בס"ד

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Why Emes Matters Most

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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 of 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

The Arizal teaches that when someone dies with unpaid debts, both the borrower and the creditor must return to this world through Gilgul (reincarnation) so the debt can be settled. For this reason, it is very important never to leave unpaid loans or unsettled promissory notes in charitable lending funds (G'machs).

To emphasize the point, Rav Chaim Kanievsky ZT"L shared a remarkable story from the era of the Arizal. One day, the Arizal

was invited to the home of a wealthy man. Suddenly, he made an unusual request, asking his host if he could visit the stables. Surprised, the wealthy man led his guest outside. The Arizal carefully examined the animals on both sides of the stable before pointing to a specific donkey.

"Would you agree to give me that donkey?" the Arizal asked.

"That donkey in particular?" the rich man replied in surprise. "I cannot part with it. It is an exceptionally hard worker and does the labor of several donkeys combined. It brings me great benefit."

The Arizal said nothing and returned to the living room. There, he asked his host to bring out the records of all the loans he had issued. The wealthy man produced a thick stack of contracts and began listing them: "This note belongs to my neighbor, and this one belongs to a prominent man from a nearby city who recently fell on hard times."

The Arizal noticed a crumpled piece of paper tucked among the documents and pointed to it. "To whom does this one belong?" he asked.

"That belonged to a Jew who passed away long ago," the host answered. "There is no chance that money will ever be repaid."

"Would you be willing to give me this note as a gift?" the Arizal asked.

The wealthy man shrugged. "Why not?"

The Arizal took the crumpled paper and tore it into pieces. "Now," he told his host, "go check on your donkey."

The man went to the stable and returned moments later in shock. "The donkey is dead!" he exclaimed. "I have no idea how that happened. It was the strongest and healthiest animal I owned."

"Know this," the Arizal explained, "that donkey held the reincarnated soul of the Jew who died before he could repay you. Heaven decreed that his soul return to work off his debt through his labor as a donkey. Now that you have relinquished the note and forgiven the debt, his soul has been released to return to Heaven in peace and the donkey has died."

Rav Kanievsky shared this account as a reminder of the consequences of financial dishonesty and the obligation to repay what we owe.

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.

"May I back out of a school carpool that
I have already committed to?"
"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"

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