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SEFER BEREISHIS - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

IN HONOR OF MY DEAR FRIENDS: SRULY & TIKI WERDIGER

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Eisav's Role in History

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Year 4 | Issue 9

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פרשת תולדות

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Eisav's Role in History

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Part I. Eisav's Error

Prophecy and Fulfillment

When Rivkah our mother approached the prophet of Hashem and was given the *besurah tovah* that she was carrying twins, among the things she was told were three short words that would determine the course of history: *V'rav ya'avod tzair* – *The older one will serve the younger* (Toldos 25:23). That was the prophecy that Rivkah gained even before Yaakov and Eisav came into this world.

Now some people take it to mean simply that because Eisav would be wicked, therefore his progeny, the nation of Edom, would be forced to be subservient to the Am Yisroel.

And to say such a thing is partially true – that Eisav's descendants would serve the children of Yaakov was certainly included in the words *v'rav ya'avod tzair*. It happened that way in our nation's history

again and again that this prophecy came true. In the days of Dovid Hamelech he went out with his army to conquer Edom and for many years after that the nation-state of Edom remained a tributary, a vassal state, for the Jewish nation; they were forced to be slaves to the *Am Yisroel*.

And later, in the days of Bayis Sheini, the prophecy was fulfilled once again. Yochanan Horkanus, one of the Chashmonai kings conquered Edom and was forcibly *megayer* them; they were forced to circumcise and become servant-slaves to the *malchus Beis Chashmonai*.

And so, there's no question that the words the *navi* said to Rivkah meant that as well. Eisav would have to *yaavod tzair*; he would have to enter into servitude under the control of his younger brother.

Wicked From Birth?

And yet, there's something curious here because we know that when Hakodosh Boruch Hu told Rivkah that "the older one would serve the younger one," Eisav hadn't done anything wrong yet – he hadn't even been born yet! A man who hasn't yet exercised his free will should be sentenced to servitude because of sins he didn't do?! It can't be!

Now, I understand that we already have ideas in our head from when we were children. Especially when we learn the *aggadeta* (Rashi 25:22) that when Rivkah passed by a *beis avodah zarah*, Eisav became agitated within her; he wanted to come out already and run into the church. And therefore we think it means that from the beginning – even before the beginning – Eisav was already an *oveid avodah zarah*. That's also how they make the pictures in the children's books; Eisav is portrayed as a wicked looking fellow adorned with weapons of war; according to one picture that someone showed me he was born wearing boxing gloves!

However, all this we have to know is not so. Not only is it not true but it's against the fundamental principles of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. There's no such thing! Wicked at birth has no place by us. Such doctrines you can find only in corruptions of Judaism, in foreign religions that speak about 'original sin' and other things that are

alien to Torah. According to the Torah every man gets a new chance when he's born; he doesn't have any sin on his head. He begins life anew with a clean slate and the full opportunity of free will, the *bechirah* to become a *tzaddik* or to become the opposite according to his own choice.

And it's such a fundamental truth, that to make any exception – even in the case of Eisav – is really a contradiction to the *emunah*. If you're going to learn Torah in that way, it means that you are contradicting all the principles of the Torah.

Eisav's Secret Persona

Actually Eisav was much better than you imagine. The truth is that if Eisav walked in here now, we would all get up for him out of respect. Now, I'm not interested in being *milameid zchus* on Eisav but we have to know the truth of the Torah and the truth is that Eisav was very great. I know that others laugh when they hear this but I know this from my Rebbe *zichrono livrocho*. Eisav grew up in the house of Yitzchok and Rivkah! He grew up on the lap of his *zeide* Avrohom Avinu! He wasn't a nobody. Far from it!

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said – Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel was a great man and he had a great father too, and he said (Bereishis Rabbah 65), “I never was able to attain the greatness of honoring my father like Eisav honored Yitzchok.”

When Eisav wanted to go into his father, he put on his *b'gadav hachamudos*, his Yom Tov clothing. Imagine you want to go into your father to ask him for some money, for your allowance, and you put on your *bigdei Yom Tov* because you want to approach him; not because you're trying to butter him up – because you really mean it.

Now, when Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel had to serve his father he did it, no question about it. But he couldn't do it like Eisav. You know, it's very difficult when a number of times during the day you have to go on some errand for your father and you're going to have to change into your Shabbos clothing every time he calls you in. It takes a lot of dedication, a lot of character, to do something like that. But Eisav did it – he never walked into his father's presence without changing into his better clothes. And if his father needed him many

times during the day – Eisav didn't know that each time there was going to be another time – he changed his *begadim* each time. And this one story is only a *mashal*, it's only one example of who Eisav was. Eisav was a very good person, with a tremendous amount of potential for greatness.

Why Forced Servitude?

And therefore we have to rethink what it was that the prophet told Rivkah on that day. We can't understand *v'rav yaavod tzair* as a sentence, a punishment, and say that because Eisav was born wicked therefore he was punished that he would have to serve his younger brother, because that's absolutely not true. Eisav could have been very great! As much success that Yaakov achieved, Eisav could have achieved along with him.

And so, what does it mean that the older one would have to serve the young one? What kind of serving of Yaakov does it mean if Eisav had the *bechira* to be a *tzadik gomur*, a completely righteous man and live a successful life of his own?

Eisav's True Function

And the answer is that this *nevuah* foretold Eisav's role in history, how Eisav could gain fulfillment in his life. Eisav's perfection in life was to be a helper, an assistant to Yaakov in accomplishing great things in the world. And although Eisav was not going to be on top, he could still live a completely successful life if he would recognize his role. That's what the *navi* was saying to Rivkah: *V'rav yaavod tzair – the role of Eisav, the success of Eisav, is to help Yaakov fulfill his function in the world*; “and the younger one will serve the elder one” was heavenly guidance for Eisav to understand his *tafkid* in this world and had he been willing to fulfill that role he could have made a different history.

How sad it is that a person with such potential, such character and talents, should go lost because he won't accept that. If Eisav would have executed his role properly *he wouldn't have been any less successful than Yaakov Avinu*. Had he used his given talents – his ruddiness, his *gevurah* – to help Yaakov, he would have become great no less than Yaakov Avinu. He would be in *Olam Haboh* right now,

sitting next to his younger brother, next to Yitzchok and Avrohom and all the *tzadikim*.

A Tragic End

Only that Eisav wasn't willing to accept his place in history. He wanted to be the leader! "I'm on top or I'm out of here." That's why when he saw that the *brachos* had been given to his younger brother, when he saw now that the prophecy of, "And the older one shall serve the younger one," was beginning to take shape, he couldn't take it! "I should be subservient to Yaakov?!" said Eisav. "I don't want to hear stories about being a helper; about becoming great by means of being second!"

What happened? *Vayeilech el eretz mipnei Yaakov achiv* – he went away to another land because of his brother Yaakov (Bereishis 36:6). He felt that he just couldn't remain in the same country where his brother was the leader and he made the unpardonable sin of forsaking his family because he couldn't tolerate being second. He ran away from his role and that was the *makeh b'patish*, the final blow that ruined Eisav and his family forever.

The truth is that the heart bleeds – it really is a tragedy of tragedies. Eisav could have remained. Nobody sent him away. Imagine if he had accepted his role! How different the world's history would have been! He'd be a frequent visitor by us; he'd live a few blocks away, or a mile away and we'd be working together in the service of Hashem. But now he's cut off entirely. He chose to let go of the great privilege of being a member of this noble family, the holiest people in the world.

Passing Up Opportunities

I remember many years ago in a *kehilla* there was somebody who lost out in matters of *kavod* and he became the second man in the *kehilla*; he wanted to be the President of the *kehilla* and now he became only the Vice-President. What happened? He became so discouraged that he left the shul – he moved away from Brooklyn and settled in California. What a tragedy!

You can't be the best? So be the second best or the third best; that's also a very great success in this world. So much good could have been accomplished in that *kehilla* had he remained and taken up his role of helping from behind, from working in the background.

Eisav could have come along with us. Didn't Yisro's children come along? And they succeeded! וַיֵּרָא אֶת הַקֵּינִי! – When Bilaam saw the Keini, the descendants of Yisro, among us, he said: אֵיטֶן מוֹשְׁבֵךְ – The place where you're seated is a strong place, וְשִׁים בְּסֹלֶעַ קִנְדָּ – you put your nest on the rock (Bamidbar 24:21). It means you chose to attach yourself to the Bnei Yaakov and now you're ensconced with them forever and ever. And we know that “the children of Yisro sat in the Lishkas Hagazis in the Sanhedrin” (Sotah 11a). They didn't make the error of Eisav.

The Name Edom

Now, the truth is that we know that Eisav's family never admitted that they made an error. The children of Eisav forever held onto the thesis that *they* were the ones who were chosen to lead and it had been cheated away from them by their trickster uncle, Yaakov.

You can see that from their name. They called themselves *Edom*, The Red Ones. Why did the children of Eisav call themselves *Edom*? So some people say we know the reason. It says in the *chumash* that it was because Eisav came in one day when he was hungry and when he saw that Yaakov had made a red pottage, a red soup, he said, “Haliteini na min ha'adom ha'adom hazeh – Give me some of that red red soup.” “Al ken kara shemo Edom – and that's why he was forever called Edom”

But does it make sense that Eisav's children forever would call themselves by such an uncomplimentary name as a reminder that their ancestor had once been so careless as to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup? What *bizayon* can be greater than that? The Red Lentil people?! They should have attempted to forget that incident altogether instead of perpetuating it by calling themselves by that name.

Edom's End

The answer is they didn't call themselves Edom because of the red soup. That's the Torah's reason for their name – the Torah is telling us the *real* reason they received that name. Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave them that name as a monument to the person who was willing to give up his future for a bowl of red lentils; for the sake of a desire of the moment he gives away everything – that's Edom.

But the nation of Edom had other ideas. They called themselves Edom because *vayetzei harishon admoni* – Eisav came out first and he was ruddy. First and ruddy! To them that was a sign that Eisav was the boss. He was red – a sign of strength and vigor – because he was the one chosen by Hashem to be the leader. The Edomites never thought anything else. The story of the red soup was not even known to Eisav's posterity. To them they were the Edomites not because they were the Red Lentil People but because they were the vigorous ones, the leaders.

They couldn't accept their role and because of that they're cut off entirely. *Va'avaditem bagoyim*; that's what Eisav did. He went lost among the *goyim*. And that means that Edom is the story of a people who gave up the greatness they could have achieved because they didn't recognize their function in this world.

Part II. Eisav's Role

An Opportunity in History

I told you once how Rav Yisroel Salanter *zichrono levrachah* had made great plans to further Torah in the world; Rav Yisroel was full of good ideas. And so when he heard that Sir Moshe Montefiore, the Lord Mayor of England was coming to visit Russia, Rav Yisroel recognized that this was a glorious opportunity in history because Sir Moshe Montefiore had everything that Rav Yisroel Salanter lacked. He had money and prestige and connections – everything that Rav Yisroel would need for his plan to bring the *Am Yisroel* back to Hashem.

Rav Yisroel on the other hand had everything that Reb Moshe Montefiore lacked. Rav Yisroel Salanter was a *gadol baTorah*, a brilliant man; and he had a clear vision of what he wanted as well as an excellent mind capable of executing the visions. So Rav Yisroel thought that if they could get together, Reb Moshe Montefiore would help him turn the world upside down. They could bring back the whole Am Yisroel to Torah and who knows what they could accomplish – together they could be *mekarev* the *geulah*. I said these last words; Rav Yisroel didn't say *mekarev* the *geulah*.

And so Rav Yisroel made attempts to meet Reb Moshe Montefiore, but *lo mistayah milsah*, it didn't happen. Reb Moshe Montefiore had a certain German Jew, Dr. Levi, as his secretary and Dr. Levi had his own ideas about Russian Jewish rabbis. He had his own ideas who the real leaders of the Jewish people are, about who should be helping who, and therefore the shidduch never took place. Rav Yisroel never was able to meet Reb Moshe Montefiore.

That's one of the great tragedies of our history; it was the tragedy of ignoring the lesson of *v'rav yaavod tzair*. Reb Moshe Montefiore *zichrono levrachah* certainly did good things and Rav Yisrael *zichrono levrachah* certainly did good things but what they could have done together would have changed the course of history.

Had Reb Moshe Montefiore recognized what his true role was expected to be, he would have come running to Rav Yisroel; he would have sat at Rav Yisroel's feet and asked him what he should do next. But it never took place because of someone who didn't recognize his role in this world – the role of being a helper, an assistant, to the ones who are greater than him.

Story of Antoninus

And that brings us back to Eisav and his tragic refusal to accept his role. Now, the truth is that there were some times in history when Eisav's children did accept the role of *v'rav yaavod tzair* and they succeeded just because of that. If we would look in history, we could find instances, single cases, where the descendants of Eisav did fulfill their proper role.

We'll take an example so that we should understand it well and that's the noble story of the Roman Emperor, Antoninus the Pious. He wrote a book – you can still find it in the Public Library – it's in English today; it's called *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*; that was his name. It's a *mussar* book.

And when it comes to Antoninus we have an instance of an Eisav who fulfilled his role; a Roman emperor who was humbled before the Torah leader. Although the masses of the Roman populace, the plebeians, were not necessarily of Edom but according to our tradition the patrician class, the Roman nobility, were descended from Edom; it means Antoninus was a great grandson of Eisav.

A Turbulent Time

Now, listen to this remarkable story. In the days after the War of Beitar the Romans were very angry at the *Am Yisroel* and they were busy making *gzeiros* against the Jews who were left in *Eretz Yisroel*. Do you remember how for seven years the Romans didn't let us bury the dead? Thousands of Jews killed near Beitar were laying around unburied for seven years! And Rabeinu Hakodosh, Rebbi, was appointed to travel to Rome in order to make a personal appeal to the Roman senate and the emperor that they should rescind the *gzeiros*.

During that period of time when Rebbi was in Rome meeting with the aristocracy he came in contact with an intelligent young Roman named Marcus Aurelius and this young man fell in love with Rebbi's personality, with his character and greatness of mind; he admired Rebbi to no end.

And then, many years later, when this young Roman became the emperor – that's Emperor Antoninus – he became a *talmid* of Rebbi. How did it happen? The Roman emperors had a vacation place in Caesarea in *Eretz Yisroel*. It was a Roman city; Jews lived there too but was a gentile city and Antoninus chose to spend his vacations over there. And he had a reason for that. It was because he wanted to come in contact with his old friend whom he admired so much, Rabeinu Yehuda Hanasi.

The Underground Network

Now, during the war of Beitar the Jews had made tunnels underground everywhere; they used guerilla tactics in their attempt to fight off the Roman legions. They had secret ways of going through the tunnels that crisscrossed the country, and they would appear suddenly and attack the surprised Romans. And after the war the tunnels remained; they weren't used anymore but they remained.

Antoninus had a tunnel right near his palace in Caesarea and through this tunnel he came every night to Rebbi's residence to visit him. Every night he came to Rebbi. Of course no one was permitted to know of this relationship between Antoninus and Rebbi because if the Romans would know that the emperor humbles himself before the *chachmei haTorah* then he would certainly have been assassinated. A Roman emperor was supposed to be cruel to the Jewish people – that was the policy – and if it would be known that he was friendly with a Jewish leader, if it would be found that he's loyal to the Jewish people, that he looks up to them and supports them, they would kill him immediately. And therefore Antoninus practiced the utmost secrecy; it was a secret that nobody ever heard outside of the *chachmei haTorah*.

Utter Servitude

The *chachomim* (Avoda Zara 10b) describe the scene for us: "Every day Antoninus traveled through this tunnel to come visit Rebbi and he would serve him with food and wine at the table like a butler. And when Rebbi want to climb up onto his bed so Antoninus would bend down in front of the bed like a footstool and he said, "Rebbi, please step up on me in order to climb into bed." Rebbi said, "But it's not *derech erez*; it's improper to treat a king so much. Even though you're not our king but still we have to respect the emperor."

So Antoninus said to Rebbi, "If only I could be your mattress in the next world." It means, "I just want to be underneath you, to serve you – I understand my role in life!"

Antoninus asked Rebbi, "Will I come to a *Olam Haboh*?" And when Rebbi assured him that he would, Antoninus said, "But isn't it written *וְלֹא יִהְיֶה שְׂרִיר לְבֵית עֲשׂוֹ* – that nothing will remain from the

house of Eisav. It means that the whole nation of Edom finally went lost. Nothing remains of the nation of Edom in this world anymore; they disappeared entirely. But this *possuk* means more than that; even worse than that. Not only in this world! In the World to Come nothing will remain of Eisav – that’s the biggest tragedy. That’s why Antoninus asked Rebbi: How could you say I’ll have *Olam Haboh*? I’m from the house of Eisav; I’m descended from Eisav!”

So Rebbi told him, “That’s only *b’oseh maaseh Eisav* – if you behave like Eisav did.” It means if you abdicate your role of helping Yaakov. If you walk in the footsteps of your *zeideh* Eisav then it’s true. But if you fulfill your *tafkid* you’ll have *Olam Haboh*; if you fulfill your role in this world then you’ll have *Olam Haboh* forever and ever.

A Great Undertaking

Now listen to what was the result of Eisav fulfilling his role in this world. The *Am Yisroel* was facing grave danger in those days. After all, they they wouldn’t be much longer in *Eretz Yisroel*. The Romans were taking over – the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed and they were being sent into exile. What’s going to happen to the Jewish nation now? It was a very tenuous time and therefore Rebbi understood that the time had come to take action to be *choseim* the *mishna*; to set in stone the *mishnayis* as the foundation of the *Torah sheba’al peh* forever.

You know, now that we have a finished *mishnah*, it seems to us a simple matter. Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi convened his sages and they took a vote and they decided that the *mishnah* from now on is closed. They made some editorial improvements and they closed the *mishnah*; very simple – it’s finished.

But actually it wasn’t simple at all. Rebbi said, “The time has come that we have to do something about the *mishna* but I cannot act as *Nasi* and call together though *chachomim* because Rome is against making the Sanhedrin.” The Romans wouldn’t allow it; they considered it a rebellion. And without a *Nasi*, without a Sanhedrin, Rebbi wouldn’t have the authority needed to take such action.

Why would the *Am Yisroel*, as one, obey him? Do you know that at the same time that Rebbi made the *mishna*, there was a huge

Jewish community, a Torah community, in Bavel. And they could say, “Why should we obey Rabbi? Why should we have to obey the *chachmei Eretz Yisrael* and declare the *mishnah* sealed or accept their final version of the *mishnah*? Just as the *mishnah* had continued until now for centuries and centuries from the *anshei kenesses hagedolah* and we could add to it opinions of successive generations of *chachamim*, so we should continue to do so. Where did you get such authority, such audacity, to make such an important decision for all generations that the *mishnah* is closed?!”

A Grand Accomplishment

The answer is, it was because of Eisav! Because where did Rabbi get his power and his great wealth? It was from his disciple Antoninus the Roman emperor; it was the backing of Antoninus that made it happen. It was a secret backing but it was what the *Am Yisroel* needed. Antoninus caused Rabbi to become tremendously wealthy and so in addition to being the greatest sage, he now had power unequalled among the Jewish people.

Antoninus gave Rabbi a confidence, and inspired by that confidence Rabbi forged ahead. He knew that the Roman emperor was secretly backing him, that the resources of the entire Roman Empire are backing him. He never had to bring any Roman legions to help him but Antoninus said, “You go ahead and do it and I’ll defend you,” and that was enough.

Rabbi came together with all the *chachmei Yisroel* and the Romans didn’t do anything; they couldn’t, because the Emperor said quietly to them, “Don’t bother them.” The great Torah leaders came from Bavel, from Madai; from everywhere they came together under Rabbi and they weighed every word and they decided when it should be a *stam mishna*, when it should be a *machlokes*. They put in all the words of the *chachomim* that were added from Yavneh on and they edited it with a fine toothed comb and established the final language of the a *mishna*.

They came together as one and put their final stamp on the *mishna* forever – from now on, nobody could add one word on to the *mishna*. And therefore it’s because of Antoninus that we have a

mishnayos today. That saved us! If Rebbi hadn't done that we'd be today such a disorganized nation. There would be so many different *muschaos* in *halacha*. Even today, with the *mishna*, there are so many different opinions but had we not had a unified *mishna* who knows what would have been!

And the one who was responsible for our salvation was Antoninus! Eisav served Yaakov and the *Am Yisroel* survived. Because of the humility of Antoninus a tremendous achievement resulted. And so we see what was accomplished when *v'rav yaavod tzair*, when Eisav agreed to be subservient, to help and thereby accomplish what would have been impossible without his assistance.

And that's what could have happened throughout history. Who knows what big achievements could have been performed if those who Hashem wants to fulfill their roles as helpers, would have been willing to be subservient.

Part III. Understanding Roles

A Life of Parallels

Now, to understand this in a more practical sense we'll have to make a little bit of effort and not just brush it off and say Eisav was a sinner and so on and so forth. There's much more to it than that. We must know that the Torah wrote this story of Eisav for the purpose of *torah*, of *teaching* us lessons that apply to our own lives.

And that brings us to our subject because in our lives there are very many parallels to the episode of Eisav shrugging off his role. One of the most important lessons we're expected to learn from the error of Eisav is to make use of the various roles that Hashem gives us in this world, to realize that for many people their greatness lies not in *being* leaders but in *helping* the leader.

Many good people who should be achieving greatness by means assisting others are instead trying to be little chief rabbis – you'd be surprised how many Jews are trying to live up to that role right now and it means they're not accomplishing what they could because they're making the same mistake that Eisav did.

Rabbis and Gedolim

Here's a little rabbi who recently was ordained by Yeshiva University – the ink is not yet dried on his *semichah* and he comes out to lead the world. Rabbi Paul So and So; he has a mustache, a golden wristwatch and a gentile name so he imagines himself a leader of the Jewish people.

So on *erev Rosh Hashanah* Rabbi Paul So and So issues a call to the Jewish nation to do *teshuvah* – it's in the newspapers: "Rabbi Paul calls on the people to return to G-d." Are there no *roshei yeshiva* around that we need Rabbi Paul to lead the way?! By means of an advertisement he made himself the chief rabbi of the Jewish nation.

Or some other little fellow who recently graduated and now he's elected a rabbi of a congregation out in Queens. He puts a big ad in the newspapers advising the *roshei yeshivos*, the *chachmei haTorah*, how they should behave in regards to a certain communal issue.

What a loss! These are men with capabilities, with talents, and they're squandering it all just because they want to be leaders. How good it would be if a men like them would come to the Torah leaders and say, "What can we do to help you?" That's what they should be thinking about: "How can I fulfill *v'rav yaavod tzair* and be successful in this world?"

Ketanim Are the Majority

And there are very many like that. Some don't have the money to advertise but in their heart of hearts, it's the same thing. I had a conversation with one of them, a freshly ordained 'rabbi'. He says, "Rabbi Miller, you think we should follow the *roshei yeshivah* like blind sheep?!" I said, "Certainly! We should because we *are* blind sheep. I'm also a blind sheep and I have to follow the *gedolei Yisrael*; and you are thirty years younger than I am so certainly you have to follow the *gedolei Yisroel*." But not only follow – we should be searching for ways to fulfill our role of being helpers to them.

So this little *gadol* told me, "I was brought up not to obey." He's not ashamed to make such a statement. He was brought up like that? So there's something very wrong in his education. And the fact is that there are so many Jews who have never learned this that they

have sufficient numbers to form a numerous party. That's the Mizrachi – the Mizrachi has never learned that there's such a thing as obeying *gedolim*. And even their own so-called *gedolim* they disobey.

But the truth is that we have to not point fingers at others – mostly we have to look inside at ourselves. We have to realize that not everybody is a *gadol*; most of us are *ketanim*. Many people are not born to be leaders; nothing wrong – not everybody is gifted like that. But what do we see? There are so many who instead of using their talents to serve the *chachmei hatorah*, they set themselves up as leaders of little institutions, as leaders of little independent movements without feeling the necessity to back the truly great national Torah leaders.

Our Role

Now, there's nothing wrong if you establish your own *yeshivah*, a little organization or your own little movement. There's nothing wrong with that because you might have ideas and talents and capabilities that others don't. But everybody should feel the necessity of contributing his efforts, his abilities, his weight, to the national efforts of our Torah leaders.

We have to follow the *chachmei haTorah*, the great *roshei yeshivos*. They are the Yaakov. We're not Eisav but we have to serve them; that's our role right now – we have to find ways and means of helping them. Our success is in being together with them. *V'sim chelkeinu imahem l'olam* – Our lot should be together with them forever, *v'lo neivosh* – then we'll succeed in both worlds.

We must sit at the feet of our *chachomim* – “we” means all us; even the grown men of sixty and seventy – not only to study from them but to act on their behalf, to assist them in their endeavors; in everything they want to accomplish. We have plenty of great men, *boruch Hashem* – Hakodosh Boruch Hu should give them long lives – and we have to listen to them. They're the ones who take the initiative and we follow, we help. But because each one wants to be the leader therefore very many big achievements are never carried out.

Helping the Rabbonim

All the community members should be helping the *rabbonim*; and the *rabbonim* should help the *roshei yeshivah*; and the *roshei yeshiva* are standing before the *gedolei hador* helping them carry out their plans because helping is the form of success which is decreed for most of us.

Every Jew should do whatever he can to help his *rav* succeed. Today, in many places, if someone becomes a rabbi in a congregation of a hundred members, there are a hundred rabbis and one member. A hundred teachers are teaching him what's right and what's wrong because nobody understands their role. Nobody wants to be a helper.

I remember when we started giving our Gemara *shiurim* here, there was a man who took upon himself to hand out flyers in the yeshiva, on the street, making sure that others knew about it. Nobody asked him but he saw an opportunity for greatness, and he grabbed it. Now, he wasn't capable of giving the lecture, not at all, but he realized what he was capable of doing, and he did it.

Founder of Toras Avigdor

We should remember that this entire institution of our tapes was only successful because of one man - Pinchas Shelby. He was the one who organized our lecture here and from the very beginning he was dedicated to being in the background and making it work. Not only that, he came every Thursday night with his car to pick me up and he took me home after the lecture. And it cost him a lot of money, week after week, because there were expenses involved here.

And then it was his idea to spread the tapes to the world. The tapes spread because of him. It was his vision; he thought about it before anyone else did and he grabbed the opportunity to be a *yaavod* in this world, to make himself great by means of being a helper.

The Helpmate's Role

Now, we shouldn't end our discussion without speaking about a more domestic instance; something that applies in the home. Every

woman should feel that she will succeed most perfectly in this word in her role as a helpmate, as an *eizer*.

A wife should feel that she's an assistant to a husband. She has to help him carry out his ambitions for Torah, his ideals for the family instead of trying to be the leader and to contradict him and to conduct the family according to her rights. Sometimes there's a wife who feels that she shouldn't bask in the splendor of her husband's brilliance; she also wants to be a leader. Especially today there are women who feel that their role of a career girl must continue after marriage and therefore they are trying to hold the steering wheel at the same time that the husband is trying to steer and you know what happens when two hands are guiding the steering wheel.

So you'll ask me how I can so flippantly hand over the leadership of the family to the husband? Doesn't leadership depend on certain abilities? The answer is that we have to make an institution that agrees with nature, not an artificial thing. When I say nature I mean nature with a capital N. I mean Hakodosh Boruch Hu. And by nature the husband is chosen as the leader. A man has a beard; a beard makes the chin look bigger, you have to know that, A beard gives you a big chin; it makes you look more authoritative. A man is taller than a woman. You see that a wife is usually shorter than her husband. That's how Hashem made it. A man gives off the aura of authority more than a woman does.

Captain and First Mate

All over the world – whether it's among the black people or the Eskimos – wherever you go it's the case that the father is the leader. And it's common sense too because he has more physical force. Sometimes he has to fight with his son. In the good old days the father used the club to give his son a good beating. And the father was the one who was best able to do it. Men are more arrogant, more rough, whereas women are humble, more modest, more reticent than men by nature. She has a softer heart.

You can't have two captains in one house. If you have two captains on one ship then you're looking for trouble. Sooner or later there'll be a mutiny. A wife who is subservient to a *ben Torah* husband

or even a partial *ben Torah* shouldn't feel that it is beneath her dignity to accept the role of chief first mate. When you know that your husband is a normal observant Jew so it's your job to be loyal to him and to help him succeed.

Of course we're not talking about slavery, about mistreatment. A wife is the queen in the home. That's very important! *Okiru l'neshaychi* – "Give honor to your wives." And Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives a blessing on a man for that: *Ki heichi d'tisatru* – "In order that you should become wealthy" (Bava Metzia 59a). You'll get rich for that because that's what every wife deserves; more than you respect yourself, you should respect your wife.

Now, of course we can't always make delineations of roles and imagine that it's so simple. We understand that there are various circumstances of life and therefore all of the ideas we are speaking about tonight must be applied judiciously, with *seichel*. Even in Europe, I remember seeing families where the husband was not suited for leadership and the role was abdicated to the wife. But even then, when the mother was more capable, it paid for her to assign to the father a nominal role as the head of the family. She used her abilities to tell the children, "Children listen to what Father said." It paid off because Hashem set up that system, a system that's ordained for the happiness of mankind. And if you're going to have competition, the end will be it will be a marriage that will crash up on the rocks of life.

Success and Greatness

But it's not only in marriage, it's not only in the home. All of our lives we are expected to learn a lesson from the mistake of Eisav and fulfill our roles as helpers, as assistants to all good things.

Naturally, in one place you might be expected to lead while in another place you should find ways to remain in the background and help, to be an assistant. In her home the successful wife knows how to maneuver with diplomacy and succeed while somewhere else she might lead. In the home maybe the husband is a leader; in the synagogue not so much. But whatever it may be, you must be aware

of your role in order to be a success. A person can best fulfill his role in this world when he recognizes what Eisav didn't.

And for most of us, for ordinary from Jews, our great perfection in life is attaching ourselves to people greater than us and to be of service to them – that's our success in life; to participate in all the good endeavors that find favor in the eyes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

That's part of how we strive to make something out of ourselves, to not remain nobodies. Success doesn't mean you have to become famous; that's not important. Greatness in this world doesn't mean that if you don't start a big movement. You can do tremendous things even without ever being a leader as long as you utilize the opportunities to help, to assist, as much as possible. As long as we learn the lesson that Eisav never did, that being a helper can be the best achievement in life, it means that we're finding favor in the eyes of Hashem by means of living life successfully.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Follow the Leader – I Will Succeed Where Eisav Failed

Everyone has opportunities in their life to become successful and great in the eyes of Hashem by means of assisting those who are leaders in this world. This week I will take one minute a day to think about what I could do, even in the most simple capacity, to help one leader or organization or program (examples: the Avos U'banim learning program, the local yeshiva, a chesed organization) become better. Even in the house, among spouses and siblings, there are always opportunities for this form of perfection. How can I get involved and be a helper in this world?

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

55 - Eisav's Role | 850 - Errors of Eisav | 948 - Be Ready for the Call

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמר לך

Q:

What is your opinion about celebrating the holiday of Thanksgiving tonight with a turkey dinner?

A:

Thanksgiving is a holiday that was manufactured by gentiles for the purpose of going to church. That's what the original purpose was. And therefore it's *avoda zara* and Jews are forbidden to participate in such a thing. If you eat turkey especially for Thanksgiving, you're an *oveid avoda zara*. That's my opinion.

Now, some people are weak in this matter; but I think it's real *avoda zara*; I think it's **יהרג ואל יעבור**. I think a Jew shouldn't eat turkey on Thanksgiving at all! He should make a sacrifice not to eat turkey. Because it's a Christian observance you understand. It's not a legal holiday alone. It's only recently that it became a 'legal holiday.' But it used to be a Christian holiday and that's what it is, all the way down till today.

However, there's somebody who permits it, and even though I say it's all wrong, I'm not going to force my opinion on you. But if anybody in *my* synagogue would ask me such a question, I would give it to him. But since you're not in my synagogue, so I'll let you go.

TAPE # R-30

— This week's Q&A sponsored: —

L'zchus zivug l'Rochel Bas Chana Perel