

12-3-13 Message to Beit Adonai Yisroel – Toldot  
Torah Portion; Genesis 25:19-28:9  
Haftarah: 1 Sam 20:18-42  
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: John 7:6-11

## **Is Honesty Always the Best Policy?**

**Central question of this message: Are there circumstances when it is acceptable to tell a lie?**

We are in Toldot. The generations of Yitzhak. Its name comes from the second Hebrew word in the passage, *toldot*.

Gen 25:19-20

*19 Now these are the records of the **generations** of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham became the father of Isaac; 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife.*

אֲבְרָהָם	בֶּן־	יִצְחָק	הוֹלֵדָה	וְאֵלֶּה	19
Abraham's	son:	Isaac,	the generations of	And these	
<u>85</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>3327</u>	<u>8435</u>	<u>428</u>	

יִצְחָק:	אֶת־	הוֹלִיד	אֲבְרָהָם
Isaac:		begat	Abraham
<u>3327</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>3205</u>	<u>85</u>

בְּקַחְתּוֹ	שָׁנָה	אַרְבָּעִים	בֶּן־	יִצְחָק	וַיְהִי	20
when he took	years	forty	old	Isaac	And was	
<u>3947</u>	<u>8141</u>	<u>705</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>3327</u>	<u>1961</u>	

הָאֲרָמִי	בְּתוּאֵל	בַּת־	רֵבֶקָה	אֶת־
the Syrian	Bethuel	the daughter of	Rebekah	
<u>761</u>	<u>1328</u>	<u>1323</u>	<u>7259</u>	<u>853</u>

לְוִלְאֵשָׁה:	הָאֲרָמִי	לָבָן	אֲחֹת	מִפְּנֵי אֲרָם
to wife,	the Syrian.	Laban	the sister to	of Padan-aram,
<u>802</u> <u>3807a</u>	<u>761</u>	<u>3837</u>	<u>269</u>	<u>6307</u>

As we read through this parashah, we find that things began well enough, but then we come across a passage that has given our people some fertile ground for lots of discussion over the generations.

Gen 27:5-29

*5 And Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, 7*

*'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.'* 8 *"Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. 9 Go now to the flock and bring me two choice kids from there, that I may prepare them as a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. 10 Then you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."* 11 *And Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, then I shall be as a deceiver in his sight; and I shall bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing."* 13 *But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me."* 14 *So he went and got them, and brought them to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob.*

18 Then he came to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 And Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your first-born; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me." 20 And Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me." 21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." 25 So he said, "Bring it to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought it to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said,

*"See, the smell of my son*

*Is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed;*

*28 Now may God give you of the dew of heaven,  
And of the fatness of the earth,  
And an abundance of grain and new wine;  
29 May peoples serve you,  
And nations bow down to you;  
Be master of your brothers,  
And may your mother's sons bow down to you.  
Cursed be those who curse you,  
And blessed be those who bless you."*

Does anyone argue that this action on the part of both Rivkah and Yacov was deceptive? Was that action sinful? Some will argue it was... others that it was not.

Let's look at some newer examples and make some judgments.



In 1965, the Rodgers and Hammerstein play *The Sound of Music* became a film. If you have not seen it, you have truly missed one of the great love stories of all time.

The basic story is true, actually, and I

have seen the places where this story actually took place. The movie takes substantial liberties with the truth, but it is still a delightful story and worthy of watching.

The mountains where Maria danced above Salzburg, Austria, in the opening scene, are called the “Obersalzburg mountains”. You can see where she was dancing, from Hitler’s retreat called the “Berghof” (mountain house), and “Eagle’s Nest”, just across the Austrian border above Berchtesgaden, Germany.



Set against the opening years of the Nazi conquest of Europe is the story of an orphan, Maria Augusta Kuschera, who was born on a train going to Vienna. Maria joined the Benedictine Abbey of

Nonnberg which still rests on a high cliff above Salzburg.

Maria was sent by the Reverend Mother of the Abbey down to become a governess to seven children who had lost their mother. The father of those children was Baron Georg Ritter von Trapp, who had been a Captain in the Austrian Navy.

Here's where the movie departs dramatically from the true story of Maria and the Baron, but I want to follow the movie story line now.

Maria marries the Baron von Trapp, and before he can be conscripted into the Navy of the Reich, they flee for their lives from their native Austria.

As they flee, they sing a song at a concert, so as to create a diversion as they get into the car and drive away for good.

<http://www.rnh.com/videos.html?video=122&gallery=41&vpg=3>

This was a deception on their part. But soon there would be a further deception, because the Nazis began a search for the family, and soon came to the Abbey to search for them there.

The Nazis nearly capture them at the abbey, but the von Trapp family is able to escape because the Nazi's two staff cars somehow won't start.

It seems some of the nuns had removed some of the parts of the engines.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV9H7aWgPv8>

The nuns describe their actions as “sins”. But were they really?

Those seem minor breaches of honesty, but let's look at others of that same time in history which are more severe.



**Irena Sendler,** was a Polish Catholic social worker. During World War II, she helped save 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto.

She was given special permission to enter the ghetto to conduct inspections of sanitary conditions during a typhoid outbreak. But she smuggled out babies and small children in ambulances and trams, sometimes disguising them as packages.

She provided them with false documents and sheltering them in individual and group children's homes outside the ghetto. Despite being tortured and imprisoned by the Nazis, Sendler continued to do all she could to help Jewish children in Warsaw.

**Giorgio Perlasca** worked at the Spanish embassy in Budapest during 1944. He issued over 5,000 Jews fake passports so Jews could travel to neutral countries.

He also personally secretly sheltered thousands of Hungarian Jews while waiting for their passports.



One of the more remarkable men of that time was **Georg F. Duckwitz**. He was a German, a member of the Nazi party, and he served as a special envoy Denmark during the occupation.

Initially, Danish Jews were left unmolested, but that was only because the infrastructure for mass transportation and internment in

concentration camps to the south was lacking. But by 1943, the plan for the final solution was ready to be executed in Denmark.

Duckwitz was informed of the secret extermination plan by his superiors. He immediately secretly visited Sweden and convinced Prime Minister Hansson to allow Danish Jewish refugees to flee to neutral Sweden. Once back in Denmark, he informed Danish politician Hans Hedtoft about the planned deportation.

Hedtoft quickly informed the rabbis, and in the next sixty days, more than 6,000 Jews were secretly evacuated by boat to Sweden.

Duckwitz is credited with saving approximately 99% of Denmark's Jews from the death camps.

Nobody can argue that each of these heroic people engaged in deep deception and falsehood in order to accomplish what they did.

But is deception and falsehood approved by G-d? Let's see what the Scriptures say.

Ex 1:15-22

*15 Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah, and the other was named Puah; 16 and he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is*

*a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. 18 So the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" 19 And the midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them." 20 So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. 21 And it came about because the midwives feared God, that He established households for them.*

These midwives engaged in open defiance of their civil government, and in deception as well. But it is clear that this courageous act was rewarded by G-d as a righteous act.

Josh 2:1-7

*Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." 3 And the king of*

*Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.*

She engaged in harboring spies, and in lying to the authorities about her actions. We know that Rahab was saved from death as Jericho was taken by the Hebrews, and she grafted-into the Hebrew people.

But was her action sinful? The writer of Hebrews doesn't seem to think so. She is listed in the faith "Hall of Fame" of Hebrews 11. If there is an equivalent to Mount Rushmore in Heaven, her face is certainly there.

Paul spoke of the putting aside of the old person, and becoming a new one. One of the characteristics of that new person was veracity.

Eph 4:25

*25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*

Yeshua spoke about the source of lies, and cautioned His generation to avoid lies.

John 8:38-45

*38 "I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father." 39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. 40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. 41 "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. 43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot*

*hear My word. 44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45 "But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.*

But then we have this as well...

John 7:6-11

*6 Jesus therefore said to them, "My time is not yet at hand, but your time is always opportune. 7 "The world cannot hate you; but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. 8 "Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come." 9 And having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.*

*10 But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as it were, in secret.*

He deceived them. But was that sinful? It cannot be sinful, or Yeshua is not the Messiah.

So we must now come to the conclusion that not all deception or lying is sin. But with that being said, are there any guidelines on when falsehood might be acceptable to G-d, if not completely righteous?

Let's face it. Telling lies has become part of our society. As long as there are bureaucrats who say, "I'm from the government and I am here to help you." there will be lies.

Otto von Bismarck, the man who formed the nation of Germany, and became its first Chancellor in 1871, said, "People never lie so much as after a hunt, during a war or before an election."

Apparently, von Bismarck never met a fisherman.

Jack Nicholson, the modern character actor (who, by the way, played a very convincing Satan, in *The Witches of Eastwick*), has said, "There's only two people in your life you should lie to... the police and your girlfriend."

But what do our holy people, when faced with these important issues, say? Over the ages, our sages have worked-out a few exceptions to the "always tell the absolute truth" rule.

The analysis begins, as it must, with Scripture.

Ex 23:7

*7 Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.*

	הִרְחֵק	שָׁקֵר	מִדְבַר־	7
	Keep thee far	false	from a matter;	
	<u>7368</u>	<u>8267</u>	<u>1697</u>	
תִּהְרַג	אֶל-	וְצַדִּיק	וְנָקִי	
slay thou	not:	and righteous	and the innocent	
<u>2026</u>	<u>408</u>	<u>6662</u>	<u>5355</u>	
	רָשָׁע:	אֶצְדִּיק	לֹא- כִי	
	the wicked.	I will justify	not for	
	<u>7563</u>	<u>6663</u>	<u>3808</u> <u>3588</u>	

The Hebrew words which are translated here as “from a false matter” are far more specific than the English would suggest. They are, I suggest, better translated as “from a word untrue”, or simply, a “lie”.

Our sages concluded that the prohibition against lying is absolute only in circumstances where it would result in the death of, or damage to, the innocent.

The sages concluded that telling a lie to promote peace is permitted. It is reported in Ethics that Aaron the High Priest would do this to make peace between angry spouses. He would go to one party and tell that person that the other spouse was really sorry and wanted to reconcile. Then he would do the same with the other spouse. Then they would come together and reconcile.

In fact, our sages concluded that it is actually a mitzvah (good deed) to lie in this way to promote peace.

Over the ages, instances have been found in Tractates Bava Metziah, Ketubot, as well as in Piskei Teshuvot, of seven instances where a lie is permitted:

1. Changing the truth in order to practice humility. For example, one may claim ignorance of a certain talmudic tractate even if one does actually know it.
2. Changing the truth in order to maintain modesty.
3. Changing the truth in order to protect someone else from harm or inconvenience. For example, if a host was very gracious, and one is asked about this, one should not tell all about his magnanimity as this may cause too many guests to flock to him.

On a similar vein, if a person has an incurable illness, and informing him of this will be detrimental to his health, it may be proper to withhold this information from him.

4. A white lie said in order to protect someone from embarrassment. An example of this is that one may say that a bride is beautiful and gracious, even if she isn't particularly beautiful or gracious.

5. Using exaggerated expressions if it is clear that it's an exaggeration. For example: "You look white like a sheet."

6. There are some circumstances under which one is allowed to be deceptive in order to recoup losses that are owed to him. Our patriarch Jacob employed this method to protect his lawfully earned gains from being defrauded him by his father-in-law, Laban.

7. If someone does something for himself, but another understands that it was done to honor him, one does not have to correct this misunderstanding. The Talmud relates that several rabbis were traveling from one city to another. A rabbi who approached them thought that they had come to greet him. In such a case, the Talmud concludes, it is not necessary to correct the mistake.

Can you see a pattern here? It is a pattern of honoring others above yourself, even if a small lie is used to uplift that person, or protect him from harm.

So, we can now reconcile the verses we have read today, which seem to be in conflict. We must not have a lifestyle of falsehood, or our witness will be destroyed. But on rare occasion, as the Spirit directs, we are permitted to tell a lie to uphold others, or to preserve them from harm.

A couple of examples I am familiar with makes it a bit clearer.

During his life, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a tzadik of blessed memory, spent many days in the homes of others. Most would offer him meals. Some didn't understand the rudiments of kosher, and why Rb. Shlomo wouldn't be able to eat the meal.

When asked to take a seat at the table, Rb. Shlomo would happily do so, but would protest that he was not in the slightest bit hungry (a lie), but that he would love a tall glass of water.

This lie preserved the dignity of the one who prepared the meal with love, but did not compromise his standards.

But the next example, I believe, is of a higher order.

A congregation in Denver would hold holiday picnics in the park. They invited people to bring foods to place on the charcoal grills, which could be shared with all. Hotdogs and hamburgers were a staple.

One time a sweet family brought some pork hotdogs by accident to the event, and put them on the grill before anyone noticed. Someone saw the discarded wrapper, and recognized it as containing pork. He then expressed dismay to others standing around the grill at the contents of the hotdogs. The sweet people who had brought them didn't notice, but they soon would. The bad news began to spread in a buzz around the grill.

Eliezer Urbach, another tzadik of blessed memory, saw what was happening, and stepped up to the open grill. He jabbed a fork in one of the pork hotdogs, and without a word, held it in front of his face. He made eye-contact with everyone who was around, and with a flourish took a bite and began to chew, making eye-contact once more. He never said a word.

Do you see what happened? Eliezer put his own standards of holiness aside in favor of love to a new family in the shul. It was possible that the members of this sweet family would one day discover the lie that Eliezer had just told everyone. But when that day would come, they would love him even more. And I most certainly loved him for that sweet lie.

And that's the point... love. Love of others must be the highest mitzvah of them all, and take precedence over all.

After all, Yeshua loved us so much that He took within his body all of our combined sins, and hung them on that execution stake.

As our sages declared, a prohibited lie is that which harms others, and doesn't edify. It's really a matter of the heart.

Maybe Jonathan Swift said it best when he said, "A lie does not consist in the indirect position of words, but in the desire and intention, by false speaking, to deceive and injure your neighbour."

Dr. Joyce Brothers agreed, “The topic of trust is an important factor in all matters of the heart - and here's why. Men lie to women. Women lie to men. And most people agree that some lying is even necessary - to avoid petty squabbles and to grease the wheels of a relationship.”

So, when your sweet spouse burns dinner, it's ok to say, “I like it this way”.

Or when your sweet spouse misses a turn on the highway because he won't ask directions on a trip, it's ok to say, “Yeah, I missed seeing that sign too.”

Love allows us the freedom to apply just a little more grease to the wheels of our relationships.

Feel free to do so.

## Verses for Toldot

Gen 25:19-20

Gen 27:5-29

Ex 1:15-22

Josh 2:1-7

Eph 4:25

John 8:38-45

John 7:6-11

Ex 23:7