

## On Antisemitism

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

*Rashi* in *Parshas Vayechi* (50:5) tells of a strange financial discussion. Yaakov Avinu yearned to be buried next to his parents and grandparents in the *Meoras Hamachpeilah*. To ensure that his children wouldn't experience any difficulties realizing his desire, he met with his brother, Eisov, to negotiate a clear purchase of the plot.

*Rashi* relates that Yaakov took the gold and silver he had amassed in the house of Lovon and piled it on the table. He offered it to Eisov in exchange for the plot in the *Meorah*.

*Meforshim* are bothered by this encounter. Many ask why, if Yaakov was coming to negotiate, he would immediately offer all of his money. Why did he not begin the discussion with a low offer and proceed to raise it as necessary to make the deal?

One answer given is that Eisov had one *zechus* over his brother; there was one area in which he had excelled: *kibbud av*. During the years Yaakov spent in *chutz la'aretz*, Eisov remained at his father's side, earning untold merit.

Yaakov was addressing this point. "Eisov," he told him, "I know that you feel that your eternal place is with our father, since you served him so faithfully while I was away, but know this: The measure of what a person feels or believes is shown in what he treasures. The fact that I was in *chutz la'aretz* becoming

wealthy cannot be held against me if all that money is meaningless to me. So here it is. Take it.”

By accepting the money in exchange for the burial spot, Eisov conceded that money was his primary value. Gold and silver were more valuable to him than his relationship with his father.

Yaakov Avinu turned the tables on his sly brother, showing his reverence for his father and disdain for the money, thus earning his eternal place in the hallowed cave of our forefathers.

The most common in a long list of hateful anti-Semitic epithets hurled our way throughout the ages has been that Jews love money, control the banks, and hoard millions in secret accounts.

This *Rashi*, which is based on a *Medrash*, through discussion of a brotherly financial deal, sheds light on reality. The word *kessef*, say the *seforim*, has the same root as the word *kissufim*, yearnings. The longing that man has to amass worldly goods is a parable for the most meaningful *kissufim*, the pining of a *neshomah* for the divine. Yaakov told Eisov to take the whole pile of gold and silver he slaved for in Lovon’s house, earning his fortune by working through freezing nights and scorching days. He knew that money is of temporary value. It has no permanence, unless it is invested in eternity. To Yaakov, money was a vehicle to enable him to become more attached to the divine. To Eisov, amassing a fortune was the ultimate goal.

Being conscious of the purpose of financial blessings is an extremely difficult *nisayon*. Not all merit passing that test, for often, in the process of

accumulating wealth, people lose sight of its purpose. Many have said that the dangers of wealth supersede those of poverty. People become enamored with their wealth, seeing it as an end unto itself, and waste it on pursuing pleasures which are quickly forgotten, instead of seeking to accrue for themselves eternal possessions.

A wealthy man expressed his frustration to the *Chofetz Chaim* regarding his inability to donate large amounts of money to *tzedakah*. He said that when he was a poor *yeshiva bochur*, he pleaded with Hashem to bless him with wealth so that he could generously help people. However, when his prayers were answered and he attained financial success, he found himself unable to dip his hand into his pocket for others.

The *Chofetz Chaim* responded with a *moshol* about a man who was walking down a street and saw a drunk rolling in the gutter, covered in filth. The passerby shook his head in disgust and said, "Were I to drink, I would never behave that way."

The *Chofetz Chaim* smiled and explained the fallacy of the man's reasoning.

"While he is sober, he has control over his thought process, but when he is drunk, he no longer has control," said the *Chofetz Chaim*. "A person who is sober does not know how he would behave under the influence of alcohol.

"So too, the poor man has no concept of the pull that money has over its owner and the difficulty people with wealth have in parting with any of it. When you were a destitute *bochur*, you were able to see things clearly, but now, you are controlled by your money, not by the clear thoughts of your youth."

We have seen individuals in our community rise to this *nisayon*. Thanks to the generosity of those who follow the lesson of Yaakov Avinu, new *mosdos* have been built, *yeshivos* have been opened and expanded, and vital initiatives and programs have been launched to help others.

*Ma'asei avos simon labonim*. Yaakov Avinu's offer to Eisov is a *simon*, a sign, illuminating our path ever since.

Yosef, who battled temptations in the exile, provides inspiration until this very day. Far removed from his father and family, he maintained his integrity and belief despite the many obstacles thrown his way. The *Ramban* (47:14) writes that the Torah describes how Yosef Hatzaddik saved the Egyptian economy not only to portray his wisdom, but to teach that despite all the money that passed through his hands and the opportunity to siphon cash for himself, he remained loyal and faithful to his boss.

Through this, Yosef earned the love of the people, because the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, Who bestows grace upon man, provides *chein* to those who fear Him. Yosef's faithfulness allowed him to be both effective and beloved.

We hear an echo of this *Ramban* about the *chein* bestowed upon those who work with *yiras Shomayim*, seeing money not as an end, but as a goal with which to accomplish great things. Those who are selfless in their dedication to others ultimately earn their respect and love.

But that only lasted as long as Yaakov was alive. Once he passed away, the difficulties of the exile began. The Mitzriyim quickly forgot – or acted as if they no longer remembered – all the good that accrued to them in the merit of

Yaakov Avinu. The hunger stopped and they were blessed with seventeen years of prosperity. Yosef's bureaucratic brilliance and the ingenuity with which he developed a system that fed and kept alive the Mitzriyim and many others during the rough years were erased from their minds and books.

After the passing of Yosef, with the increasing Jewish population and their dispersion around the country and assimilation with the Mitzriyim, the Jews became a despised group. Wealthy and blessed as they were, their contributions, morality and kindness were quickly negated. They were viewed with suspicion and accused of malice and worse.

The pattern of the exile, which would follow until this very day, began. The Jews settled as refugees from a foreign land and prospered and integrated in the new host country. Things were looking up. Here we are welcome, respected and treasured. Here it will be good, they thought. And then the people turned on them, vilified them, and kept their distance, eventually enslaving them, killing their children and tormenting them in every way they knew.

In future eras, the pattern would repeat. Welcomed as refugees, they slowly acclimated, then assimilated, becoming proud citizens, feeling at home, as if the exile had ended and they were in the promised land. But then, inevitably, the nation turned on them, shunted them aside, and accused them of every crime, saying that their money was ill gotten. Their patriotism was questioned and they were accused of having dual loyalties, their host country just something for the parasitic group to nurture itself from.

We give it a name to make ourselves feel better, as if it is some type of malady the country and world can be cured of. Anti-Semitism. We forget that what is

happening today is a manifestation of the historic pattern set into place by the Creator to keep *Am Yisroel* separated from the outside culture and moral degeneration, and to keep them connected to Torah and *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*. The *Netziv* wrote about this in a special treatise he published with his *sefer* on *Shir Hashirim*

And the *Meshech Chochmah* famously discusses this in *Parshas Bechukosai*.

The latent hatred is always there, but as long as the Jewish people keep to themselves and recognize that Hashem watches over them with *Hashgocha Protis*, as they follow the *mitzvos* of the Torah according to the *Shulchan Aruch*, caring for each other and using their blessings for the communal benefit, Hashem keeps the hatred hidden and the superficial love is apparent. When the people get so comfortable that they think they need no protector and can veer away from Hashem and His commandments, the hatred rises to the surface and what we call anti-Semitism is manifest.

So many countries in the world nowadays don't build things. They build lies. Russia builds lies, attacking a neighboring state, getting bogged down in a disastrous war and lying about every facet of it. The American administration led the country into an inflationary spiral as it sought to curtail the use of fossil fuels, pumping trillions of dollars into the economy in pursuit of green and woke goals. The United Nations, chartered to pursue peace, instead lies about everything, especially Israel. The media lies about the right, censoring and libeling them, as it does of course about Jews. Going after religious Jews is now in vogue.

What we can do as individuals is to remain committed to the *gedorim* of *halacha* that prevent us from sinking along with the morass of humanity, as woke and deviant ideologies and lifestyles are promoted and pushed the world over. The social fabric that holds together families and communities is unraveling, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to prevent the acrid air from fouling us and our children. In our Goshens, we must endeavor to remain loyal, separate and distinct so that we remain an *am kadosh*, continuing to merit the Divine protection.

The *Chofetz Chaim* and Rav Avrohom Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe, once traveled together by train to the capital city of Warsaw for an important mission.

In those days, the train would wait for some time at each station. *Chassidim* would pass word to each other about the Rebbe's route, and they would throng to the local stations. For many, it represented the best chance to catch a glimpse of the Rebbe. As the train approached the first stop, the Rebbe's *gabbai* told him that they were almost at the station. The Rebbe rose to oblige the people waiting on the platform. The Rebbe asked the *Chofetz Chaim* to join him, but the elderly giant said that he was worried that the *kavod* received from so many people would affect him. He said that he would remain in his seat.

The Rebbe turned to the *Chofetz Chaim*. "*Fahr Yidden's veggen*, to satisfy the sincere, authentic will of Jews to express *kavod haTorah*, it's worth enduring the heat of *gehennom*," said the Rebbe.

Upon hearing this, the *Chofetz Chaim* linked arms with the Rebbe, joining him. To benefit *Yidden*, he was prepared to suffer. Together, they stepped out at that station, and at each subsequent one on the way to their destination.

Two humble giants, sacrificing their own inhibitions for the benefit of others. Such has been the way of good Jews throughout the ages, overcoming their own reticence and desire for privacy and personal growth for the needs of the time, never seeking to derive benefit of their actions for themselves.

When we demonstrate through our actions that we understand and appreciate why Hashem has blessed us, everyone gains. When we all contribute that with which Hashem has blessed us for the benefit of each other, we gain and the community gains. When we give selflessly, we grow. We cause each other to grow and enable success to take root. When we go beyond our comfort zones to comfort others, to console and support; when we go when it's difficult and contribute when we don't want to, we earn *zechuyos* for ourselves and *Am Yisroel*.

When we recognize that Hashem blessed each person with different gifts with which to benefit *Am Yisroel* and use those gifts in the way they were intended, we can stave off the punishing hatred of *golus*. If we believe that what has come to us is due to our own abilities and wisdom, without the direction of the One above, the *posuk* forewarns that great harm will follow.

Let us all appreciate that all we have is from Hashem, given to us so that we can each carry out our individual missions in this world, benefitting ourselves and others. If you realize that everything we have was gifted to us for a purpose, it is easier for us to part with it and use it *lehagdil Torah ulehaadira* and to benefit those who have been given less. It enables us to earn *Hakadosh Boruch Hu's* protection over ourselves and our people, and keeps the nations' hatred toward us suppressed.

May *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* bless our people with *parnosah b'revach*, and may our *roshei yeshiva, rabbonim, mechanchim, baalei tzedakah* and *askonim* continue to build and expand what they are doing, so that we merit *Hakadosh Boruch Hu's Hashgocha* and the ultimate redemption very speedily in our day.