֶׁשְׁקָר בָּא מִצַּד הַקְּלָה אִין לוֹ הַעֲמָדָה וְקִיּוּם. וְלִכּוֹן כְּנֻעַן צָנָה לְבָנָיו אֵל תְּדַבְּרוּ אֱמֶת, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁכְּנֻעַן הוּא אֲרוּר כְּדַכְתִּיב "אֲרוּר כְּנֻעַן", וְלֹא רָצָה שֶׁבָּנָיו יִדְבְּקוּ בְּבְרִיךְ, וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי כְּתִיב עֲלֵיהֶם "לֹא תִחַיָּה כָּל-נִשְׁמָה".

This is the reason also that the rabbis of blessed memory said in tractate Shabbat 104a, “truth stands [eternal, but] falsehood does not stand [eternal],” that since falsehood comes from the side of the curse, it does not stand. Therefore, “Canaan commanded his sons [about] five matters: Love one another, love robbery, love promiscuity, hate your masters, and do not speak the truth,”⁷ because Canaan is cursed, as it is written, “cursed be Canaan,”⁸ and he didn’t want his sons to be attached to the upright, and because of this, it is written about how the Israelites should treat [the Canaanites], “do not leave alive anything that breathes.”⁹

וְעוֹד אֲמָרִינוּ בְּפֶרֶק י"א דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין כֹּל הַמְחַלִּיף בְּדִיבּוּרוֹ כְּאִילוֹ עוֹבֵד עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, כְּתִיב הֵכָא "וְהִיִּיתִי בְּעֵינָיו כְּמִתְעַתֵּעַ" וְכוּ'. וַיִּשׁ לְדַקְדַּק בְּזֶה שֶׁהָרִי יַעֲקֹב לֹא הִחְלִיף דִּיבּוּרוֹ רַק לְבַשׁ בְּגָדֵי עֶשׂוֹ, וְהֵם דְּבָרִים עֲשׂוּיִים לְהַשְׂאִיל וְלְהַשְׁכִּיר וְאִינוּ נִקְרָא חִילוּף. וַיִּשׁ לֹמַר שֶׁלְּגַבֵּי יִצְחָק שֶׁהָיָה סוּמָא גַם זֶה הָיָה חִילוּף וְשְׁקָר, וְזוֹהוּ שְׁדִיבֵיק הַפְּתוּב לֹמַר "וְהִיִּיתִי בְּעֵינָיו כְּמִתְעַתֵּעַ", בְּעֵינָיו דְּוִקָא. אִךְ קוֹשֶׁה דָּאם כֵּן אִיךְ אֲפֻשֶׁר שֶׁיַּעֲקֹב שֶׁהוּא אֲמִיתִי כְּדַכְתִּיב "תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב" יְגָרוּם עֲתָה לְיִצְחָק שֶׁהָיָה סוּבֵר שְׁקָר.

They also said in the 11th chapter of tractate Sanhedrin (92a): Anyone who changes the truth in his speech, it is as though he worships idols. As it’s written here, “Jacob answered his

¹ Gen. 3:5.

² Ps. 101:7.

³ Shabbat 105b; Niddah 13b.

⁴ Rabbi Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno (c. 1475–1550), Italian rabbi, Sforno on Gen. 3:1.

⁵ Gen. 3:14.

⁶ Gen. Rabbah 59:9.

⁷ Pesachim 113b.

⁸ Gen. 9:25.

⁹ Deut. 20:16.

mother Rebekah, ‘But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. If my father touches me, **I will be a trickster in his eyes** and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing,’¹⁰ and it is written there [regarding idolatry]: “They are vanity, the work of deception.”¹¹ **We need to check this, for Jacob did not change the truth in his speech; he only wore the clothes of Esau, and “these are items that are typically lent or rented,”¹² and this is not called “changing [the truth].” It can be said concerning Isaac, who was blind, that this was also a change in speech and a falsehood, and this is why Scripture was precise to say, “I will be a trickster in his eyes,” specifically in his eyes, because he was blind, whereas a change in clothing would not be considered a deception with regard to someone who can see. But it is difficult to understand this, for if so, that it was trickery, how is it possible that Jacob, who was truthful, as it is written, “You will give truth to Jacob,” that now he would cause Isaac to have a false belief?**

וגיש לומר דגריסינגו בפרק ז' דחולין (דף צ"ו) אמר רבא, מריש הנה אמינא: סימנא עדיף מטביעות עינא, השתא אמינא דטביעות עינא עדיפא, דאי לא תימא הכי, היאך בני אדם מותרים בגשותיהם בליילה ואיך סומא מותר באשתו, אלא בטביעות עינא דקלא וכו' עכ"ל. זהו "הייתי בעיניו כמתעתע", כלומר שמא יצחק לא תהנה לו בדעתו הסברא אמתית של הדיו, ואפשר דסבירא ליה דסימנא עדיף מטביעות עינא ואפשר נמי להפך, נמצא שיעקב לא גרם שום שקר, רק הספק היה בדעתו של יצחק אם היה תועה בדיו, ועיין לקמן בסמוך.

It can be said that it is presented in the seventh chapter of tractate Chullin (page 96a):

Rava said: At first, I would say that a distinguishing mark is preferable to visual recognition . . . , but now I say that visual recognition is preferable [to a distinguishing mark]. For if you do not say so, how are men permitted to [engage in intercourse with] their wives at night [when it is dark and they cannot see their wives' identifying marks], and how is a blind man permitted to [engage in sexual intercourse with] his wife [despite the fact that he cannot identify her by means of her identifying marks]? Rather, [one must say that they identify their wives] based on voice recognition.

- Chullin 95b–96a

This is the meaning of “I will be a trickster in his eyes,” as if to say, “maybe Isaac won’t have the true view of law in his thinking. Perhaps his opinion will be that a distinguishing mark is preferable to visual recognition, but it’s also possible that his opinion will be the opposite.” Thus, it’s found that Jacob didn’t cause any falsehood, only the doubt was in Isaac’s mind as to whether he erred in the law. That is, Isaac wasn’t sure whether to believe a distinguishing mark, as his hands told him it was Esau standing before him, or to believe a voice recognition, as his ears told him it was Jacob standing before him. **See further below in the adjoining essay.**

¹⁰ Gen. 27:11–12.

¹¹ Jer. 10:15.

¹² Bava Batra 52a, 52b; Bava Metzia 116a; Shevuot 46b.

ועוד יש לומר שחס ושלום לא עשה יעקב בעצמו שקר, שאם היה רוצה יעקב לעשות שקר היה משנה קולו ודיבורו דומה לשל עשו כדי שלא יכיר בו אביו כלל. אבל זה לא עשה דכתיב "הקל קול יעקב" דוקא, וזהו שהיה מתמה יצחק בעצמו, אם זה יעקב שהחליף בגדיו כדי לקבל הברכות היה לו לשנות את קולו. ולכן לא הפירו ויברכהו. וזהו שתרגם נמי אנקלוס "בא אחיך במרמה", בחוכמתא, שלא הייתה זאת מרמה ושקר חס ושלום.

It can be said that — G-d forbid — Jacob did not lie himself, for if Jacob had wanted to lie, he would have changed his voice and his speech pattern similar to that of Esau, in order that his father would not have recognized him at all. But this is not what he did, as it is written precisely, “The voice is the voice of Jacob,”¹³ and this is why Isaac wondered to himself, “If this is Jacob who changed his clothing in order to receive the blessings, he also would have changed his voice.” Therefore, he didn’t recognize him, and he blessed him. This is also as Onkelos translated on Gen. 27:35, “Your brother came with *mirma* [מרמה] and took away your blessing.” Mirma typically means “guile,” but here Onkelos translated as, “with his wisdom,” i.e., that this was not guile and falsehood, G-d forbid.

והטעם שהחליף דיבורו הוא כאילו עובד עבודה זרה, משום דבאומות כתיב "אשר פיהם דבר־שוא", ובישראל כתיב "שארת ישראל לא־יעשו עולה ולא־יזבחו כזב". וכל מי שמחליף דיבורו נראה שאינו ישראל וכאילו הוא מאותם שעובדים עבודה זרה, דכתיב בם "אשר פיהם" וכו'. ועוד דבפרק ד' דמציעא אמרינן "ולא תונו איש את־עמיתו" עם שאמה בתורה ובמצות אל תונוהו, וזה שמחליף דיבורו לישראל הוי כאילו הוא בלא תורה ובלא מצות.

The reason that the one who changes his speech is considered as if he is practicing idolatry, is because regarding the nations it is written, “whose mouths speak lies, and whose oaths are false.”¹⁴ In contrast, regarding Israel, it is written, “The remnant of Israel shall do no wrong and speak no falsehood.”¹⁵ Everyone who changes his speech therefore appears not to be of Israel, but to be as from those who worship idols, as it is said of them, “whose mouths speak lies.” Also, in the fourth chapter of tractate Bava Metzia (page 59a), they said: “ ‘Do not wrong one another,’¹⁶ [‘one another’ means] with one who is with you in observance of Torah and mitzvot, you shall not mistreat him.” If he is with you in Torah and mitzvot, do not wrong him! But one who changes his speech to a fellow Jew is considered as if he is without Torah and without mitzvot.

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¹³ Gen. 27:22.

¹⁴ Ps. 144:8.

¹⁵ Zeph. 3:13.

¹⁶ Lev. 25:17.