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Year 5 | Issue 10

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פרשת תולדות

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

Recognizing Your Motivations

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Part I. Ultimate Deception

The Puzzling Plan

One of the great puzzles of the Torah is the fact that Yitzchok Avinu had initially intended to give the *brachos* to Eisav. I say 'initially' – it was more than that. It almost turned out that way! Yitzchok knew there would be a Jewish nation with three Avos – and he planned on giving Eisav the *brachos* and establishing him as the third one!

According to the plan of Yitzchok, forever we would have stood *shemoneh esrei* saying *Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak ve'Elokei Eisav*. Only we wouldn't have been saying because we wouldn't have been around anymore. If Eisav would have been established among the three avos, it would have been a ruination *chas veshalom*; we wouldn't be here today. We're the *Am Elokei Yaakov*. That's the only reason why we exist today.

Now, you have to know that Yitzchak was a greater *chacham* than even Avraham Avinu. That's what the *chachomim* say. Avraham Avinu was the discoverer, the *mechadesh*, but Yitzchak Avinu learned all that his *rebbe* taught him and then he added to it too. He was like a giant standing on the shoulders of another giant, and so there's no question that Yitzchok was one of the greatest *chachamim* of history; and therefore to say that Eisav was able to deceive him, to defraud him, is a very big puzzle.

Shaking Like A Leaf

And it wasn't a small mistake that Yitzchok made, something that could be overlooked. It was terrible and fearful. That's why when Yitzchok discovered his error **וַיִּחָרַד יִצְחָק הַרְרָה גְרֵלָה עַד מְאֹד** – *he trembled a great trembling* (Toldos 27:33). Now, *charadah gedolah* would mean that his arms and legs were shaking as in a palsy, that he was shaking like a leaf in a storm. That itself is an extreme language but actually the *possuk* says more than that. It says **הַרְרָה גְרֵלָה עַד מְאֹד** – It was a great trembling, *very much* so. Nowhere else in the entire *chumash* will you find such a description. It wasn't like a storm; it was like he was caught in a hurricane, being buffeted back and forth by a gale.

Now Yitzchok didn't tremble like that just to put on a show – he must have been terribly agitated. And so our sages ask a question: Why did he shake so much? What did he see that made him so afraid?

Glimpsing Gehinom

Now listen to the answer our sages tell us (Rashi *ibid.*): *Ra'ah Gehinom pesucha mitachtav* – Yitzchok saw that Gehinom had opened up beneath him. Now, if we could see Gehinom open up, there's no question we would be just as agitated. Not only our hands but our feet and our eyes and our lips and our head and our brains would be agitated.

If we would see Gehinom just once we probably wouldn't stop shaking for the rest of our lives. It might do us good – or maybe it wouldn't do us too much good because it would put us out of commission. That's why Hashem doesn't show it to us. You have to learn about Gehinom, you have to think about it, but it's concealed by a veil because if we could see it, I don't think we would be able to operate anymore.

But Yitzchok saw it! He saw Gehinom open up right near his feet. It means he saw that he had just barely missed falling in. He had almost given away the future to Eisav, only that at the last second, while standing at the precipice, he discovered the truth. After Yaakov had taken the blessings and left, when Eisav walked in so Yitzchok said, "Who is this who came just before and I gave him the blessings?!" He saw now that the Hand of Hashem had revealed the truth to him. Yitzchok knew that things didn't happen by accident and if it turned out now that he had given the future away to Yaakov so now he understood in a flash that he had made a terrible error all these years. "Eisav *wasn't* the one!?! It had been one big mistake. And I almost stepped off the precipice!"

I've seen pictures like that. A man is walking on a bridge in the darkness. He's in the country and it's dark, pitch dark, but he has to get home so he continues to walk. Suddenly, there's a flash of lightning and in that sudden blaze of light he sees that he's standing on the brink of a high precipice. That's a shocking experience! With one more step he would have been hurled and dashed to pieces.

When I was younger I saw a painting like that. A man is staring down into a deep abyss and he realizes how close he was to being finished. He stopped just in time. That's what Yitzchok saw. Only that he saw much more than that. He saw a much deeper hole, a hole that went all the way down to Gehinom.

Trapping the Wise Man

The question is how could such a thing happen in the first place? Yitzchok was too wise for that; how could it be that he got so close to the precipice? How could he have been deceived into thinking that Eisav, not only that he was worthy but that he was even more worthy than Yaakov?

It's a question that deserves our earnest attention. Now I don't say that we're going to solve it entirely, but at least we have to think about it. And if we do, we'll be able to take an important lesson for ourselves.

So we look in our parsha and it says that וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו כִּי צִדָּד בְּפִיּוֹ – And Yitzchok loved Eisav because he used to eat from the game that Eisav would trap for him (Toldos 25:28). The plain meaning seems to be

that because Eisav trapped venison, deer meat, for his father to eat, so he loved him and was fooled. Venison tastes good, you know. Maybe you never tasted it because it's very expensive but well roasted venison is a delicacy. And so we understand that if it was us, we could be bribed by that. But about Yitzchok it's *impossible* to say such words! The old sage Yitzchok was bribed by his son because he brought him delicacies to eat?

And so our sages tell us a *drasha* on those words **כִּי צִיד בְּפִי** – *there was trapping in his mouth*. It means that Eisav trapped his father by means of the words he spoke. “Abba,” said Eisav, “**אֵיךְ מְעֻשְׂרִין אֶת הַמֶּלַח**” – How do you separate *maaser* from salt?” Now, on salt you don't even have to give *maaser*. But he used to ask his father things like that, *chumros*. All the time he would ask his father questions like that.

Who Trapped Who?

But if we think that it's merely Yitzchok Avinu, the old father, who didn't use his head to think and he allowed himself to be caught in that trap, that's a big mistake because it's much more than that. We're making a mistake not only in Yitzchok; it's a mistake in Eisav too. Nobody could deceive Yitzchok like that. It's out of the question. Eisav couldn't just pull the wool over Yitzchok's eyes.

Do you know how Eisav deceived Yitzchok? *Because Eisav deceived himself! He wanted to give maaser on salt! He wanted to be machmir.*

That's a great *yesod* that people don't know. Eisav wasn't coming to trick his father – he believed he was being righteous; he thought he was a *tzaddik*. I know this is a novelty for people to hear, but take this into your mind as a possibility at least. It's more than a possibility to me: Eisav didn't deceive Yitzchok – he deceived *himself!* Eisav believed he was worthy of it, that he was the better one. And he was serious about it. *He pulled the wool over his own eyes!*

And that made Eisav the most dangerous one. The greatest *ramai*, the greatest fraud, is not the person who comes to deceive you. It's when he deceives himself into thinking he's something, that's when he's the biggest *ramai*. That's the most dangerous fraud. A missionary who is paid, let's say, to trap people, but he doesn't believe in it, that's a minor danger. But a missionary who has been so involved in the *sheker*

of the *avodah zarah* that he actually believes in it, he's the more dangerous one. And Eisav believed in himself. That's what "there was trapping in his mouth" means.

I'm The Real Thing

Of course, the words of the *posuk* mean what they say. Eisav went out in the fields and trapped food for his father. But it's not like we think. Actually, Eisav went out in the field to do the work of Hashem. When he was hunting for deer he was doing it only to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kibud av*. And he did it royally. Eisav was an expert, a *chossid*, in *kibud av*. He did it *lifnim mishuras hadin*.

You know that Eisav when he had to go in to meet his father, he appeared only in his *begadav hachamudos*, his best garments! אָמַר רַבֵּן שִׁמּוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל עֲרִין לֹא הִגַּעְתִּי לְכַבוֹד אָב שָׁל עֵשָׂו הַרְשָׁע – *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said*, "I never was able to reach that high degree of Eisav the Wicked." It's not easy to do something like that. It means he had to take off his hunting clothes and change into his *yontif* clothing. And then when he left he changed back again. An hour later, he changed again. And he did it every day! And so Rabban Shimon said, "I can't do that. I couldn't honor my father as much as Eisav did."

Now, Rabban Shimon also had *yontif* garments; if he wanted he could have done it too. But he didn't want to be a *ramai*. "I know I'm being false. I should put on *bigdei yontif*?! If I'll reach that high *madreigah*, I'll do it too, but I never reached that high *madreigah* of *kibud av*." Rabban Shimon's father was a great man; Rabban Gamliel was very great and when Rabban Shimon went in to his father with the greatest respect. "But should I make myself a *ramai* and put on *bigdei yontif*? No, that's not for me."

But Eisav didn't have that problem because he had already persuaded himself it is for him, that he was on the *madreigah*. That's why he did it. He said, "That's who I am! I'm not like my little brother Yaakov who sits at home all day. I'm the real thing! I'm out in the fields working hard for my father." Eisav believed implicitly that that's the reason he was an *ish sadeh*, because he was serving his father to the utmost of his ability. That's what he thought. And that's how he fooled his father. When he came back at the end of the day and he brought

venison into his father's tent, his father said, "Look at my son spending all day long in the *mitzvah* of *kibud av*."

A Cascade of Errors

Now, I am not able to explain all the reasons why Yitzchak was led astray but there's no question that it was Eisav deceiving himself that was the main cause. It's a terrible story, a fearsome story, and it's *charadah gedolah ad meod*, a very great trembling that such a thing could happen. But it was possible and it happened. And it's a tremendous lesson for us.

What lesson? It's the great lesson that the Navi Yirmiyah (17:9) spoke about. עֵקֶב הַלֵּב מְכֹל – *The mind is very complicated; it's the most complicated thing*, וְאֵיֶשׁ הוּא מִי יֵדְעֶנּוּ – *who can know the mind?* It's very easy to make a mistake in the *penimiyus* of your own mind. And that's what Eisav did. He made that terrible mistake of fooling himself and it cascaded until even Yitzchok Avinu was fooled.

Part II. Avoiding Deception

Living in the Yeshiva

Now, Yaakov was a different story altogether. He didn't make that mistake that Eisav made. And that's something we have to understand for ourselves. What was it that made Yaakov different?

And the answer is וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים – *Yaakov was a man of perfection who sat in the tents* (Toldos 25:27). Now, we've heard these words of the Chumash so many times that we're accustomed to quickly sliding over them like the person who slides over a pond that's frozen on the surface; he doesn't realize how deep the waters are.

But any person who is serious about Torah has to stop sliding and listen to what the words of this *possuk* mean: Why was Yaakov an *ish tam*? Why was he a perfect man? *Yoshev ohalim* – because he sat in the tents of his mother and father.

And those were some tents! Even to sit in Rivkah's house without Yitzchok you could make progress without a limit. To hear Rivkah's wisdom, to see her *avodas Hashem*, her piety, her nobility. And Yitzchok

too! Just to be able to see the face of Yitzchok one time would make us different people forever. But to actually grow up in his tent?!

They were good parents and they criticized, they suggested, they gave him guidance. And because Yankev wanted to get the benefit that parents can give he stayed in the tent where his parents were able to work on him; he listened to them and that's how he became an *ish tam*.

Responding to Crisis

Let me explain something. There was a time down to a certain period in *Bayis Sheini* when there were no schools for children. Only that what happened? In the days of Shimon ben Shatach, a *rifyon*, a weakness, began to set in because the Jewish nation had been through a long and difficult period; for thirty year the Chashmonaim had been battling with the Syrians-Greeks. And then the Tzedukim had taken over the house of Chashmonai and therefore the Jewish nation had now been corrupted. The old ways had broken down now and because things deteriorated they found it necessary to make schools. And so Shimon ben Shatach together with a certain Kohen Gadol established a network of schools for the youth; a system of *chadarim*, of teaching children in institutions.

Now, don't think it's such a wonderful thing. Somebody once wrote how advanced the Jewish nation is that compulsory education, *lehavdil* among *goyim* was not instituted until the later part of the last century. Even in France, compulsory education for the youth was instituted in the 1880s, 1890s, "But among Jews," he said, "we had compulsory education from the time of Shimon ben Shatach. He made a *takanah*, you must send your children to these Torah schools. Ah! Isn't that a great thing? We're two thousand years ahead of the nations!"

So an *adam gadol* commented on that; he said, "Don't boast about that. It's true – we are superior to the nations in that respect, but it's not such a thing to be happy with because it was only because of the breakdown in the home, a breakdown in the Jewish street, that we needed to make schools."

Life with Two Counselors

Originally we didn't need it because every house was a yeshiva and a Bais Yaakov. Did you ever wonder why Bais Yaakov started only lately? Why didn't Hillel make a Bais Yaakov? Why didn't Rava make a Bais Yaakov?

The answer is it wasn't needed! There was no need for it because in every Jewish house the girls were taught whatever they had to know. They were taught *middos tovos* and *derech erez* and all the *halachos* that girls should know.

And certainly boys were taught. The original system was **וְשִׁנְתָם לְבָנָיִךְ**. The father whenever he has time, when he goes to work, he takes his boys along with him and they talk in the words of *divrei Elokim chaim* all the time. When they walk to work and during work and the way back from work, when they're sitting in the house. The Torah says it openly.

It doesn't mean only learning *gemara* – that too – but it's learning to be a *mentch*. You don't realize how important the years are in your parent's home! They're the most plastic years of your life and you have two counselors who are ready to shape you. "Do this." "Don't do that." "Don't be lazy." They're always telling you to cooperate, to keep your mouth closed, to take care of your health, to go to bed early, to make your bed. It seems like they're telling you advice all the time!

Child Abuse Activism

Of course, in these *meshugeneh* days you wouldn't hear such things like "Make your bed." But in the olden days, however, you had to make your own bed every morning. You had to do a lot of things. You had to chop wood and make the fire in the fireplace too.

The mother told and the son obeyed. If he didn't obey, the father came in and then he had to obey. Even *goyim*, *li'havdil*, used to take the boys out to the woodshed in the back and hit them if they didn't obey. A *goy* learned how to behave in the good old days because he had a home.

Today you can't always do that. It's a terrible world. In Sweden they arrest you if you hit your child. In America too. I know myself, a

frum boy who was 13 years old and his father hit him. The boy called the police. He called the police on his father! A nice frum father. When the police came, the father was in the bathroom. So the mother said, "It's nothing. It's all over," and the police went home.

They shouldn't have gone home! They should have gone in and hit the boy! "What are you bothering us for?!" Slap! "Your father has a right to hit you!" But no, they wouldn't say that today. They make a committee, a child abuse committee, and psychologists visit the home. *Meshugaim!*

Preparing for the Highway

But in the ancient days every Jew understood that this world is for a purpose and that you must be prepared to travel on the highway of life; you have to know the rules of this highway and therefore you were willing to learn how to live. Even if an old Jew in the street stopped you and wagged his finger at you and said, "Boychik, don't do that!" you wouldn't dare answer back. I remember, I was a little boy and we were playing in the street, and an old woman passing by rebuked us, "*Zei nit vild.*" And we looked at her with respect and quieted down. Because we understood that the Jewish street, like the Jewish home, was a place of training.

Now if in the ancient times, in the days of *Bayis Rishon* and the early days of *Bayis Sheini* a child was taught everything in his father's house, then how much more so was it in the days of the *Avos*? They surely put everything they had into their children because they knew they were building the future of the people forever.

Meaning of Torah

And so, Yitzchok Avinu in his house spoke all day long about the will of Hashem, just like his father had taught him. And he added to that *peirushim* and commentaries.

We have no picture of what his home was like! It was a place of *kedushah*, a place of earnestness where all day long they sat and studied the principles of *middos tovos*, of *emunah* in Hashem, of understanding all the *yesodos* of the way Hashem conducts the world. Yitzchok and Rivka were loading him with all good things, and Yaakov made the most

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of that opportunity. He was filling his mind with instruction all the time. That's what the word Torah means. It's teachings, instruction.

Now, you have to know that instruction doesn't mean only words, lessons about the world. The most important instruction you could get is awareness about yourself. Of course, we don't like to hear that. It's more fun to learn about *devarim haporchim ba'avir*, ideas that are pie in the sky. Some people like to say *sisrei Torah*, things that are mysterious, things that we don't understand. Nothing wrong with that; there are a lot of mysteries in Torah too. But more than anything one of the most important of all *torahs*, the most important mystery, is to learn about yourself. And that's what was going on in the house of Yitzchok and Rivkah.

Self Examination

They taught Yaakov to examine himself, to criticize himself. And there's nothing better than that! You know why? Because otherwise you think you're good, you're even perfect. The only way to wake up from that dream is by constantly suspecting yourself, "Maybe I'm wrong."

And so when Yaakov saw in himself a bad *middah*, he didn't justify himself and say, "No, it's a good thing, I'll hold onto it." Oh no, he couldn't do such a thing in such a home. He didn't deceive himself. His parents taught him how to recognize the wrong things in himself and he learned to be *mefashpesh bema'asav*, to study his actions. Day after day, week after week, year after year, he suspected himself and that's how he became *tamim*, he became a perfect man.

The Old Days in Slabodka

Now when I was in Slabodka — Slabodka was nothing like the house of Yitzchok Avinu; you couldn't even dream to be like that home — but in Slabodka we were taught to think like that. Our *rebbeim zichronom livracha* spoke a great deal on this subject and they were experts in analyzing people. If you went to them privately and you asked them for advice, if you said "Rebbi, tell me something about myself; could you criticize me," they would oblige, they would do it for you.

I know some who did it. They asked. And our *rebbeim* knew what they were doing; they did it gently like a surgeon who has to take some

foreign body out of you or make an operation on you. He doesn't just make a rough cut. He does it delicately. Our rebbeim delicately probed and they found what was supposed to be removed and they told you. But most of all they taught us that *we have to probe*.

Slabodka was a glorious opportunity but in the home of Yitzchok and Rivkah it was a thousand times better. And because Yaakov was *yoshev ohalim*; he was sitting in the tent gaining the purpose of life.

Eisav The Truant

Now, where was Eisav when all this was going on? עָשׂוּ אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה. He went out to the fields. He became an outdoors man and he was away from home as much as he could be. He took up hunting. In those days, it was a youthful pastime, but it kept him away from the instruction of his parents and he grew up an entirely different person. You know, the trees and the grass never criticize you; they never reminded him to think a little more deeply into his way of life. And so he never learned how to become an *ish tam* – of course he did to an extent, but it was nothing like Yaakov.

Now don't make any mistake about it. Eisav thought he was doing the right thing. "Yaakov is making the mistake," he said. Did Eisav think, "I don't like *mussar* instruction. I don't like being cut down to size by my parents and that's why I like the outdoors"? No, it never crossed his mind. And therefore the greatest mistake of Eisav was that he didn't utilize the house of his parents to sit and learn from them. That was the biggest mistake of all because he missed out on learning about himself.

Part III. Art of Deception

The Must-Read

Now, one of the things that Eisav missed out on by being in the fields was Sefer Mishlei. You know, Mishlei wasn't just invented by Shlomo Hamelech. Besides for his own wisdom he also gathered together and wrote down *chochmos* that he learned from the *kadmonim*; and in that way Mishlei became a repository of the deepest wisdom for successful living.

Isn't it a shame that so many people make the time to read everything else – newspapers, magazines and so much other garbage; some people read novels, imaginary pictures that the writers conjured up out of their minds, but for Mishlei, the repository of wisdom, they don't have time.

Could it be that you'll live your whole life and not learn *Mishlei* at least once? Read it in English at least. It's more than that, it's much deeper than the English words, but at least *that* you should do. Shlomo is not just wasting his time; he knows what he's talking about.

Don't Be A Simpleton

And so you can be sure that among the many things studied in the tents of Yitzchok and Rivka was everything that's in *Sefer Mishlei*. All of the ideas you'll find there Yaakov learned. And that's how he became *the ish tam*.

But I'm going to surprise you with something now about what it means to be an *ish tam*. Don't think a pious man is a simpleton. *Tam* does not mean you're a pushover, someone who doesn't have any wisdom or cunning. No, it doesn't mean that. A man *must* be cunning to be a decent man.

That's why at the beginning of *Mishlei* when he tells us his motives for making this *sefer*, he says לְתֵת לַפְתָּאִים עֲרֻמָּה – *to give the simpletons cunning* (1:4). You want to be successful in this world? The first thing is prepare yourself to be a thinker; not to be a superficial simpleminded fellow.

Fight Like The Secretary

You have to know how to deal with people. You'll shout at them and tell them what they have to do? No. You have to know how to handle people with cunning. Not always can you say what you think and not always can your face depict what you feel. Sometimes to accomplish things you must utilize subterfuges, various plots so that nobody might suspect at what you are aiming.

A person who is *lacking* cunning is like a bulldozer. He goes straight ahead and he runs roughshod over people. No, no. You have to fight like the Secretary of State fights. The Secretary of State doesn't put on

gloves and doesn't carry a blackjack. Otherwise, he wouldn't be a Secretary of State. He does things with diplomacy, with cunning – or at least he's supposed to.

Tricking the Trickster

You remember when Yaakov fled Lavan's house and Lavan pursued him and wanted to kill him. And then Hakodosh Baruch Hu appeared to Lavan in a dream and said, "Watch out! Don't harm Yaakov!" The next day when he caught up to Yaakov he was afraid to start up but he was still fresh to him. What did Yaakov do? He could have said, "Careful! Hashem told you to watch out." He could have hit him over the head too. He was a very strong man, Yaakov.

But no, he didn't do that. Instead he made a feast. He made a party and they ate together and they kissed each other. They kissed each other and they had a fond farewell.

That's Yaakov; it's tricky. He doesn't react without thought. He thinks it through; he won't react merely with his instincts. That's wisdom. *אֲנִי הַחֲכָמָה שֶׁכִּנְתִּי עָרְמָה* – *I wisdom dwell in cunning* (Mishlei 8:12). Of course, it must be all for the purpose of *chochma v'chesed*, of doing the will of Hashem, but when you read the stories in the Chumash you see that all his life, Yaakov succeeded with people because he didn't think superficially – he learned to think in a cunning way.

Tricking Yourself

Now, although the wisdom of learning to deal with other people is very important, the greatest *chochma* of cunning that Yaakov learned had nothing to do with other people. The most important purpose of a cunning mind is for the purpose of dealing with yourself; so that you shouldn't deceive yourself. *לְעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה אָדָם עָרוֹם בְּיִרְאָה* – *a man has to be cunning in fear of Hashem* (Brachos 17a), because you are dealing with an opponent that is very cunning – you're dealing with yourself! And if you're not thinking with cunning, then you think you're always in the right.

That's another teaching from Mishlei: *כָּל דֶּרֶךְ אִישׁ יִשָּׁר בְּעֵינָיו* – *Every man's path is correct in his own mind* (Mishlei 21:2). He is making a statement here about me and you, about the things we do every day.

Everybody thinks they have good character; that's what Shlomo is saying. In your own mind you always think you're doing right.

I've listened to so many cases of neighbors quarreling, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, husbands and wives quarreling. And it's remarkable that each one is right. Always. And the truth is that sometimes they're both very wrong, terribly wrong. Some of the people are so wrong that they don't realize how wicked they are. 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.

The Biggest of Problems

And therefore it's so important to examine yourself and not to think you're always right. Actually there's no choice, because Hakodosh Boruch Hu is examining your mind anyhow, whether you like it or not. That's what Shlomo says at the end of that *possuk*. "Every path of man is right in his eyes, וְתִכֵּן לְבוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם, but Hashem is measuring everybody's mind (Mishlei *ibid.*) And so what will it help to deceive yourself if Hakodosh Boruch Hu is going to measure your mind? Hakodosh Boruch Hu is measuring the depths of your mind, what are your real intentions, your real thoughts, your real motivations.

And that's the most difficult of all. To know yourself is the biggest of all problems because when it comes to that, everybody is totally blind. I'll explain that.

It states in the Torah (Devarim 16:19) בְּיַד הַשֹּׁחַד יַעֲוֶה עֵינֵי חֲכָמִים – *Bribes blind the eyes of wise men*. A bribe is not just something that corrupts a man's character. No! It does worse. It corrupts his mind.

Delicate Balance of The Mind

If you give a judge a ticket for a trip to Israel – that's all; you don't say anything to him – he immediately begins to see the light about you. He sees that you're a good fellow. And now all the rulings, all the legalisms begin to rearrange themselves in his mind according to a new pattern and suddenly what could have been the tiniest loopholes, the smallest cracks in a legal wall, become not big holes – they become

wide open gates! That's what a bribe does; it throws the entire scale of judgement off balance.

It just can't be helped. The mind is a delicate balance. You know there are certain balances that are used for experiments, laboratory scales that are used for weighing the tiniest fractions of a milligram. One speck of dust can throw the scale off balance. It's so delicate you have to keep it in a glass box because even the tiniest piece of dust might come and spoil it. That's why it's kept in a glass box. It's weighed behind glass.

Now suppose you took a ton weight, a ton of lead, and put it on one side of that scale. How much chance is it that it's going to weigh these delicate amounts from now on? It's finished! The whole thing collapses on one side and there's no hope of making precise measurements again. That's how delicate the mind is. That's nothing compared to the mind – the mind is even more delicate than that – and one little bribe finishes you; you won't be able to weigh with your mind anymore.

The Deepest Darkness

Now if that's the case, there's one bribe that we have all received that puts us out of commission permanently and that's self-love. The biggest bribe in the world is love of one's self. Everyone has persuaded himself that he's doing right because what bribery is there greater than love of yourself? And everybody is subject to such bribery! You have to watch out always because all day long you're accepting that bribe!

And that's a very great lesson to learn. If you came here tonight just to hear that, it's important. You are always right! Even when you're bent over saying *vidui*, and you're hitting your breast and shedding tears, “*Chatasi!* I was wrong. Why did I do that?”, while you're doing that you're thinking, “Look what a virtuous man I am.” While you're bumping your hand against your heart, you're thinking, “What a nice fellow I am that I'm doing this, that I'm making *teshuva* like this.” Now don't refrain from doing it just because of that. At least you're going through the motions. But there's no question that this darkness is the deepest of all.

Be Suspicious

And it was how to overcome this darkness that was one of the most important things that Yaakov learned in the house of Yitzchok and Rivkah. What did he learn? He learned the art of being cunning with himself, of not being deceived by self-love. He learned to examine himself not superficially but with cunning. לָתֵת לַפְתָּאִים עָרְמָה. What is a *pesi*? A *pesi* is *mispatteh beyitzro*, someone who is persuaded by his *yetzer hora*; he's persuaded to think that he's good.

You have to learn *lachashod es atzmo*, to suspect yourself. You have to think about yourself and examine your *ma'asim*. You have to examine your thoughts and your motivations. You have to be *bodek* yourself and that takes *chochmah*. And that's what Yaakov was learning; that's why he's called the *ish tam yoshev ohalim*.

But Eisav lost out. Eisav wasn't an *ish tam*. He didn't become perfect because he was a straight man. He didn't know anything, no *chochmos*. He ran after a deer in the field; shoot an arrow, kill the deer. Shoot another arrow, kill another deer. "It's all good. I'm doing *kibud av v'eim*. What could be wrong?" That's all he knew. Did he suspect himself maybe he's trying to get away from learning? That it's not all *kibud av*. Maybe it's only an excuse to be away from the watchful eye of his parents. He didn't suspect himself. The whole *sugya* of how to become an *ish tam* he didn't know. He was a straight man and a straight man is nothing. A straight man can't be an *oved Hashem* because he deceives himself!

The Fool Falls Into Gehinom

He's the biggest *ramai*. Like the *medrash* says about the name Eisav, that it sounds like הוֹי שָׂוִי – how false he is! He's so false not because he deceives people. He deceives himself! That's the biggest falsehood. Eisav was a *ramai*, not because he intentionally came to deceive. He thought, "I'll be *machmir* with *melach*, why not?" I'll ask my father "Eich *me'asrin es hamelach*?" It wasn't just a trickery trying to deceive his father. No, he had deceived himself!

But Hakodosh Boruch Hu said, "You want a *chumrah* in *melach*?! Very good! But what about a *chumrah* in *middos tovos*? What about a *chumra* in recognizing your motivations? That's the most difficult thing and that's what I'm waiting for."

And that's what it means that when Eisav walked into his father's tent to take the *brachos* that he thought he deserved, that Yitzchok saw the opening of Gehinom right there in the tent. Yitzchok saw himself standing on the precipice of Gehinom *but he saw that Eisav was already falling in!* And that's why Yitzchok was shaking terribly; not only did he realize the mistake he had almost made but more importantly, he saw now that the mistake was caused by the self-deception of his son. He saw now that not knowing yourself is the opening to Gehinom. Eisav had brought ruin upon himself because he wasn't willing to study himself, and because of that he had almost ruined the Am Yisroel forever.

Have A Wonderful Shabbos

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Seeing Through Deception

This week I will work on minimizing the bribe of self-love that is holding me back from making proper judgments about my *avodas Hashem*. *Bli neder* I will spend five minutes every day reading Sefer Mishlei [whether in original or translation] and attempt to break through the facade of *כָּל דֶּרֶךְ אִישׁ יֵשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו* – *Every man's path is correct in his own mind*. By learning to recognize who I really am, I will come a few steps closer every day to being an *ish tam*.

— *This week's booklet is based on tapes:* —

149 - He Made Darkness | **376** - Counsel of Torah

443 - Do Not Be Sidetracked | **850** - Errors of Eisav

E-196 - Recognize Your Motivations | **E-230** - The Artificial Man

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

Can the Rav please explain the Chazal that Adam Ha'Rishon was a heretic, a *kofer b'ikar* (Sanhedrin 38b)?

A:

I want to tell you something. If we would be anywhere near the level of Adam Ha'Rishon, who was *kofer b'ikar*, we would be *tzadikim gedolim*. Only, that for him, it was called *kofer b'ikar*. According to his opportunities, it was considered *kofer bi'ikar*.

Like Eisav, for example. Eisav was not a *rasha* the way we think about it. Like Raban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "I never honored my parents to the high level that Eisav Ha'rasha did". So the question is – Why then, does Raban Shimon ben Gamliel call Eisav Ha'rasha a "rasha"? If Eisav honored his father even more than Raban Shimon ben Gamliel, why call him a "rasha"? The answer is that when considering his opportunities, Eisav could be called a *rasha*.

He was the brother of Yaakov. And the son of Yitzchok and Rivkah. And he had a *zeide* like Avraham Avinu. With such parents and such a family, much more is expected of you.

You must know that if you fail to live up to the opportunities presented to you, you're called a *rasha*. And therefore you have to know, that many times when the Am Yisroel is blamed and criticized, it is not because they were "ra". They weren't bad in the eyes of people. They were "ra b'einei Hashem"!

Hashem has different standards for how he measures people. And every person must take his opportunities and use them to become more and more perfect in the eyes of Hashem. So was Adam Ha'Rishon a *kofer b'ikar*?! I'm telling you, that if he was here in this room with us, he'd be the biggest *ma'amin* in this room. Nobody here is anything like him. Not even close.

TAPE #E-215

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