

Chayei Sarah

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

This week, the subtheme seems to be the way we speak with forked tongue! Sometimes to good effect and sometimes not. Avraham wants to buy a cave to bury Sarah. He approaches Efron the Hitite, who says that he will give it for nothing. "Besides," he says, "what is a field worth four hundred shekels between friends?" So Avraham weighs out the money and pays him. Efron was not being honest when he said he would give it for free, otherwise he would not have mentioned the exact valuation of the property. Here is a negative example of doublespeak.

Then Eliezer is sent to find a wife for Yitzchak. Avraham tells him specifically to go back to his homeland and birthplace to look for a wife, but he says nothing about going back to the family. After he has found Rivkah, he says to her family that "my master made me swear that I would not take a wife from the local tribes amongst whom I live, but to go back to my father's house and to my family to take a wife for my son."

Did Eliezer accurately report what Avraham had said? On the face of it he did not. He clearly made out that Avraham had mentioned his family to make it seem all the more appropriate and amazing that the kind qualities he was looking for could be found in Avraham's family. Yet Eliezer went to the well where anyone might have been, not just family. So he was slightly distorting the truth in order to persuade her family that Rivkah was the Divinely ordained wife for Isaac.

On the other hand, maybe Eliezer was reading deeper into Avraham's intentions than the text lets on. Perhaps the art is to read between the lines and to try to understand what is being said to you on more than a superficial level. The Torah provides guidance. It is not just a book of laws and customs, but also one that helps us understand human nature better.