

TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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PARSHAS TOLDOS

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

SEEING IN THE DARKNESS

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Part I. The Test of Deception

Errant Evaluations

One of the most surprising stories in Sefer Bereishis is found in this week's *sedrah*. It's the account of the error made by Yitzchok in his assessment of his two sons, Eisav and Yaakov. Because we see from the *pessukim* that as far as Yitzchok was concerned, Eisav was going to be the future leader of the Torah nation. Yaakov would be something too; he would play a role in the future of the nation. But Eisav was the one who would be a father of the Jewish people.

Now, you should let that sink in! Yitzchok, our father, envisioned that the time would come when his posterity would stand Shemoneh Esrei and they would say, "ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו אלקי אברהם", "אלקי יצחק ואלקי עשו". He was deceived into thinking that Eisav was the acme, the summit of virtue. Not only that Eisav was good, but that he was the best that could be found, even better than the virtuous Yaakov.

Sharp Tzaddikim

Now some people, those who don't know who our forefathers were, brush this off. Because they think that Yitzchak happened to be the type of simple *tzaddik*, the kind who always kept his eyes on the ground and he thought only about Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And therefore he didn't know what was really doing around him and he was easily deceived.

But that's the most crooked picture of our forefather! It doesn't begin to describe him! You must realize who Yitzchok was. He wasn't a *tamim* who was hoodwinked easily because he trusted in human beings. Whatever kind of *tzaddik* he was, he wasn't dull. Just the opposite – he was razor blade sharp; a very sharp intellect. That's one thing you have to know; Yitzchok, like Avraham before him and Yaakov after him, was as sharp as could be.

Cheder Torah

So what happened? Now, I'm not the one capable of telling you everything but the first thing to know is that Eisav wasn't a shaggy-haired, wild man. Forget about what your *rebbe* told you when you were five years old in the *cheder*. Because you probably gained the impression that Eisav was a

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wicked character who you could spot immediately. You picture somebody with a lot of hair on his arms; his chest is exposed and it's bushy and he's always carrying a bow and arrow. Maybe he doesn't even wear full clothing; a loincloth, that's all. He's carrying a bow and arrow and a sword too. And so if you saw him coming towards you, you'd know right away, "That's Eisav."

So you'd see the obvious but Yitzchok, he didn't see. That's what you think, that Yitzchok was fooled by superficial things, things that Eisav said or did to fool his father.

No. That's all wrong. Yitzchok wouldn't fall for superficial behaviors. He wouldn't have been deceived by little things into choosing a wild man to be the progenitor of the *Am Hashem*, the third founding father.

The Founding Fathers Exposed

I want to tell you something. Forget about being deceived into choosing a wild hunting man. You have to know Yitzchok wouldn't have been deceived into choosing even those as great as the founding fathers of America. Yitzchok would see right through them. You know, I have a certain respect for the founders of this country, for the writers of the Constitution; but Yitzchok would have spurned them.

Yitzchok would have despised Benjamin Franklin. He would see right through him. Even I can show you who Benjamin Franklin really was in his private life and if I can do it Yitzchok surely would have exposed him.

So you'll say Thomas Jefferson maybe? Now, I admire many things that he said and I quote him because he said important things but Yitzchok Avinu wouldn't. He would have seen right away that Jefferson was an *eishes ish'nik* – it's nothing new; there are records – and would have thrown him out of the house on day one.

Ok, so maybe George Washington? At least him. Now, I think he's one of the best that they had but you can be sure that Yitzchok would have seen right away his faults. No, no good.

I'll tell you more. *Lehavdil elef havdalos*, Yitzchok wouldn't have chosen Rabbi Akiva Eiger. He wouldn't have chosen a Rambam or even a Yeshaya Hanavi. Because they weren't great enough; they weren't the best and Yitzchok knew very well that the very best was what he needed. And yet he was hoodwinked into choosing Eisav! He saw in Eisav great things and he wanted him to be the chosen son. Hakadosh Baruch Hu arranged it so, He pulled the strings, so that a man of the keenest perception was deceived by a man in disguise.

The Prophetic Birth

Now, how it happened that Yitzchok was misled; even with my little head I could explain it. Because it was clear to Yitzchok right away from the beginning the plan of Hashem: *ויצא הראשון אדמוני* – *Eisav came out first and he was ruddy* (Bereishis 25:25).

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu made him come out first," Yitzchok said, "and I don't believe in accidents. Especially in our family where *ma'aseh avos siman lebanim*, every little thing that happens is a prophecy for the future; so if a son is born first, it's *al pi Hashem* for a purpose. He's the *bechor*, my heir, and that's a sign that Hakadosh Baruch Hu chose him to be the leader."

"And he's *admoni* too," said Yitzchok. "Why is he so ruddy? It's a sign of vigor and strength." That's what Yitzchok thought about Eisav. He didn't come out a pale baby; he came out full of blood – red cheeks, vigorous, like a grown man. And he had a lot of hair. A baby is tender and soft, not hairy at all, but Eisav was born like a finished man. He's an *eisav*; it means a finished man.

Of course it was abnormal, but that's exactly it. It showed Yitzchok a prophecy, that this one is prepared for great things. You can't have a *nebech'l*,

a milquetoast to be a father of the Am Yisroel. You need a *gibor chayil*, someone with valor and strength of character, and Yitzchok saw this strange incident of a child being born עשוי – a finished man ready for action – as a prophecy.

A Double Prophecy

So Yitzchak thought *al pi shnayim eidim yakum davar*. I have two testimonies, two prophecies, that Eisav is the superior one – *rishon* and *admoni*, first and ruddy. And because Yitzchak was a *ma'amin* that in this founding family when Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives portents, when He gives signs, they are true omens for the future, therefore Yitzchok already knew from the beginning that this was the *ratzon Hashem* – Eisav the *bechor* is going to be the leader.

And therefore whatever Yitzchok heard subsequently about Eisav, he interpreted it in the light of what he knew was Eisav's role. You can always explain things in two ways and so Yitzchok did what was right – he was *לכף זכות*. So if Eisav, let's say, was reported to have hit somebody, if neighbors came and said Eisav hit somebody so Yitzchak said “That's my boy! Because he has the power of *gevurah* in him. He's a leader. He doesn't suffer injustice. He takes up for what's right! He's exercising his innate characteristics.”

Kibbud Av

And when Eisav went out in the field hunting for deer Yitzchok was impressed by that dedication to the mitzvah of *kibbud av*. When Eisav came back at the end of the day and he brought home venison for his father, Yitzchok said, “Look at my son spending all day long in the mitzvah of *kibbud av*!” He saw that Eisav was *moser nefesh* for *kibbud av*: “Instead of sitting at home in front of a *sefer* the way he wants, he goes to the field for me.” You know what it means for a good boy, a yeshivah man, to give up from his *sedorim* in the yeshivah to help his parents? It's dedication, sacrifice.

And so whenever Yitzchak saw or heard anything that Eisav had done, he interpreted it according to the ‘prophecies’, the heavenly hints, as he understood them.

And Eisav acted the part too. Whenever Eisav had to go into his father he changed his clothing; he put on his festive garments. Imagine when you come home your father's not there so you're wearing your weekday garments. But when you hear your father coming you quickly run into your bedroom and you change into your *bigdei Shabbos*. It's a difficult *hanhagah* but Eisav did it always. And this is only one example of the service that Eisav demonstrated towards his father. He served his father in everything.

Rivkah Gets a Heads Up

Now, how was it that Rivkah recognized the superiority of her son, Yaakov? That's a good question. Was Rivkah smarter than Yitzchok? And the answer is Rivkah didn't know this on her own. Before they were born, *ותלך לדרוש את ה'* – *She went to inquire of Hashem*. Rivkah knew something was taking place within her because even when you have twins, they don't battle in the womb. They might battle later, but not in the womb. And she understood the battle was an omen. And for that great family, it was enough of a reason to inquire.

And so she went to ask in the academy of Shem v'Ever, and asked them, “What do you say about this?”

ויאמר ה' לה – *And Hashem spoke to her through the mouth of those prophets in the academy of Shem v'Ever and they told her*, “There's going to come forth from you two characters but don't be deceived. Because the one who will be first may look to be superior and he'll be endowed with gifts, but you have to know that the second one is the one who'll be the winner because he is better than the first. *ורב יעבוד צעיר* – *The older one will be subservient to the younger one*. The younger one is

the real one.” That’s what the *navi* told her *b’sheim Hashem*.

Mother Knows Best

And therefore, as soon as they were born, she kept her eyes on both of them. And because she had a clue, therefore she was able to discern the truth from the beginning. And after a while, she began to see through the wiles of Eisav. She began to recognize the trickery and the deception. She began to see that Eisav was pulling the wool over everybody’s eyes. He was doing it masterfully and although nobody else saw through it, Rivkah did.

At the same time she kept her eyes on Yaakov too and she saw that he was developing in a way that was far superior. She saw that he was the **איש יושב אהלים**; that he was always in the tent of his parents listening to them, trying to be more and more perfect.

And therefore, because Rivkah was endowed with the foreknowledge of what would be, she was able to recognize the difference between the sons; the little things that made a big difference. But Yitzchok didn’t have any prophecy and so he was susceptible to making a mistake.

The Test of Deception

Now why didn’t Rivkah divulge the prophecy to Yitzchok and tell him that Yaakov will be the chosen one? The answer is she wasn’t a blabbermouth. The *nevuah* was given to her. Why wasn’t the *nevuah* given to Yitzchok? The *navi* should have come and told it to Yitzchok. He’s the head of the family after all. And she understood that if it was only given to her then that was the intent of the *nevuah* – and therefore she kept it a secret. She kept it to herself.

It was all part of Yitzchok’s ordeal, part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s plan in arranging the story of Eisav and Yaakov so that Yitzchok would be tested to see if he would fall into the trap. And he did. When a great imposter came along, he was able to deceive Yitzchok. And when it was revealed to

him his mistake, it was the most terrible revelation: **ויחרר יצחק חרדה גדולה ער מאד** – *And Yitzchok was seized with a violent trembling (ibid. 33).*

Part II. Exposing the Eisavs

Reevaluating Our Evaluations

Now, this entire story is a big puzzle. Because why did Hakadosh Baruch Hu arrange such a strange story, that a great man, a man of wisdom, should make such a mistake? It’s a question that deserves our earnest attention because that’s why the story was recorded in the Torah – it’s written so that we should be able to sit here tonight and give it our attention. In one little shul in Flatbush, there are a group of Jews sitting and fulfilling the purpose of history!

Of course, I don’t say that we’re going to solve it entirely – surely I would never say that we’re capable of that – but at least we can study it together and understand a little bit of what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants from us.

And what is the lesson? The most important lesson, the most evident lesson, is that we should know that as much as we imagine that we see things clearly, we are being deceived – *especially when it comes to the matter of Yaakovs and Eisavs*. That’s the real lesson of this story; that we think we see but actually we’re walking in darkness. We see people, we evaluate them in our mind’s eye, and we think we know. But it’s not so. We have to be very, very careful because if Yitzchok can be deceived then we surely are being deceived all the time. And therefore you should have **חרדה גדולה ער מאד** and suspect yourself always: “Maybe I’m not thinking right. Maybe my attitude towards the Yaakovs and Eisavs in this world is upside down.”

The Frum Detective

Now, that will take a lot of explaining and we won’t be able to finish in one night, one lecture, but first in order to lead up to the subject, we’ll read a

story from *Mesichta Bava Metzia* (83b); an incident in the life Rabbi Elazar b'Rebi Shimon.

This Rabbi Elazar was one of the great Tannaim at the end of the period of the Mishnah; he was the son of the famous Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and he was considered one of the very greatest in the days of greats. Even Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, the premier *chochom* of that generation, stated that Rabbi Elazar b'Rebi Shimon was much superior to him in Torah.

Now, the Gemara tells us that this great man was once employed in a most uncharacteristic profession. He was hired as a detective for the Roman government. How did such a thing come about? You have to know that in the Roman provinces they were serious about punishing crime. They didn't have yet criminal politicians and criminal judges, and so when a thief was apprehended there was no jail where they supported the criminal with colored TV. There was only one sentence – crucifixion. And there were no appeals to the Supreme Court either. The criminal was nailed to death. They gave him the best rehabilitation; he was guaranteed never to criminalize again.

Rabbinic Advice

But first they had to catch the criminals and so there were detectives who were assigned to the job of ferreting out the criminals. The Romans had many detectives like that; a whole force whose job it was to mix with the people in their daily activities and try to find out who are the criminals, the thieves of the night.

Now, Rabbi Elazar was once in a conversation with one of their detectives and he asked him, "How are you sure about arresting people? After all, the criminals function during the night, when it's hard to see, and so it's difficult to catch them. Don't you think that you are making errors? Maybe you're arresting innocent people and letting the wicked escape."

There's a whole story there about how Rabbi Elazar showed this detective the way to catch the thieves who were disguised as good people and to leave alone the innocent ones, the good ones. There's a certain *chochmah*, a wisdom, that's required if you're going to not be deceived and Rabbi Elazar was giving the detective a lesson in carrying out his profession.

You're Hired!

Now, this Roman detective was so impressed that he went and reported the conversation to headquarters – "I met a rabbi and he taught me how to conduct my investigations" – so they said, "If this sage of the Jews thinks he is so expert on the subject, then tell him that he's elected for that job. Starting today he's on our staff."

Now, Rabbi Elazar didn't like that but in those days you couldn't refuse an order of the Roman governor and so he became a detective. There's a long story there because he was catching Jewish thieves and some of the Sages weren't happy with him. It's an interesting story – take a look if you want; it's on *pei beis amud beis* but I'm not going to tell it to you because it's off topic. For our discussion we're going to listen to the *possuk* that Rabbi Elazar quoted to the detective: *תשח חושך ויהי לילה* – You, Hashem, make darkness and it becomes night, *בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער* – in that night walk around all the wild animals of the forest (Tehillim 104).

Rabbi Elazar was describing to this gentile the difficulty in exposing the real criminals because they are compared to the wild beasts who function only at night in order to escape detection. They don't go out by day – not as criminals at least – and so maybe you're arresting innocent people. Maybe the real thief is well dressed by day; he's disguised as a respectable citizen but actually he's one of the thieves. That's how Rabbi Elazar described the problem – that it's not easy picking out the criminals in the darkness.

The Dark World

But what we have to know is that this gentile didn't understand Rabbi Elazar perfectly. Rabbi Elazar was speaking about more than the thieves of the night. Because the Gemara says, what is meant by that verse, 'You make darkness and it becomes night'? Is it talking only about the nighttime in the forests? No, that's nothing yet. *זה העולם הזה שדומה ללילה* - *It's talking about this world that is like night.* It means, the entire history of the world, day and night, week in and week out, it's always dark. Harlem at 2 o'clock in the morning is bright as day when compared to this world. *תשת חשך* means that the entire existence of Olam Hazeh, Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it to be a dark night.

Now, what does that mean? Does it mean it's unhappy because it's dark? No. It's a very happy world. In this darkness you eat and you drink and you sleep. You have garments. You have a spouse and children. You have a home to live in. You have warm houses to sleep in. You have a bed and a pillow and blanket. You have everything in the darkness, so no, it's not a sad world; it's not a sad world at all. But it's a *dark* world. It's a dark world because it's deceiving us.

It means that just like in a forest in the middle of the night it's very easy to make mistakes – you see a person coming towards you and only as he gets close to you, you see that it's a chimpanzee ready to bite. Or you see a chimpanzee coming towards you and you run away but really it was a person coming to help you – the same thing in this world. Even though it seems to be illuminated by sunlight, nevertheless it's a place of intense darkness. It's a place where errors are ripe because *בו תרמוש כל חיתו יער* – *in this darkness of Olam Hazeh creep around all the animals of the forest.*

Criminals in Suits

But they're very hard to see because who are the wild animals? When you spot one of them you're not going to see a tail on him. You won't see claws.

You're going to see him dressed – not in jeans. They're well-dressed gentlemen with pressed trousers. Many of them are important personalities. Politicians and professors and judges and scientists. Inventors and businessmen and actors. Famous television people. News people. People who are fighting for justice. Wealthy innovators, seekers. Some of them are people you look up to, people you speak about with a sparkle in your eyes. Those are the Eisavs in this world.

Now if I hurt your feelings, excuse me because I speak the truth. Nobody has to accept what I tell you, but at least give me a chance to explain it; maybe after a while you'll see there's some justice in what I say.

College Demons

Here's a professor speaking to his college class. He's well-dressed, polite. He looks like a human being and he's intelligent too. He's quite impressive actually. But actually he's a wild animal, a wild beast. He's a dangerous creature and nobody knows it.

How is that? Because he stands for the opposite of the *emes*. First of all he stands for atheism. It means he's a proponent of the very worst thing in the world! The Rambam says *avodah zarah*, to worship idols, is less than atheism; atheism is worse. And so this college person, it's his influence that causes the world to become spoiled with *apikorsus*.

And all of his ideas about society are filthy and corrupt. He's a degenerate bum but because he's well dressed and he makes a lot of money and his ideas are published in journals so the world accords him respect.

It's not the mafia who are the real criminals. It's not the murderers, the thugs in the poor neighborhoods. It's the people dressed up in suits who are undermining the foundations of society. The whole academic world is opposed to the belief in a Creator! They are the biggest criminals because once you destroy the values of mankind, then it's

easy for Hitler to come along and get people to murder millions. Because if there's nothing to be afraid of, if there's no other world, no Hereafter, so everything is possible. And that means that the entire academic world, they are actually the very worst enemies of mankind.

Hospital Demons

Even if you walk into a hospital; you see people dressed in white – physicians, surgeons – and you see them as angels of mercy, helpers of mankind. They are the biggest criminals because they're atheists. I know that it seems an extreme statement but it's not my fault. It's the fault of the people who are not accustomed to that attitude.

I'm not talking about Orthodox doctors – them, it's a pleasure to see, a *kiddush Hashem*. But in general the 'angels of mercy' are the biggest demons because they're robbing the world of the most important of all benefits, the most important knowledge that every human being must gain: that there's a Creator in charge of everything! He's in charge of antibiotics and He's in charge of the surgeon's hands and He's in charge of all sickness and healing. And the ones who refuse to mention this most important fact, they are the greatest criminals of all. The people in white, the ones who are concealed in habiliments of mercy, are like Eisav who put on his garments of *kibbud av*.

Mental Unhealth

Now, I can't leave out the psychologists who are undermining all morality.

“Oh, but we're trying to heal people. We want to straighten out people, help them with their problems.”

So how do they do it? They're preaching that there's nothing wrong with alternative lifestyles. It's the psychologists who are preaching that incest can be healing. They're teaching that today and they say it's nothing but a societal taboo. And so they're destroying all the values of mankind because

in a mask, under a disguise of helping mankind, they actually are destroying mankind.

Hidden Hostility

Now, don't misunderstand me. I don't say that you should adopt an attitude of hostility to every college professor, to all the judges and politicians and scientists. I don't say you should be impolite. You *also* should be a person in disguise. Put on a nice mask, smile to everybody and extend a cordial hand. When they leave, let them leave with a pleasant impression of you. Why not?

But don't be misled in the darkness – don't look up to them. Because you must know beforehand that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made this test in order to deceive you. **תַּשֵּׁת חוֹשֶׁךְ** means He made it so; You, Hashem, made a darkness. It's a test and the world is being deceived because the world does not understand that their function is life is to battle against the darkness.

Part III. Exposing the Yaakovs

Exposing the Good Ones

Now, I have a lot to say about exposing the wicked in this world – it's an important subject by the way and I hope one day to spend an entire lecture on that – but I wanted to talk to you tonight about the other side of the coin. Because it's not only that the darkness of this world causes the Eisavs to look important but even more so we don't see the Yaakovs for who they really are.

Now, this might seem unimportant to us. After all, we're not Yitzchok Avinu. You're not choosing between them, to give them the *brachos*, to be the progenitor of the Am Yisroel. And so doctors, professors, *talmidei chachomim*, politicians, inventors, they're just ships passing by in the night. It doesn't matter.

Fixing the Mind

But that's a big error! Because seeing in the dark means that you're creating for yourself a Torah mind and there's nothing more important than that. You know, when you go to the Next World and leave everything else behind the only thing you'll take with you is your mind. The attitudes of the mind, *the perfection of these attitudes*, that's what you'll be left with when your *neshamah* takes off its overcoat, the body, and goes to the Next World.

Now, the attitudes of the mind that you have to acquire in this world are endless. There's so much to think about, so much to impress on our minds, that it's a lifetime of work. But one of the most important and overlooked attitudes we have to acquire while we're still here is to appreciate the Yaakovs in the world; to recognize the *talmidei chachomim*, the Torah learners, and to see them for what they really are.

Deceived By a Sneeze

Now I understand that it doesn't bother anybody right now because they think they see everything anyhow. "Rabbi Miller," they say, "he's *hocking a chinek*. He's telling us darkness. Darkness, shmarkness. We see everything." But actually they see nothing at all. Because they see *talmidei chochomim* and they see people, human beings, that's all.

How do you think it happened that people in the Midbar spoke against Moshe Rabbeinu? We read the stories in the Chumash and we are surprised. How could it be such a thing? To speak against the *Ish Elokim*, the man of Hashem? It seems impossible.

The answer is that Moshe Rabbeinu was a person. He was an *Ish Elokim* but he was still an *ish*! That's the darkness! Moshe Rabbeinu had two eyes and he had a nose and he had lips and he had teeth! That's the darkness! He was a human being. Do you know how difficult that is? Suppose Moshe sneezed in the middle of his *drashah*. He never sneezed? I

don't know but probably he sneezed. He had to go to sleep sometimes. He had the frailties of a human being. And even if you only saw him in his vigor by day when he was fresh and enthusiastic but still he was a human being. And that's the darkness that makes us see with a distorted vision, with a vision of *apikorsis*.

The Frum Apikores

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) asks, who is called an *apikores*? Now, to us that seems to be a strange question because who doesn't know what an *apikores* is? But our Sages want us to know that '*apikores*' doesn't necessarily mean a disbeliever. It means somebody who is in rebellion against the Torah, in rebellion against Hashem. And so the Gemara wants to know, what qualifies as rebelling against Hashem?

Among others the Gemara gives the following example: האומר מאי אהנו לן רבנן – *Someone who says, "What benefit do we get from the Torah learners? From those who spend their lives studying Torah."*, he's already in rebellion. "What's the big benefit they give the world?" he says, לידהו קרו לדידהו תנו – *"All of their learning is for themselves, for their own benefit."*

Benefits Galore

Now we have to realize what it means 'for their benefit'. It doesn't mean that they're going to get big positions in synagogues or in yeshivos, that they'll make a decent *parnassah*. It can't mean that because in those days when this was said nobody received any pay for teaching Torah. There was no such thing. Way back there was no *heter*; no permission was given yet. Even in the times of the Rambam the controversy was still very much alive. The Rambam said nothing doing; no pay. Later, the Beis Yosef has *teshuvos* in which he justifies taking pay, but the Rambam says that when they started taking pay he said כבה מאור הדת – *the light of the Torah was extinguished*.

So in the times of the Gemara when they said 'for themselves they learn' it didn't mean money; it meant for their own souls. And so this *apikores* is saying, "Certainly it's good for a man to learn. Absolutely it's good for his soul. When a man sits down for an hour and learns he's making a big deposit in the bank. A page of Gemara is like purchasing a piece of real estate; it's an apartment house. And not only it's good for him in the World to Come; the old time *apikores* knew that it's good for him in this world too. The Torah learner lives more happily, more successfully, more fulfilled. That was the *hashkafah* of the old-time *apikores*.

But that's not enough! Because what is an ordinary Jew, a non-*apikores*, expected to understand? He has to believe that when one studies Torah he is not merely benefiting himself with all of the greatest benefits and achievements for now and forever *but that he is conferring upon the entire Jewish nation a great blessing!*

The Greatest Benefactors

And not that he's just saying it because it sounds *frum*. An ordinary Jew has to be *convinced* that when the people in Bnei Brak or in Yerushalayim or in the Mirrer Yeshivah or wherever they are sitting all day and laboring in the *sugyos hashas*, laboring in Gemara, they are the greatest public benefactors; that the yeshivah man in Lakewood is saving the entire Jewish nation and protecting them against their enemies.

And that's why when the *nasi* in Eretz Yisroel needed people to help rebuild the broken walls of the city, and he summoned everyone to help – he announced that the *talmidei chachamim* must come out of the *beis hamedrash* and like everyone else they have to take a spade and a pickaxe and help dig. "We have to make earthworks and throw up fortifications," he said, "and everybody has to help. What do you mean you'll sit at home and study Torah? It's for your benefit too!" So along came Reish Lakish and he defied the *nasi*. Reish Lakish said *לא צריכי נטירותא* – "Nothing doing! The

Torah students don't need any *shemirah*. They don't need anybody to watch them. On the contrary! They protect the city and they shouldn't be disturbed. They should continue their studies because that is what keeps us safe." (Bava Basra 7b).

Now Reish Lakish certainly understood that we have to build fortifications but he said that we have to know that the fortifications are worthless if not for those people who are sitting in the *beis hamedrash* and laboring in Torah. *ה' עוז לעמו יתן* – When Hashem is giving this strength to His people – the Gemara says that it means the Torah, that's our strength – *ה' יברך את עמו בשלום* – then He blesses His people with peace.

The Border Wall is Not Enough

Now, does that mean if you have *chachomim* you don't need walls? Does it mean you don't have to have police and an army? Of course not. You need everything; but it means that the walls and the police and the army will be effective only when the *talmidei chachomim* are sitting and laboring in Torah. Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the One Who makes it effective and He tells us that it's the Torah learners, the ones who are busy day and night studying His words, those are the ones who protect the nation. All the blessings on the nation – protection and *shalom* and *parnassah* – come to us because of the Torah learners.

And so what will it help you if you have fortifications and weapons and military precision if that fundamental attitude is missing? It's like in Eretz Yisroel today. What good is the army if Hakadosh Baruch Hu sees that the Torah learners aren't important to the nation? The *apikorsim* in Israel – even the *frum apikorsim* – they think their little toy army, that's what's going to protect them? I know it's a difficult thing to hear but I hope they'll never discover their error in a tragic way.

Years ago I said this in public – I said that the *yeshivos*, that's our army, that's our artillery, that's our navy, that's our tanks – and Jews were incensed

when they heard that. They thought I was exaggerating, maybe trying to raise money for the yeshivah. But I was just saying the plain Torah truth; you can't go away from the Torah truth, from seeing through the darkness.

Night Vision

Now this understanding of what the Torah learners mean to our nation is such a fundamental attitude that without it a man is called an *apikores*; he's considered in rebellion against the Torah. And therefore it requires our utmost and immediate attention. We have to begin sharpening our senses according to the Toras Hashem.

The Gemara (Brachos 43b) says עתידין בחורי ישראל שלא טעמו טעם חטא שיתנו ריח טוב כלבנון – *In the future, a time will come when the darkness will be lifted and the Jewish youths, the yeshivah people who sit in the beis medrash all day long, will give forth a fragrance like Levanon. Levanon*, that's where the cedars grow, the cedar forests, and when the wind blows the fragrance towards you, it's invigorating. Did you ever smell a cedar forest from a distance? It's a pleasure. Ahhhh! You breathe deeply as the wind brings the aroma of the cedars to you. It's inspiring, enchanting. And our Sages tell us that one day we'll actually smell that fragrance from the *talmidei chachomim*.

Practicing With a Maamar Chazal

Now, why do we have to know that fact? It's true but what is it to us? When it happens it will happen, very good, but why do we need to know this information?

The answer is that it's the way to practice up, the way to sharpen your senses. I'll explain that. Let's say a man is riding in his car past the Mirrer Yeshiva, for example, and he sees the *bnei yeshivah* come out. Now he knows that these youths are not bums. They don't run around with females. They are decent boys who spend their day in the yeshivah. And he appreciates that.

But that's nothing yet! He doesn't begin to see! He's still walking in darkness because the truth is that a clean-cut college boy also appeals to him. Even if he prefers yeshivah men – at least I hope that's the case – but if the college boy happens to be the kind who puts rum on his underwear, who perfumes his handkerchief, so that makes a favorable impression on him too.

Passing the Smell Test

Because when you're a child – even a child of sixty years old – so you live with your physical senses. You don't smell with your mind; you smell with your olfactory nerves. And so let's say a fellow approaches you for business and he's clean shaven and he's well dressed and his clothing is pressed and he smells good. So because you never trained yourself to think, he makes a favorable impression. It's easy to deceive you.

And so as much as you appreciate the Torah learner it's not enough – you have to awaken the awareness that the one who sits and studies Torah is the only one who smells good. And so when you see a group of yeshivah men across the street going to the yeshivah, "Ahhh, it smells beautiful!" You breathe deeply the aroma of *kedushah* that you see in a yeshivah man. That's how you begin elevating the greatness of a *ben Torah*. Anybody who goes to yeshivah, anybody who spends the day learning Gemara is to us good looking and handsome and romantic. Little by little you begin to see a certain glamour about them.

Sharpening the Sense of Smell

It has to be practiced because actually you're not so convinced yet; you can say it and mentally, in an abstract way, you might feel it's so but that's nothing yet. You have to talk yourself into seeing through the darkness. You have to sharpen your mind by means of thinking and speaking words that bring the truth into focus.

"Baruch Hashem for the Torah learners! I thank the Almighty that we have a remnant of loyal Jews

who are devoted to the Torah because they are our best. They are everything to us!"

More than the big businessmen, more than the *frum* judges and the *frum* inventors and *frum* engineers. More than anyone else we look at the Torah learners with love and admiration because they bring all the blessings down on the world. If business is going well, if things are peaceful, it's because of the Torah learning.

And that's how we live successfully in this world. The more we sharpen our minds, the more we will perceive the greatness of the Yaakovs, the *frum* Jew, the *talmid chochom*, and the more we'll recognize the emptiness of the Eisavs, the wicked ones disguised as the great and important ones in this world. We'll learn the lessons of our *parshah* and successfully see through the darkness of Olam Hazei.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Gaining an Appreciation of Yaakov

This world is filled with darkness and deception. The distinctions between the Yaakovs and the Eisavs can often become blurred and hard to recognize. Even Yitzchok Avinu was deceived by Eisav. This week, I intend *bli neder* to develop a greater appreciation for Torah scholars. Once each day, when I am in the presence of someone studying Torah — be it a rabbi, a kollel member, or a yeshiva student — I will try to envision this representative of the Torah as someone emanating a wonderfully sweet fragrance and serving as a great source of blessing to the world.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

21 — Hashem Chooses the Best | **72** — Making Light Into Darkness
149 — He Made Darkness | **292** — Eisav and His World
850 — Errors of Eisav | **E-217** — Seeing in the Dark

Q&A

WITH
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שאלות ותשובות עם ראב"ד אביגדור מילר ז"ל

QUESTION

How do I make peace with my mother-in-law?

ANSWER

The first step is to send her a little gift.

A woman was telling me that she was fighting with her mother-in-law for a long time. So I said, "Stop talking against your mother-in-law."

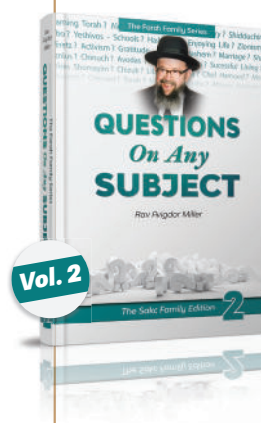
"What can I do?" she said. "She's my enemy."

I said, "The first thing is to send her a little gift."

That's number one. And even if she's going to belittle you again and she'll say, "Such a gift she sends me!", don't worry. Because she's going to feel, however, a certain warmth, a softness towards you. **מתן אדם ירחיב לו** – A man's gifts open the doors for him (Mishlei 18:16). It's important to give gifts; small gifts.

A father-in-law was making trouble for someone here in the shul. I said, "Send your father-in-law a seventy five cent pair of cheap cufflinks. Mail it to him; it's a good beginning. Don't think of it as a small thing."

And therefore, **מתן אדם ירחיב לו** – a man's gifts open the doors for him. You can make shalom with gifts. TAPE # 824



Are you interested in more Q&A's on the subject of succeeding with your in-laws?

Should I live near my in-laws?

What should I do if my mother says something not nice about my wife?

My in-laws have a TV in their house, Can I let my kids visit them?

And much much more...

Stay tuned for the Chapter on Succeeding With In-laws in the upcoming Questions On Any Subject Volume 2

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