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On the Parsha

What caused Yaakov to become Yaakov Avinu (our holy forefather), and Eisav to become Eisav HaRasha (the evil one)? The Midrash (Beraishis Rabbah, Parshas Toldos) tells us that until their Bar Mitzvah, Yaakov and Eisav were nearly identical in their deportment. However, after their bar mitzvah, things started to change. How did Yaakov and Eisav turn out so differently?

Rav Dov Meir Rovman ZT"l (1895-1967) was a student of the Kelm Yeshiva, the Rosh Yeshiva in Vilkomir and the founder of the Tiferes Yisroel Yeshiva in Haifa. In his Sefer, Zichron Meir (Maamar 37), he points out that from the Passuk in Malachi (1:2) which states, "Behold Eisav is a brother to Yaakov" we see that Eisav was comparable to Yaakov in certain respects and had remarkable qualities. Regarding the honor he gave to his father, the Midrash Rabbah (65:12) quotes Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel who says, "All my life, I served [and honored] my father, and I did not even reach one percent of what Eisav reached in serving his father."

We also see that he had a deep appreciation for the blessing of a Tzaddik. In the Passuk (Bereishis 27:34) after Yaakov leaves Yitzchok Avinu and having secured the better blessing that is reserved for the first born, Eisav bitterly cries and asks Yitzchok for a blessing as well.

We also find that Eisav was well versed in certain areas of Halacha, as the Midrash says that Yitzchok Avinu actually relied upon Eisav's knowledge of Shechita (the laws of slaughtering Kosher animals) as he asked Eisav to serve him food (meat). We also see an allusion to his grasp of Pilpul (analytical Torah study) when he asked Yitzchok, "How does one take Ma'aser (tithe) from salt?" arguing that just as the Torah requires a tithe from food that is grown, the Torah should require a tithe from food that is mined (i.e. salt).

With all of Eisav's remarkable qualities and his inherent potential, how could it be that he still became Eisav Harasha (the evil one), while Yaakov actualized his inherent potential and achieved such greatness that his likeness is figuratively carved into the Kisei HaKavod (Hashem's throne in Heaven) itself?

We all have different character traits that can influence our decisions and our future path of life. Rav Rovman explains that Eisav had a specific "talent" for persuasion and

deception. We see this talent described in Rashi – "Yode'ah Tza'id" – he knew how to trap, capture and deceive. There is a Midrash (Bereishis 65:1) that explains that Eisav is likened to a pig (see Tehillim 80:14) because he would showcase his good qualities and hide his bad ones, just as a pig metaphorically presents his "split hooves" so to speak (which is the first criteria needed to make it a good / Kosher animal), while hiding the fact that he is not a ruminant (which ultimately makes it a bad / non-Kosher animal). Rav Rovman explains that this talent for deception led to his downfall. His penchant for creating falsehoods prevented him from leveraging his remarkable qualities. He ceased to grow as a person and never actualized his potential. Ultimately, this led to his very serious moral failings and the well-deserved moniker, "Eisav Harasha".

On the other hand, Yaakov Avinu was an "Ish Emes" – a man of truth. He was truthful with others (see Beraishis 31:36-40 for the description of his honest and faithful service to his father-in-law, Lavan) and with himself. He was introspective and consistently examined his actions and motives for any wrongdoing. Due to his appreciation of Emes, Yaakov's spiritual stature grew enormously.

We see from Rav Rovman, that the appreciation for truth and conversely, the penchant for falsehood, can greatly influence the direction of our future lives just as they did with Yaakov and Eisav - two individuals who started off similarly, but ended off in very different places.

Chizuk - Inspiration

There is a fascinating Mogen Avrohom (Orech Chaim 54:2) which cites the custom during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva (the Ten Days of Repentance) to say right after the Tefilah (prayer) of "Yishtabach", the Mizmor (psalm) of "MiMaamakim Krasicha Hashem" – from the depths I call out to you, Hashem. What does this Mizmor have to do with the Aseres Yemei Teshuva?

Rav Yechiel Hindi, author of Talmei Yechiel explains Rav Elyah Lopian ZT"l in his "Lev Eliyahu (Vol. I Shivei Lev p. 262)" who cites Rav Simcha Ziv of Kelm, that MiMaamakim Krasicha Hashem teaches us that each and every Jew has within the inner depths of his soul, an immutable sense of truth that can never be dislodged. Some people can reach this sense of truth easily, but others have to dig deep to reach it. MiMaamakim Krasicha Hashem - we call out to

Hashem from the depths, to reach that sense of truth which guides us to see that we should and must do Teshuvah.

We recite this Mizmor during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah to remind us of this inner sense of truth that we all have and to use it to repent.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am currently dating and I am, Boruch Hashem, inundated with suggestions of Shidduchim (potential marriage partners) from friends and Shadchanim (matchmakers). Often, people will suggest a Shidduch that is clearly not for me. May I lie and say that I am busy dating someone else even if I am not dating anyone at the moment? Lying in this instance will likely prevent the Shadchan from being insulted or embarrassed upon my outright rejection of his suggestion. It also may prevent me from saying Loshon Horah (gossip) if I have a negative opinion of the Shidduch and the Shadchan asks me why I am rejecting the Shidduch.

ANSWER: The Gemorah in Sanhedrin 11a clearly indicates that it is permitted to lie to save someone from embarrassment. This is the ruling of Rav Nachum Yavrov in Niv Sfasayim page 197. It is worthwhile to note that not all rejections of Shidduchim are considered embarrassing or insulting to the one who is recommending the Shidduch, such as when the Shadchan is not a friend or a relative. In such a case, the Shadchan is often not as invested in his recommendation and may not feel that insulted or embarrassed if his suggestion is rejected. In such a case, the permission to lie is questionable as seen on page 167 of Titen Emes L'Yaakov.

After going on a date and seeing that the Shidduch is not for him, if one feels that he may need to provide negative feedback to the Shadchan which may be Loshon Hora, a suggestion would be to tell the Shadchan that "She is not for me, let's leave it at that." In such manner, one has not spoken Loshon Hora nor has one told a lie.

As an aside, it might be worthwhile to address another aspect of Loshon Horah as it pertains to dating. There are times when a person will come back from a date and discuss with his friends or roommates why the girl that he just dated was not for him. There is a Rosh Yeshiva who investigated this matter extensively and came to the conclusion that this practice is very destructive. Such discussions often contain Loshon Horah and even if there is no Loshon Horah, these discussions often contain incorrect factual information. The Rosh Yeshiva banned this practice entirely from his Yeshiva with grave consequences to anyone who engaged in it.

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with the translation of the third chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sefer, Sefas Tamim.

"Moreover, even if he [one who steals] was to offer a Korban Olah, which is completely consumed, or if he was to perform other Mitzvos from Hashem, it would not be acceptable before Him.

And the Sages have said, "A stolen or dried out lulav is unfit." They provided a parable (Vayikrah Rabbah 30:6): To what may it be compared? To a robber who sat by the crossroad and would rob the public. Once the messenger of the king passed there, who was appointed to collect the taxes from that district. The robber attacked him and took all that was in the hand of the tax collector.

After a short time, the robber was caught and placed in jail. The tax collector of the king heard that the robber was caught and came to him and said: "If you return to me all that you have taken from me, I shall put in a good word for you to the king." The robber responded, "I do not have anything from what I have taken [stolen from the king], except this uniform that was from the king [that I can return to him]." The robber gave it to the tax collector.

The tax collector said, "Tomorrow when you go out to be judged and the king asks of you if you have anyone that can speak on your benefit, respond that you have a man and the king will send for me and call me, and I shall speak on your behalf."

The next day when the robber went to be judged, the king asked, "Do you have anyone who can speak on your behalf?" The robber responded, "I have a certain person [the tax collector]."

The king sent for him [the tax collector] and asked, "What do you know about this man?"

The tax-collector responded, "I know that when you sent me to collect the taxes from that district, he came upon me and took all that I had. This uniform before you that he had just returned to me, it shall testify on him." Everyone in attendance began murmuring, "Woe to this one, whose defense witness has become his prosecutor."

So too is a person who takes a Lulav to use it [for the Mitzvah on Succos]. If it is a stolen Lulav, it cries out before Hashem and says, "I have been stolen! I am the product of robbery!" The ministering angels respond: "Woe to this one, whose defense witness has become his prosecutor!"