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PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Toldos ✍️ Rabbi Yisroel Langer

The Great Cry

At the beginning of this week's parsha, the Torah describes the behavior of Yaakov and Eisav. In their youth, one could not differentiate between the two of them. However, upon reaching the age of Bar Mitzvah the different personalities of Yaakov and Eisav emerged. Yaakov was an honest person who spent his days studying Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Eisav, however, was a hunter and a swindler. His disregard for spirituality and holiness is depicted by a short episode mentioned in the parsha. On the day that the world was mourning the death of the great tzaddik, Avraham Avinu, Eisav was out in the fields spilling the blood of innocent people. When he arrived home exhausted, Eisav demanded to be fed from the lentil stew that his brother Yaakov was cooking. Yaakov agreed to give him some stew only on the condition that Eisav exchange his birthright for it. Eisav readily agreed, proclaiming that he had no use for the birthright anyway. The performance of bringing sacrifices to Hashem was done by the first-born. Moreover, the Torah and all of its commandments were to be given to the descendant of Yitzchak who had the birthrights. All of this was worthless to Eisav. The Medrash goes on to tell us that after the sale Eisav brought his friends in to join him in his meal. As they sat and ate they all laughed at Yaakov and mocked how he was so "gullible"! Eisav was able to get real food in exchange for the "worthless birthright"!

Later on in the parsha, Yaakov received the blessings that were meant to go to Eisav. When Eisav hears of this, he let out a great and bitter cry. He told his father that now Yaakov "outwitted him" twice- he took the birthright, and the blessings. What happened to Eisav's seemingly changed attitude? Initially, he celebrated the fact that he was able to outwit Yaakov by giving up the "worthless" birthright for lentils, and now he's complaining that Yaakov outwitted him!

The Steipler (Birchas Peretz) explains that Eisav only rejoiced at the time when he was enjoying his lentil stew. However, after he

finished his meal, he felt that something was wrong. After all, Eisav had grown up in the house of Yitzchak Avinu, and he understood what the birthright represented. Eventually, Eisav's regret grew so great that he angrily felt that he was tricked and outwitted by Yaakov his brother.

The Steipler learns an important lesson from this episode. We have a mission in this world to grow in ruchniyus (spirituality) by toiling in the study of Torah and doing mitzvos. Sometimes, one may get lured away from the Torah by the pleasures of this world. He may spend his days and nights in the pursuit of only material gains. As he becomes wealthy and powerful, he may live with the false belief that he is a very smart and successful individual. However, after the imaginary pleasures expire he begins to feel empty, and he may feel that he is lacking something deeper. Unfortunately, there are times when it's not until after a person leaves this world that he realizes that all his success in this world was just illusory. At that point he will cry an exceedingly great and bitter cry upon realizing that he deceived nobody but himself. He may have truly wasted a lifetime of opportunity to grow in Avodas Hashem (service of Hashem). May we merit to lead a life of Torah and mitzvos; one that we shall never regret.

Rabbi Langer learns full-time at the kollel.

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HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Lying Part 1

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

Chazal tell us that there are four classes of sinners, who may have many good deeds, but they will not merit receiving the Divine Presence. One such class is made up of those who are liars. Many of us mistakenly think that as long as we are honest in our monetary affairs and conduct our business activities in a moral and ethical fashion, we are not part of the “class of liars.” However, the rishonim tell us otherwise. Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuvah Shaar 3, 181) says that one who is dishonest even in matters in which there is no gain, and even if no one gets hurt, he is still classified as a liar. This is so even if he says the basic truth of the story and just a few details are changed or embellished. According to the Chareidim (mitzvah 26), such a lie is a violation of the Mitzvah d’oraysah-“Midvar sheker tirchak”- stay far from words of falsehood (Shemos 23:7). Others (see Yeraim 235) hold that although any kind of lie is detested and abhorred by Hashem, only a lie that is damaging is forbidden by the Torah, while other lies are only prohibited m’drabonon. (See Orach Meishar 9:1 and Shevilei Chaim in his commentary on the Chofetz Chaim in the pesicha that proves that the opinion of many rishonim is the possuk of “Midvar sheker...” is only applicable in court related matters.) Although to speak even a “little white lie” is strictly forbidden, there are situations where it is permitted to lie and even commendable to do so. (Note: Every situation is unique and therefore any halacha l’maashe questions of “sheker” must be brought to a rav. The point of this article is to just bring up the relevant issues).

The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat siman 262:21) lists four situations in which it is permitted to lie. The first case mentioned is “darchei shalom”- for the purpose of peaceful relations. The poskim say that not only may one lie in order to diffuse an existing quarrel, but one can lie even to prevent a feud from beginning. However, this can only be done if there is no other alternative to making peace. (Chofetz Chaim Hilchos Richilus 1:8) Even in a case where it’s permitted to lie, one should preferably do so by using words that have a dual meaning. An example of this is when Yaakov Avinu approached his father Yitzchak who was blind with delicacies in order to receive the brachos intended for Eisav. Yitzchak asked “Who are you my son?” Yaakov replied “It is I, Eisav your firstborn”. Although Yitzchak was tricked into thinking Eisav was standing before him, Yaakov used words that could also have a truthful meaning. “It is I [Yaakov who brought you the delicacies], Eisav [however, is] your firstborn. Although it was permitted for Yaakov to lie, he did it in a way that could be interpreted to be truthful. (Note: In a situation where it is forbidden to lie, even such a lie is not permitted as it is deceiving the listener.)

The Magen Avraham (siman 156) quotes the Sefer Chassidim (426) that limits the heter of “darchei shalom” to matters related to the

past. The Sefer Chassidim says that if someone asks you for a loan, and you’re nervous that this individual will not pay you back, you cannot say that you don’t have any money right now when in fact you do. (This is so, even though by telling the truth you will be insulting him.) It is said that when an untrustworthy person would ask the Chofetz Chaim for a loan, the Chofetz Chaim would “give” all his money to a close talmid and respond that he had no money available to lend. However, many Achronim argue with this psak (see Teshuvos Maharsham volume 7 siman 152). Therefore in a situation where one might become offended or embarrassed, many poskim permit lying even in matters that pertain to the future and to the present for “darchei shalom”. (Pischei Chason Laws of Halvah ch. 1 note 12, Titein Emes L’Yaakov ch. 5 siman 15).

Even in a situation when it is permitted to lie because of “darchei shalom”, some say (Maharshal Yevamos ch. 6 siman 46) that it should not be done too frequently as one may become accustomed to lying. It is not clear from the poskim how often is considered “too frequently”.

One is permitted to lie if it will enable him to be able to perform a mitzvah, even a mitzvah d’rabnon (Orach Meisharim 9:7 based on gemarah in Berachos 43:). (See Orach Meisharim (ibid) who permits this “lie” only if it can be interpreted in a way that would not be a lie as in the case of Yaakov Avinu. However, others say that all lies are permitted in order to enable one to perform a mitzvah- (see Niv Sifasayim klal 3:1.)

If one wishes to be humble and not reveal his pious conduct, it is praiseworthy to lie (unless it’s possible to do so without lying). (Taz 565:6 and Magen Avraham 565:7) For example, if one accepted about himself to fast and is questioned upon it, he may respond, “I am not fasting”. If one is asked if he understands a certain Torah topic or if he learned a mesechta, he may respond in the negative, even though that may not be the case.

If one sees others who are not acting in accordance with halacha and his words of rebuke won’t be listened to, he may quote them a great posek who forbids this act, even though the posek never said so explicitly. (Magen Avraham 156:2).

When one gets married, it is a mitzvah to tell the choson about what a wonderful kallah he has, even if she is really somewhat lacking. Likewise if someone purchases an item (house, car, clothing etc.) and that item can no longer be returned, you should lie and tell the person what a wise purchase it was, even if you don’t really think so. The reason for this is that often a new choson or buyer is a bit apprehensive about his new acquisition, it is therefore a mitzvah to put him at ease. [See Niv Sifasayim klal 3:5 in chidushim who discusses this issue at greater length.]

Next week we will IY”H discuss some common scenarios of possible “sheker” and what the gedolei poskim ruled in those situations.