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(718) 544-5213  
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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

## IN ALL HONESTY...

### PARSHAS LECH LECHA

When Rabbi Yisroel Brog was a youngster, he once asked Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l why he merited long life. Rav Yaakov responded that it was because he had never told a lie in his entire life.

When Rav Yaakov was a yeshiva student in Europe, the custom was to eat meals at different people's homes. One Pesach, Rav Yaakov was at someone's house but became concerned about the level of kashrus. He did not want to offend his host, so he apologized and said that the reason he could not eat in the house was because his custom was not to eat *gebrokts*. (Some people have the custom not to eat matza that has come-in-contact with water, on Passover, as an extra stringency. For example, they will not eat matza balls in their soup.) Although Rav Yaakov's custom had been to eat *gebrokts*, he stopped eating it for the remainder of his life. Since he had told his host that he does not eat *gebrokts*, he wanted to be totally honest. So he never ate it again on Passover.

Rav Nosson Kaminetsky, one of Rav Yaakov's sons wanted to trace his family's roots. He went to visit the small European town in which Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky had been the Rav. While he was there, he discovered a very interesting historical fact. Even though much of Lithuanian Jewry was wiped out during the Holocaust, most of the Jews of that particular town survived the war. Rav Nosson Kamenetsky asked the mayor of the town how so many the Jews of this town survived. The mayor said, "I can tell you exactly why the Jews escaped." He said that before the war, the fellow who eventually became the mayor had been the postmaster of the town. He made a test for the clergy members of that town – both Jews and non-Jews. When they bought postage stamps, he would purposely give them more change than they deserved. He wanted to see whether they would return the money or not. This was his acid test to see what type of people he was dealing with. He did this three times with Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky. Each time he gave Rav Yaakov more

*"He [Avraham] continued on his travels from the south to Beis-Eil, until the place where he originally had [set up] his tent, between Beis-Eil and Ai". (Bereishis 13:3)*

money than he was entitled to, Rav Yaakov would always return the money. This postmaster was so impressed with Rav Yaakov, who was the head of the Jewish community. Therefore, years later, when he was the mayor of the town, any time he became aware of a German action

that was being planned to kill the Jews, he would notify the Jews and they would go hide. That is how the Jews of the city were saved. ([Torah.org](http://Torah.org) based on Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes)

Hashem told Avraham to leave his birthplace and travel to the place that Hashem would show him. When arrived there, in the Land of Israel, Hashem tested him further by causing a famine in the land. That necessitated Avraham's temporarily moving to Egypt, to get food. While there, Avraham became wealthy from the gifts that Pharoah gave him. When Avraham returned to Israel, he "continued on his travels". **Rashi** explains that on his return, he paid the debts he had previously incurred at the inns that he had stayed in, on the way down to Egypt.

The **Chida** (quoted in Talelei Oros by Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin) wonders how Avraham could have gone on such a long journey to Egypt without money. How could he have assumed that innkeepers and merchants would extend credit to him? Furthermore, why did they extend credit to him?

The **Taz** (Divrei Dovid-Turei Zahav) answers that this shows the esteem in which Avraham was held. Even though Avraham went down to Egypt with all that he had, indicating that he may not return, the innkeepers still trusted him when he said that he would return to pay them.

The **Chida** has a different approach. He says that Avraham did have a small amount of money with him. The innkeepers noticed his impoverished state, so they charged him discounted rates which Avraham was able to afford at the time. On the return trip, Avraham was wealthy. He returned to all the innkeepers and merchants who had given him discounted rates. He paid them the full amount for the services that he had previously received at their discounted rates. In his honesty, he felt that these payments were not “extras”. Rather he felt that these were settlements of unpaid bills.

Rav Safra was an amarah, a rabbi of the Talmud. The **Talmud** (Makkos 24A) relates a story illustrating the level of honesty that Rav Safra had. The Talmud relates that Rav Safra was once sitting in his store when a customer walked in and offered him a price for some merchandise. Rav Safra did not respond because he was in the middle of reciting Kriyas Shema. The customer, thinking he was rejecting the offer, offered a higher price. When Rav Safra still did not respond, the customer raised his price again. Rav Safra finished saying Kriyas Shema and was able to talk. He turned to the customer and told him that he would have been willing to accept the first price that he had offered. Therefore, he would not charge him more than that. The Gemara concludes that this level of integrity is known as “dover emes b’livavo”, speaking the truth in his heart.

The **Torah** exhorts us to distance ourselves from falsehood (Shmos 23:7). The **Sefer Hachinuch** (74:2) explains that falsehood is abominable. Hashem is the G-D of truth. Blessing only takes effect for those who liken themselves to Hashem in their actions by being truthful, compassionate, and by doing acts of kindness.

**Hashem’s “signature” is emes, truth. Hashem wants us to be truthful in all our dealings and with all people. Doing so will bring blessing into our lives. We will also sanctify Hashem’s name and will inspire others.**

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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