

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha
Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

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Mishpachat Levy Edition

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת חיי שרה

SPACE IN THE TORAH INDICATES IMPORTANCE

One of the most fundamental rules in the study of the Toras Hashem, a guideline for understanding how important something is, is by noting the amount of space allotted to that matter. More space is afforded to those things that are more important. And therefore, if we wish to assess the importance of *Eliezer eved Avraham* personally and his importance in our history and our Torah ideology we can do so by measuring the space that the Torah allots to him. It's remarkable how many pages in the *chumash* Eliezer occupies - sixty six *pesukim* are devoted to his mission of finding a wife for Yitzchok. And that's remarkable! You know, there were people of great stature among our progenitors, among the forefathers of our people, who were not deemed worthy of a small fraction of that space in the Torah. Now the Torah is not *chas v'shalom* a random chronicle. It is the *dvar Hashem*, the thoughts of Hashem. And if we see that the proportion of time that the Torah gives in narration about *Eliezer eved Avraham*, and how much space is given to his own words, we are amazed to discover that this personality was among the most important in the history of Mankind - and that the lessons we're expected to learn from these *pesukim* are as equally as important.

In Parshas Chayei Sarah we are told that Avraham was זקן ובא בימים, "He was already old and well along in years." And so,

because of his advanced age, he found it necessary to delay no longer; he had to take action to find a wife for Yitzchok, a wife who would be designated as the mother of the Am Yisroel. Now, to find such a woman upon whose shoulders would rest the future of the Am Yisroel was no small feat. And therefore, for help in finding this needle in a haystack, he turned to the one he could trust most, his most loyal disciple, Eliezer. "The time has come to choose a wife for my son," Avraham said to him. "I'm getting old and I can't wait any longer. And it's very important that the right woman should be chosen, and that's why I'm turning to you. I need you to travel to my birthplace and take a wife for my son, Yitzchok."

MAKE THE LOYAL ELIEZER SWEAR?!

However we then read something remarkable. Because instead of sending Eliezer on his way, Avraham took the unusual step of demanding an oath from Eliezer: **ואשבועך בהשם אלוקי השמים ואלוקי הארץ אשר לא תקח אשה לבני מבנות כנען** - And I make you swear by Hashem, the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth, that you will not take a woman for my son from the daughters of the Canaani" (Bereishis 24:3).

Now that's a very superfluous thing to demand of Eliezer. After all, Avraham was talking to his faithful servant, the one who was **מושל בכל אשר לו** - he was the one who controlled all that Avraham had. Now what does that mean? You might think that he carried around in his belt a big bunch of keys, he could even open Avraham's treasury where he kept all his gold and silver. It's true, but it means much more than that. He was the most devoted of Avraham's talmidim, the one Avraham turned to for everything. And for such a loyal *eved* it should have been more than enough to just give him instructions for this important mission and send him on his way. An oath, with the name of Hashem?! It seems so superfluous! And yet we understand that if Avraham Avinu administered such a dread oath to Eliezer then there's good reason for it.

ELIEZER WAS A SPIRITUAL WATER CARRIER

Now if we're going to resolve this question, we'll first have to better understand who Eliezer really was in the house of Avraham. In the Torah we find that Eliezer is called **זקן ביתו**, the elder of Avraham's house. And the gemara explains that to mean that Eliezer was **זקן ויושב בישיבה**, he was the *zakein* who sat at the head of

Avraham's gathering of sages. Now *zakein* is a specific word in *lashon kodesh*, a word that is not used lightly. It means *זוה שקנה חכמה*, someone who has acquired wisdom. So you understand already what kind of slave he was already! He wasn't a janitor; he was the elder of the house, the eldest sage of the *yeshiva*, the one who sat alongside Avraham.

And what was his function in the *yeshiva*? For that we'll look at another title that the Torah crowns him with. It says that he was called *דמשק אליעזר*. Now *Damesek Eliezer* has two meanings. The plain meaning is that he came from Damascus. That's where his birthplace was, Damesek. But why does the Torah take the trouble to name his birthplace? There are a lot of great people, even bigger, whose birthplaces are not mentioned. So our *chachomim* say that Damesek is a hint, it's a *notrikon*, a telescoped phrase that is meant to hint at the following: He was the *דולה ומשקה*. That means that Eliezer was *דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים*. He used to draw, as if with a bucket, from the well of the teachings of his master and give it to others. You know that in the *yeshiva*, after the *rosh yeshiva* is finished with his lecture so there are chosen individuals who repeat it over to groups of people. They know it well, and they're capable of explaining it in more detail, to break down and simplify the ideas, more than the *roshei yeshiva* would do. And they're able to answer the questions of the disciples - it's like someone who opens a well and he departs and then comes along his adjutant, his lieutenant, and he dips buckets into this water and he gives everyone to drink.

And that was the function of Eliezer in Avraham's academy. Avraham Avinu had gathered great knowledge and he was sitting surrounded by his disciples among whom Eliezer was the foremost. And Avraham was teaching them the truths of Hashem, the great truths of the universe and man's purpose here; that was the Torah that Avraham's taught. And in the assemblage of sages, Eliezer was the *choizer*, the *ibberzuger*, the chief disciple who repeated and explained his master's words. And that's the main service that he performed for his teacher, the service in the *yeshiva*, in Avraham's group of sages.

THE FIRST BAIS YAAKOV

And among the recipients of Eliezer's teachings was his own daughter. He had a daughter. And his daughter had turned out to be

one of the best girls in the world. A Bais Yaakov girl today would have nothing on Eliezer's daughter. Eliezer's daughter! A *bas talmid chochom!* And as soon as Eliezer heard that Avraham, his rebbi, the rosh yeshiva, was looking for a wife for his son, so Eliezer's heart leaped within him. And he thought, "Maybe! אולי, maybe it will be my daughter! After all, where else could Yitzchok find such a wonderful shidduch, a girl raised under the influence of Avraham?"

Now Eliezer didn't say anything. He wouldn't have the gumption to say anything in front of the Rosh Yeshiva; but in his heart this hope suddenly leaped up. But Avraham was a wise man, and when he was speaking with Eliezer, when he raised the idea of the mission for Eliezer, he saw a flash in Eliezer's eyes. And he didn't have to be told what Eliezer's thoughts were.

DID AVRAHAM CALL ELIEZER 'CURSED'?!

And therefore Avraham said, "Eliezer, you have to swear to me by the Hashem, the G-d of the heavens and the earth, that you will *not* choose for my son a wife from the Canaanite girls. I need you to swear!" You know that Eliezer was a Canaani; he came of the seed of Cham, from the family of Canaan. Now this family as you know was already under a curse which Noach had uttered. It doesn't mean that the people are to be cursed by others, but Noach characterized them as an accursed people. ארור כנען, Canaan is accursed. Because Noach saw certain qualities in Canaan that deprived him of the right of exercising his free will. Free will is a gift that Hakodosh Boruch Hu gives to Mankind because they are expected of being capable of using their free will. But when some persons abuse this privilege it becomes not a benefit for them, but a source of great peril. It is very dangerous for someone to possess a powerful tool when he is not capable of using it properly. And free will is the most dangerous of all tools a man possesses.

And therefore Noach put a curse on the descendants of Canaan and he said that they should be enslaved, that it's good for them - and it's good for everyone else. And the *chachomim* say that the following is what Avraham said to Eliezer - these are the words that the *chachomim* attribute to Avraham, but I'll soon explain that he didn't actually say it. The *chachomim* put these words in Avraham's mouth: ואתה ארור - you are accursed, you're a Canaani, ואני ברוך, And I'm blessed. I come from Shem, and Noach had said ברוך אלוקי שם,

Shem is blessed. We come from the seed of Shem, we're from special seed. And in addition to that, Hashem said to me **וְאִבְרָכָה**, I will bless you. We're blessed twice, we're blessed by Shem and by Hashem to Avraham. And Canaan is cursed. And therefore **אֵין אַרֹר מֵתְדַבֵּק בְּבְרוּךְ** - the one who is accursed can not be joined to the one who is blessed.

SPOILING MY REBBE'S TORAH

Now did Avraham actually say these words? No, he didn't say it. By the way, I just want to let you know that what I'm telling you now I heard from my great teacher Rav Isaac Sher *zichrono l'vracha*. Sometimes I might add a few words to spoil it, but in general the Torah is his. And he told us that Avraham *didn't* say it. Avraham merely saw the flash in Eliezer's eyes and he said "Eliezer, I want you to swear to me that you won't take a wife for Yitzchok from the daughters of Canaan." Avraham understood the desire, the hope, of Eliezer but he knew that it wasn't a possibility. And therefore to forestall any problem, he made Eliezer swear. "Just swear to me that you're going to follow my instructions." It's the same as telling Eliezer, "There can never be any union between us, because you come from **אַרֹר** and I come from **בְרוּךְ**."

And that was enough for Eliezer. **דִּי לַחֲכִימָא בְרַמְיָא**. If you give a wise man a hint, that's enough. The rebbe said that it has to be a girl from his family in Charan and *not a Canaanite girl*; and that means that the shidduch for Eliezer's daughter is off the table. And Eliezer understood that. It could very well be that this news broke his heart, but the loyal servant of Avraham accepted the decision of his rebbe and began to prepare for his journey to Charan, to fulfill his mission.

THE MOBILE NETWORK IS DOWN

And so, wanting to prepare for all eventualities - you know in those days he couldn't place a phone call to Avraham from Charan - Eliezer made sure to ask all of his questions now. And so he said, **אוּלַי לֹא תֵאבֹד הָאִשָּׁה לְלַכַּת אַחֲרַי** - "Perhaps, maybe, the woman I find will not be willing to come back with me to this land? There's no guarantee that the girl will be willing to follow a stranger to a foreign country. And if that's the case do you want me to bring Yitzchok to Charan to marry her there?" So Avraham warned Eliezer that he wouldn't countenance such a thing. **הַשְׁמֵר לְךָ פֶּן תֵּשִׁיב אֶת בְּנֵי שְׁמָה**.

“Beware lest you bring my son to that land. Yitzchok must remain under my supervision! And so he blessed Eliezer with success on his mission and sent him on his way.

And so the loyal Eliezer took an oath to Avraham; he took ten camels and loaded them with precious gifts, and he set out to Aram Naharayim, to the city of Nachor. Now the sages tell us that this journey wasn't so easy. On the way Eliezer was being put to tests. First, a sandstorm arose. Now in the desert, travelers know that you don't proceed further in a sandstorm; you stop and pitch your tent and wait until the storm subsides - otherwise people go lost. People are buried in a sandstorm and die there. So you have to huddle together and make a ring. I never did it but I can imagine - you huddle together with the camels and make a ring. You throw tarpaulins over the camels, and you wait inside a safe structure huddling together, waiting as the sand piles up outside. And then after the storm subsides you dig your way out and try to proceed. And if the roads have now gone lost under mounds of sand, so the careful traveler will turn around and return home so as not to go lost and die of thirst in the desert.

BACKPACKING THROUGH STORMS

So Eliezer had every reason to stop in the middle of the journey. “I really should turn back. Look at this dangerous sandstorm that's raging. All the other travelers are turning back.” He peeked out at the sandstorm from behind the wall where he was taking shelter, and he understood that it was meant to be this way; he *had* to turn back.

But he did not. Eliezer didn't even stop! He forced himself to go further. You know why? Because Eliezer was battling with himself. No, I can't turn back.

He was afraid that the reason he wanted to stop was because of his daughter back in Eretz Canaan. He said, “Who knows what motive is really telling me to turn around?! Is it really because of the sandstorm, or maybe that's just the excuse in order to gratify my ambition. Maybe the real reason I want to go back is because I'm thinking of myself. “Maybe if I would stop and go back, Avraham would understand that there is no better option, and that my daughter would be the best candidate after all.”

“But there’s a real sandstorm out there. I’m not turning around for the sake of my daughter, I’m going back because of the storm.” And then there burst up from deeper in his mind, “No, maybe I’m just fooling myself.” And so he struggled on.

HE COULD HAVE TURNED BACK

What he had gone through, I’m not able to tell you. I just gave you some of the *roshei perakim*. But it was a terrible ordeal. In his heart a battle was raging. A short while later he subsequently came to a river. And at that time this river was flooding. It was raging over the banks and there was no passage, no ford to cross over. “Look at this flooding river. There’s no going further. What am I, crazy to keep going? I have every reason to turn back.”

So what more could Eliezer do? The only alternative was to return home. And he would have been absolved of his oath. The oath didn’t require him to lose his life, or even to risk his life. And therefore he could have turned around. And anybody else would have! But not Eliezer. Because he didn’t trust himself now; he suspected himself. He was battling with himself. He said, “No, I’m afraid I’m being bribed by my own self interest.”

WAGING WAR WITH HIMSELF

And so when Eliezer travelled on his journey he had a thousand legitimate reasons to turn back. It was a long battle, a difficult battle. Don’t imagine that it was easy.

But he fought himself all the way, he asked himself, “Are these really legitimate reasons or is it simply an excuse to fulfill my own desire?” He knew he was a Canaanite and his inner flaws could obscure his judgement. And so he waged a mighty battle within himself throughout the entire journey. “No,” he said, “I will remain loyal to my master and no matter what happens I will complete this *shlichus*.”

And Eliezer searched deep into his mind. He didn’t want to fool himself. “The sandstorm is not a sandstorm; it’s really just a storm of ambition in my heart.” And at each test on the road - and there were many more - Eliezer battled his way through it and he finally arrived.

Now this suspecting of himself effected such a change in the soul, in the personality, of Eliezer. There took place a tremendous

change in his character at that time. And when he arrived in Charan he was no longer the same man. He had weathered the storm in his mind and he finally arrived at his destination despite the obstacles on the road *and despite the obstacles in his mind.*

ELIEZER FOUND RIVKAH AND HIMSELF

And when he arrived, he found that Hakodosh Boruch Hu had already prepared the girl who would be the wife of Yitzchok, the mother of the Am Yisroel. And you are all familiar with the story of how Eliezer miraculously found Rivkah by the well. But I want to tell you now about something that was just as important as Rivkah that Eliezer also found in Charan. *He found that he was a new man altogether!* Because when Lavan, Rivkah's brother came out to greet Eliezer he said something quite strange. Now you have to know who Lavan was; whatever greatness Rivkah had achieved growing up in that house, ideals of *chesed* that made her worthy of being chosen, Lavan was *not* such an idealist. He hadn't absorbed the great truths of life. His ideal was only one thing, כסף וזהב, money, money and more money. And when he saw Eliezer coming towards the house loaded down with money, with jewelry and gifts, so he ran to greet Eliezer and he called out to him: בא ברוך השם, Come in, you who are blessed of Hashem."

Now when Lavan said those words he was thinking only about the wealth that was loaded high on the camels of Eliezer. To Lavan, that's what the "blessed of Hashem" meant; it could only mean that for this greedy fellow. However, we know that great prophecies sometimes come from mouths of donkeys too. You remember when Bilam's donkey opened its mouth? Bilaam's donkey wasn't a Navi. Hakodosh Boruch Hu sent prophecy, and it happened to go through this "pipe". You know sometimes you'll see a fountain, it's the statue of a lion, and the water is going through a pipe out from the mouth of the lion. The lion is not shooting out any water through its mouth. It's a stone lion but there is a pipe that is carrying water through the mouth of the lion. And that's what was happening with Bilaam's donkey - Hashem's prophecy came through the mouth of Bilaam's donkey.

LAVAN THE "DONKEY"

And here also, Hashem sent a prophecy through the mouth of another "donkey," only that this time his name was Lavan. And

Hakodosh Boruch Hu was saying, “Come, Eliezer, welcome, you who *now* are *blessed of Hashem*.” You who came from the accursed seed, a seed of people who live only for themselves, a people who live with selfish motives; you have conquered that. You weathered a terrible storm of the mind, a ferocious battle, and the entire journey you battled against yourself. And you have changed your nature fundamentally, and now you are no longer an *arur*; you’re a *boruch*.

When he heard the words of *nevuah* from the mouth of Lavan, **בא ברוך השם**, he realized that the most successful achievement of his journey had been accomplished. Because changing yourself, recognizing your motivations and overcoming them, is the greatest achievement of all. Of course he brought Rivkah back with him too. And that was very important; that was the future of the holy nation. But for Eliezer himself, he came back as a *boruch* and nothing could be more important than that.

So you’ll ask me, if so why wasn’t his daughter eligible now? Why didn’t he turn around and propose the *shidduch* to Avraham. The answer is that Eliezer had gone through the ordeal; it was only *he* who reached into the depths of his mind to root out the misplaced motivations. But his daughter had remained at home, and she was in the class of *arur* no matter how good she was.

WHERE'D THE LETTER VUV GO?

You know, we mentioned earlier that the narration, the story of Eliezer’s journey, as well as his conversations with Avraham, Rivkah and Besuel are intended to teach us the most important lessons. And *chazal* make the point that even in one letter we are able to glean some of the deepest secrets of the universe, the most profound secrets of man’s character.

When Eliezer sat down with Rivkah’s family to finalize the *shidduch*, he told them how Avraham had first asked him to travel to Charan on his behalf. And he told them how he had asked Avraham, **אולי לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי**, “Maybe the girl won’t want to come back with me to Eretz Canaan.” However in the repetition of the statement of Eliezer the Torah writes the word **אולי**, without the *vuv*. And that missing *vuv* is as important as the whole story itself. Why is the *vuv* left out? So *chazal* tell us it’s so you should be able to read it as **אלי**, “to me” instead of **אולי**, “maybe.”

SELF AWARENESS!

Eliezer stood now after a long and arduous journey, a journey during which he had battled more than storms and raging rivers. He had been battling to reach into the subterranean parts of his mind, to his most deepest motivations. And now as he sat at the shidduch table repeating over the conversation that had taken place with Avraham, he had achieved a new sense of self awareness. And so he was commenting on himself, saying, “*Now* I know what I had been saying to Avraham back then. What I *really* was saying was not that “אולי, perhaps she won’t come back with me” but “I’m hoping that she won’t come back with me, and then Yitzchok will have to come אלי, to me.”

Now he didn’t say it of course. He didn’t even think it, consciously. He didn’t realize then that some of his selfish motives were playing out in his mind. He thought he was concerned; he had to prepare for all scenarios, what if she wouldn’t want to come.

Only later, after enduring the battle in his mind, after overcoming and vanquishing, and becoming the ברוך השם, when he was telling over the story to the family of Rivkah, so there it is written without a *vuvo*. Because that’s when he recognized that what he had been saying to Avraham back then, was אלי, to me.

REALIZING THE DEPTHS OF YOUR THOUGHTS

With this, Eliezer announced that he had a self-realization about himself, that he himself deep down did *not* want the *shlichus* to come to fruition. He realized now that his hopes, his intentions on that day, many weeks before, we’re not as pure as he had imagined then.

Because he realized that there was much more that was going through his head. “Doesn’t my daughter deserve a Yitzchok? My poor daughter; why should she be deprived of such a glorious match? After all,” thought Eliezer, “I am Avraham’s chief student, and my daughter who was raised in Avraham’s home and is an exceptionally fine young lady, a fitting shidduch for Yitzchok. She is so loyal to me, to my teachings. In a certain sense she grew up in the tent of Avraham because I gave over everything to her. For all these years she studied under me, and she followed my ways and she gained perfection. It would be such a happiness, ענבי הגפן בענבי הגפן.” Why am I traveling to Padan Aram which is so far away? It’s

not right.” And he realized that these were his real motives of why he was thinking of going back. It wasn’t because of the sandstorm or the raging river *at all*.

CURSED BECOMES BLESSED!

Now he had realized his own subjectivity And it was this battle, and this self-realization that completely transformed him from top to bottom. He was a completely different person now; his daughter was still cursed, but he was now blessed. Eliezer was able to overcome, the “Me.” When a man is able to overcome the “Me”, that’s his greatness. And by serving Hashem so loyally; from an *arur* he became a *boruch!*

And you know what the Sages say about his ordeal? They quote a *possuk* in Hoshea (12:8). כנען בידו מאזני מרמה - “The Canaanite, in his hands he’s holding scales of deceit, scales of falsehood, לעשוק אהב - he loves to deceive.” And the Sages say that these words refer to the Canaani, Eliezer eved Avraham. At that time he was holding in his hands a scale, and he was weighing, “Is my daughter fit for Yitzchok? It could very well be that she is the best one for him.” As Eliezer waited for the storm to pass by, and for the flooding river to subside he weighed the options carefully. He knew very well that he was the most proficient of Avraham’s talmidim. And he understood that he had raised his daughter to be most capable of continuing Avraham's system of disseminating the awareness of Hashem by building a family dedicated to these ideals. And after much thought, Eliezer came to the decision that “Yes, she is the best choice; she’s the one for Yitzchok.” And he thought, “Maybe this is the message Hashem is sending me; I should turn back now and tell Avraham the truth, that the journey was impossible, the paths impassable.”

ELIEZER WASN'T GONNA BECOME A FAILURE

And the sages say that this decision, this conclusion of one of the great men of our history was מאזני מרמה, it was made using scales of deceit, לעשוק אהב, he wanted to cheat the אהובו של עולם, he wanted to deceive the beloved one of the world, that’s Yitzchok ben Avraham, by palming off his daughter on him.

But Eliezer wasn't going to let himself be deceived and be a failure. He questioned himself and vanquished this deceit that welled

up from within his mind. It was on this lonely desert road where Eliezer achieved the pinnacle of greatness, more perfection than he had acquired under the tutelage of Avraham. Because he dug into the depths of his soul and ignored the conclusions he had reached; he reached into his true motivations and ignored the deceitful weighing of the scales he had made. And he travelled on to Charan to fulfill the mission of Avraham Avinu.

THE MOST DIFFICULT TEST

And there are many examples from the *kadmonim*, stories of big people who were tested by this type of test that Eliezer endured; of recognizing one's true motivations. It is one of the most difficult of tests that a man can endure and one that many people in our history struggled greatly to overcome; great people who were actually wrong, but they hoodwinked themselves into thinking that they were right.

One of the great men in our history is Shaul Hamelech. Make no mistake about it; he was a very great *tzadik*, an exceptionally great *tzadik*. We're talking about a man who was chosen by Hashem, the **מְשִׁיחַ הַשָּׁמַיִם**, the first king. Hashem chose Shaul because he was perfect enough to be the one to lead the people in being the Am Hashem, the loyal nation.

SHAUL'S HIDING PLACE

And he was an *anav* too! You know that when they wanted to make him the king so they drew lots and it fell on him. But they couldn't find him. They looked for him and they found him hiding in the basement between the barrels. He didn't want to be the king. Only that when they got to the basement they saw his foot sticking out from between the barrels; they pulled him out and said, "You're the king." This *tzadik* had to be pulled out from among the barrels to be anointed king!

You remember when the soul of Shmuel appeared to Shaul in a prophetic vision? And what was Shaul told? "You're going to be with me" which means that Shaul was given official recognition by the *navi* that he deserves to be not only a *ben Olam Habah* but that he would be in the *mechitza* of the great *navi* Shmuel. Shmuel told this to Shaul in a vision! **עִמִּי**, "You're going to be with me!" It means, "You are worthy of sitting next to me in Gan Eden, that's how great you

are!" The words of Shmuel Hanavi from the Next World! That's like hearing an *haskamah* from Hakodosh Boruch Hu himself!

ONE OF THE PUZZLES OF NACH

Now if that's the case we have a puzzle. Because we know that Shaul had attempted again and again to pursue Dovid in order to capture him and put him to death. What did Dovid do already that Shaul wanted to kill him?! Dovid was the **נעים זמירות ישראל**, the one who used to sing songs of love to Hashem with *ruach hakodesh*. He was even brought to the palace of Shaul to sing for the king and Shaul was so pleased when he heard these songs. Dovid was known as an *eved Hashem*. So why would this *tzadik* Shaul try to kill him? And it went on for years! When Dovid said **השם מה רבו צרי** he meant Shaul Hamelech. He was hunted like a wild beast; he had to run and hide in the caves of the mountains for many years. What was Shaul thinking in that great head of his?! It's hard to fathom what was doing.

And the answer is that Shaul decided that Dovid had become giddy, intoxicated by his great victory when he slew *Golias Haplishti*. At that time, Dovid became the hero of the Am Yisroel. And people sang songs about him. In the streets people were singing about their new hero. They were delirious with happiness at their *yeshua* and they sang as follows: **הכה שאול במאותי ודוד באלפיו** - Shaul killed many hundreds of our enemies, but now Dovid has done even more.

And Shaul watched that with disquieted eyes. And he said to himself, "I can see where this is heading. I can see in his eyes that his success has made him intoxicated with power. And now he's going to try things that he's not entitled to do. There's no question that he has eyes on my throne, and he can only do that if he assassinates me and gets me out of the way."

SHMUEL HANAVI TEACHES GA'AVAH

Shaul didn't know that Hashem had appointed Dovid as the future king. Nobody told him that. And now he saw this fellow coming to take from him what Hashem wanted him to have, so Shaul did his best to put down this ambitious fellow who he suspected of wanting to take away his crown. He had to protect his office, and his life as well, for all usurpers eventually must put the incumbent out of

the way. And so Shaul defended himself. And we wouldn't be any better - we'd be a thousand time worse!

Shaul had been extremely humble at first, but under the tutelage of Shmuel Hanavi he had developed the healthy feeling for the dignity of royalty. It's not for nothing that he was chosen from the whole nation to be the leader. Hashem had searched out the heart of every single Jew - every single last Jew! - and he chose Shaul as the *tzadik hador*, to be the one most fit to guide the nation towards Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Shaul didn't ask for the job, he hadn't sought leadership; but after accepting, he was every inch a leader. "Hashem chose me because that's what's best for the ruchniyus of the nation, and it would be a sin against Hashem to let this young rebel to take that away." Shaul saw that this little upstart was vying to override the choice of Hashem.

And so Shaul was convinced that Dovid was his deadly enemy. So convinced, so certain about it, that he said **הבא להרגו** **השכם להרגו**, if someone is trying to kill you, then get up earlier than him in the morning, and make sure you kill him first. That's the halacha! It's not a choice, it's an obligation to defend your own life. Now you have to know that Shaul did not make this decision on the spur of the moment. He was a *tzadik*, a *ben Torah*, a very *frum* man. And he was an *anav* too, a very humble man. And he came to the conclusion, he was fully convinced, that he was right. So here I have a case where a *tzadik* wished to kill a *tzadik*. And he was so sure of himself that he exerted himself for years and years to carry out this "*mitzvah*".

THE SONG THAT TORE SHAUL'S HEART

But when we look back at those days, we have the benefit of hindsight, the benefit of looking back through the eyes of *chazal*. And we see that the motivations of Shaul were much deeper than he thought. And this is what they tell us: When Shaul who had been the leader in battle till now, he had been the hero, when he heard the people singing Dovid's praises he became jealous of him. To hear the women who had once chanted, "Shaul smote thousands" and were now chanting, "Dovid smote tens of thousands," tore the heart of Shaul. He was sorely hurt when the popular admiration he had hitherto enjoyed was now being turned to his young servant.

And it was this jealousy that was the motivation that lay at the bottom of Shaul's heart. It was the root of everything. Don't think that a tzadik doesn't get jealous. You know that Shaul had a nose, you know that don't you? He had all the organs of the body just like you and I. And so too when it comes to the spiritual organs, the traits of character - a tzadik struggles with them as well. And now the eminently righteous Shaul was subject to a great ordeal of recognizing his motivations. The same enemy that Eliezer battled, the enemy of the subconscious, was now facing Shaul. All the ideas of Shaul that brought him to the conclusion that he must execute Dovid stemmed from this one *negiah* that he had at the bottom of his mind that he was jealous of Dovid. And the most difficult test of his life would be this: "Are you able to recognize your true motivations?"

Now you have to know that this is a terrible story to hear. It hurts me to say it over. Absolutely Shaul was a *tzadik gomur*, from beginning to end. And nevertheless, no matter who you are, when a person becomes obsessed with a certain jealousy or any other wrong motivation he becomes deceived and blinded. And it can lead to the most serious of errors; you might want to even kill the **משיח השם** Dovid Hamelech. You'll try to kill the *tzadik* Dovid and *you'll be sure that you're right*. It was all good *svarahs*, it sounded very good to Shaul! And he found a way to explain everything he saw in a negative way.

THESE ARE MORE THAN JUST EXCITING STORIES

This you have to know actually is more than just a *marshal*, more than just a story. All these things are told to us in our *seforim* - although they're interesting and they're worth studying - nevertheless it is a model for everyone to understand that this an illustration of human nature, of our natures.

There's a *possuk* in Mishlei: **כל דרך איש ישר בעיניו** - Every man thinks that his way is the right way. Now that is a statement of the utmost importance. Everybody thinks that he's doing right. And it says **כל דרך איש**, *all the paths of a man*. Shlomo is making a statement about me and you, the things we do every day. Everybody thinks they have good character; that's what Shlomo is saying. So a good man says, "I know I *don't* have good character, I know, I know." But it's not true what he's saying; he thinks he *does* have good character!

OUR GREATEST MEN STRUGGLED WITH THIS

When we study this subject we begin to understand one of the great problems of Mankind. And that is that even the best of our people, the most learned, the most distinguished, can make the most tragic errors by failing to search deeply into their motives. Many great men, much greater than the best of us, have fallen into this error and have done tremendous misdeeds because they thought they were doing a mitzvah.

We see examples of Eliezer and Shaul, and I could tell you many more as well if we could sit here for hours - the brothers of Yosef, Achitofel, Yeravam ben Nevat, and many others - all these examples are *michayeiv* us. We're expected to study these stories and take them to heart.

WALKING DOWN THE IMAGINARY ROAD

A person has to study these examples from the Torah that show how perilous it is to make decisions based on what you think is right, because actually you could be totally wrong.

And if you don't put effort into studying your motivations, you'll never even begin to realize it, and you'll walk on your imaginary **ישר ישר** your whole life.

And that's because there is such a thing as the subconscious mind that is actually motivating your actions. And these subconscious thoughts of a person are also seen by Hashem. Hashem judges a person by the subconscious ideas that are in his mind. A person must know that he's not judged merely by what he *thinks* is right or wrong, but what is in his *leivav* - not the *leiv*, but the *leivav*, the innermost thoughts, the depths of his mind. **השם יראה ללבב**, Hashem is looking not only at your thoughts, but your innermost thoughts.

PSYCHOLOGY 101

Why the innermost thoughts? I'll explain that. Freud, that big faker, came along and said that there are three stories in the human mind: there is the "id," that's "idea," all the way at the bottom. And above that, the middle story is the "ego" and on the surface is the "superego." The "id" is what you really are, taught Freud. You're actually terrible; he makes you a dirty dog! The way Freud describes the "id" everyone is a dirty dog. The worst thoughts; I can't tell you

his examples. In public you can't say the things he thought about. It's terrible the way he described the "id."

Now it's not true of course. The human mind is beautiful; it has wonderful ideas buried deep inside. Freud was a filthy man, a dirty dog, so he projected his filth onto the rest of us. But I'm telling you about the levels now. There is an id that's the bottom. The id is unconscious.

Above that is the ego; ego is the subconscious, what the mind can be aware of. And then, on top is the superego, the mind that is in control. So again, there is an *id*, an *ego* and a *superego*. The idea is a true idea; we don't need him for it. It's in our seforim too. I'm taking him as a *mashal*; he took this wonderful idea and he made us all into dogs.

DON'T IGNORE YOUR 'EGO'

Most of the people in the world deceive themselves and they only look at their superficial thoughts; their "super ego." They are never willing to dig into the subterranean levels of their minds, their "ego," to see what really motivates them. And that's exactly why you're going to be so overwhelmed on that Great Day of Judgement. When Hakadosh Boruch Hu will tell you, "Chaim, or Dovid, you're this and this!" And you'll understand exactly what He means! And you'll be so overwhelmed, so shocked. All your life you've been deceiving yourself and patting yourself on the shoulder, blaming other people, not yourself.

It's time to get it into our thick skulls that we're not perfect. Any perfection you acquired is the result of hard work. Most human beings think that they are lucky to have been born with good character. Although they know they didn't work on their character, they didn't labor to train themselves, but they're convinced that they're good anyhow. Of course they do, because self-love is coursing through their veins day and night.

YOU'RE BRIBING YOURSELF

One of the most prevalent and dangerous middos that lays lurking in our subconscious is the *shochad*, the bribery of self love, Self-love blinds you to your faults. And everybody is prone to such bribery. And it's all due to one reason, שוחד, bribery. When a judge receives a gift from one of the two parties who comes before him for

judgement, so he's *possul* to be a Dayan because the gift will cause him to think in favor of the one who gave him the gift. And when a man has to judge himself, which he's doing all the time, he's bribed by his love of himself. And he's not capable of recognizing his true nature unless he tries very hard. Unless he has tried to study himself. Everybody is blown up by arrogance. Even the most ignorant fellow is a *baal gaavah*. Every *Am Haaretz*, every nobody is a *baal gaavah*! He's always right, always! And this selfishness of the mind is a peril even for the biggest people.

And Shlomo Hamelech says that you have to watch out always! Because while *כל דרך איש ישר בעיניו*, all the ways of man are pure in *his* eyes. It's only *your* eyes that are being fooled; because *ותוכן ליבות השם*, Hashem is measuring everybody's mind. It won't help if you deceive yourself because Hakodosh Boruch Hu is measuring the depths of your mind, what are your real intentions, your real thoughts, your real motivations. And unless you battle to realize the truth in this world, you'll be shocked when Hashem greets you in the Next World.

WE ARE ALL BEING FOOLED

Now this is a very important lesson that you have to learn while you're still in this world. Because one of the things that the gemara says is *מכוסה מעיניו של אדם*, one of the things that most people do not realize is *omek hadin*, how deep is the judgement. And Rashi says *רובם טועים בו*, most people are in very grave error about how deep Hashem will dig into a man's mind when it comes to that great day of judgement. The shallowness of the human mind persuades a man that he is always right, but on that day when Hashem digs down deeply into your motivations, everything becomes revealed.

And so this very important subject actually is the preparation for our true career, our existence in Olam Habah. Our preparation for the Life to Come depends on knowing who we are. And we have already heard that *רובם טועים בו*, most of us are in error! A man says he can't learn because he doesn't have the time, or because he was never trained in the yeshiva. I hear it all the time and it's *sheker v'chazav*! I'm too tired to learn now. Did you investigate your motivations?! I *have* to go to this simcha?! Oh really, you *have* to?!

Remember well those words of Rashi: רובם טועים בו. Most people - and actually it's all people - are deceiving themselves in almost everything unless they're willing to take the effort to analyze what are their motivations. Only that if we take it seriously, we'll think about it, we'll be *מפשפש במעשיו*, maybe a little bit we'll discover. And that's why we're always saying *נחפשה דרכינו ונחקרה*, let us search out our ways and investigate them. We're always saying it, but the problem is that nobody is doing it. Because it doesn't only mean that we'll be *מפשפש*, we'll think about our deeds, that we'll feel them out a little bit. No, it means that we'll *investigate*, we'll dig deep and then even deeper and think about our motivations. 'What is my real motivation?' And in most cases where we think we're justified we'll be amazed at what's hiding deep down at the depths of your *neshama*, a different purpose all together.

DREAMING IN SLABODKA

Now when I was in Slabodka, I'm not going to tell you that we succeeded like Eliezer did in plumbing the depths of our minds. I'm won't say that; Slabodka was nothing like the house of Avraham Avinu - we couldn't even dream to be like that. But we studied again and again examples of great people, important personalities, who deceived themselves. And we were taught about how important it is to examine ourselves, and to re-examine ourselves, and not to think that we're always right.

And now we come to the subject of what to do, what to do about this great problem. But before you do anything you must learn that it's a problem. If you don't realize that you're prone to self admiration, that you're always being bribed by self love then you'll never even start. The first step is to always suspect yourself. *חושד את עצמו*, you have to suspect, "Maybe I'm wrong; maybe my motives aren't as pure as I thought." That's the first step, and that's something that most people refuse to admit. And therefore most people remain full of faults forever. Of course, most people have good things in them too. No question about that. But you can't rely on your good things to cover up all your faults.

LET THE SEFER TALK TO YOU

But a person needs much more than that because recognizing the problem is an important step, but it's only the beginning. The long path to perfection is to realize that there are certain things called

middos that you have to study in the *seforim*. People who never study the *seforim* don't even begin to know that there is a possibility they have these qualities within them. If you take a sefer like the Mesillas Yescharim and study it seriously, you begin to realize that it may be that some of the things he's talking about may be in you. If you learn a sefer like Shaarei Teshuva, and he mentions certain wrong qualities of character, it might enter your mind that perhaps I'm the man that he's talking about. You have to go to the places where they talk about these things, where they learn the seforim that discuss these things.

THEY'RE BOTH PERFECTLY RIGHT!

And one of the most important areas of life where we find this fault is in people's encounters with other people. And therefore it becomes the utmost necessity to think about this subject of what is really motivating a man in all of his encounters with the people around him.

Every case of a husband and wife - many times there are serious quarrels that shouldn't have ever happened. I'm dealing with couples all the time and sometimes it becomes very, very serious. And each one, as he or she tells me the story, is perfectly right! Here's a case, a man comes here and tells me his story; sounds good to me! She comes in and she tells me her story; also sounds good to me! Two opposite stories; how could it be?! The answer is that each one is telling me their superficial thoughts and not their real motivations. I've listened to so many cases of husbands and wives quarreling, and it's remarkable how each one is right. Always! Sometimes he's charitable, he says, "A little bit she's right." But in general he's a hundred percent right; he believes that.

MURDERING ONE'S SPOUSE

And actually he's very wrong, terribly wrong. And some of the people I speak to are so wrong that they don't even know how wicked they really are.

Tyrants who think they're tzadikim. And there are wicked women sometimes too *chas v'shalom*. Sometimes the woman is a tyrant too, and she drives the husband out of the house. In America especially, she calls the police and drives him out of the house!

And so many lives have been ruined by dissension, by lack of harmony that is entirely based on hidden motives by which people deceive themselves.

And therefore in all *machlokes*, especially *machlokes* in our own families, husbands and wives, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, we always find hostility based on “good reasons.” Both of them are claiming justice and really each side is being motivated by nothing more than *middos* of human frailty. You have to know that in every case it’s nothing but a weakness of character that has led us to be hostile towards our fellow Jews. If they would dig down they would discover how wrong both of them are. That’s usually the case. Both are usually wrong. Sometimes one more than the other, but both are wrong.

Daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law, neighbors, shuls - all over the map they’re fighting today. It’s remarkable how many families, how many *kehillos* are being ripped apart. Of course, some don’t. I’m not saying everyone, but it’s remarkable how many are. *Mechutanim!* Here’s a man who won’t talk to his *mechutan*; he sees him in the street and he walks away, he crosses the avenue so he won’t have to meet him. So many cases, again and again. And it’s based on nothing but some small *middah*, a foolish characteristic, a weakness in a trait of character, that misleads him. Only that no one even imagines that he is the guilty party and he therefore doesn’t think that it’s serious.

IT'S AT LEAST A MAYBE

And therefore when people have *machlokes* with somebody else, it’s an obligation that they must suspect themselves, “Maybe I’m wrong.” Look into the matter. And look into it more. And the truth is that in many cases you’ll discover that you are wrong. The most difficult of all tests is our dealing with our fellow Jews; that’s where the most serious errors are committed. And the reason why most of these errors occur is because you don’t know how to deal with yourself - you haven’t learned how to recognize what’s really going on in that mind of yours.

And what we’re learning now is that in any case of dispute - even when you seem to be fully justified, even though you have good reasons on your behalf, you have foolproof arguments backing you up, you have to know that it’s perilous to make any decisions, any conclusions. And that’s why the *derech* of *shalom* is always the safest,

the *derech* of *anavah*, of humility. And you say, “Even though I might be right, I’m willing to yield, I won’t say anything” That’s what Eliezer did. He had a million reasons to turn back, he knew he was right, he knew that his daughter was the best *shidduch* in the world for Yitzchok, but he didn’t trust himself, He “knew” but he knew that he knew nothing!

AVOIDING SINAS CHINAM

And only if you know beforehand that there is such a thing as self-deception in motivations then a person will always be ready to think, “Maybe I’m wrong, maybe the other party is right. And what can I lose if I give in? What will I lose already if I make *shalom*? What will I lose if I don’t talk about it? What will I lose if I act friendly despite what he did - or I think he did to me?” And therefore the way to success in life *bein adam lachaveiro* is the way of *shalom* with people. Keep your mouth closed. No matter how justified you think you are, you make it your business to get along with people and by doing so you have avoided the most perilous form of behavior which is the *sinah bein adam lachaveiro*. *Sinas chinam* is one of the greatest mistakes of our lives, and most people in some instances are transgressing.

And therefore we have to make up our minds that we’re not going to risk it. Even if we don’t have the power to study our motivations, you can’t think into your subconscious minds, but the awareness of the possibilities of what could be doing in our subconscious mind must be the catalyst that spurs you to always be willing to be *moichel* and to overlook; and to say that despite everything, we are going to live in harmony, we’re going to live in peace and respect each other. And that will be our very best preparation for our great success in the World to Come.

THE GREATEST GREETING FOR OLAM HABAH

And now we can understand why this story of Eliezer is very important. And that’s why it’s told in detail, such detail that you don’t find elsewhere. Not only is the whole story told in detail, but later it’s repeated. He tells the story over again! The whole story he repeats - it’s remarkable! And the sages say that the scribes break their pens on this, and much ink has been spilled on this. It’s a lot of ink to write all these extra *parshiyos*. Whereas when it came to the Torah of the descendants of Avraham, Hakodosh Boruch Hu bregrudged even one letter sometimes. Important *halachos* are hinted

at by only one *os*, one letter. And here you have literally thousands of letters, hundreds of words, because we are being taught the importance of this great man, and the details of what made him great. What he accomplished in his travel to Charan was so great, so significant, that it deserves a most prominent place in the Torah. A man who is able to change himself, that's the man that deserves the most space in the Torah.

When a person can dig deep enough into his own mind, and realize the flaw, the blemish, the impure motivation that is *really* driving him, that is the beginning of the path to becoming a ברוך השם. If he then battles against it, uproots it and removes it from himself, not only does he become a totally new person, he becomes beloved in the eyes of Hashem. And just like Eliezer received the approbation of Hashem בא ברוך השם - "Welcome, you blessed one of Hashem," when he recognized and overcame his deeper motivation, so too can all of us. The loyal *eved Hashem* Who recognizes that כל דרך איש ישר בעיניו, his ways are straight only in *his* eyes, but that תוכן ליבות השם, that Hashem will study the deeper motivations of his mind, that man will be welcomed into Gan Eden with the words of Hakodosh Boruch Hu Himself, בא ברוך השם.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

How much mussar is a person required to learn every day? And what kind of mussar is best to learn?

A:

How much mussar depends on who you are. If you are a talmid in a yeshiva, then you have to keep the sedorim of the yeshiva. You cannot go off someplace by yourself and be a failure in what the yeshiva requires of you. However, there is time. There is enough time to learn mussar. There's time bein hasdorim. There's time Friday afternoon. When the yeshiva disperses you can still sit and learn mussar; there is time.

Now, how much time should you allot in your spare time also depends on who you are. But this I can tell you. That if you invest time in mussar, you're investing in your future. You're not giving away time, you're gaining greatness! Mussar means to develop your mind in the model of the great truths of the Torah in an abstract form - in the form that's most useful for people who like to think.

Now what kind of mussar? I would say that at the beginning you should spend more time on Mesillas Yesharim, and on the Rambam - his Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah, Hilchos Teshuva and Hilchos Dei'os. Also, Rabbeinu Yonah Shaarei Teshuva and Chovos Halevovos. Other seforim could come later. But these that I just mentioned, I think should be the fundamental seforim to study.

TAPE # 403

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