

Toldos

Ikar and *Tafeil* – Yaakov's and Eisav's Different Goals

A. The Eternal Struggle

The *parsha* describes the dramatic struggle between Yaakov and Eisav to receive the blessings from their father Yitzchak. The story of their struggle begins well before their birth. Rivka, after many years of childlessness finally became pregnant. She had great pain, so she went to the prophets Shem and Eiver to inquire about these pains. They told her that she was carrying two great, powerful children. They would be destined to fight with each other over the leadership of the entire world.

After the two children were born, Yitzchak loved Eisav the hunter, and Rivka loved Yaakov the student. On their *bar mitzva* day, their grandfather Avraham Avinu died. Eisav came home that day after committing the horrible crimes of murder, rape, and theft. Yaakov was preparing soup. Eisav asked him for some of the soup. Yaakov proposed a trade, soup for *bechora*. Eisav said, “Why do I need all of these restrictions?” Then he sold the firstborn rights to his brother Yaakov.

As Yitzchak grew old, he decided to give God's blessings to Eisav. Rivka heard of this plan and she told Yaakov to impersonate Eisav and to take the blessings that Yitzchak wanted to give to Eisav. Yitzchak then gave Yaakov the blessings. When Eisav discovered that his brother had taken the *brachos*, he was distraught. Yitzchak gave Eisav *brachos* too. Rivka understood that Eisav wanted to kill Yaakov, so she sent him to Aram to live with Lavan and to find a wife there.

This is an amazing story on the straightforward simple level. Yaakov and Eisav, though, were not just two individual characters. They raised families that subsequently grew into great nations. These two nations continued the antagonistic relationship started by Eisav and Yaakov. When we consider this story at the level of the Jewish people throughout history and its entanglements with the nation of Eisav, this story becomes even more informative. Other nations have desired to usurp our role as the nation of God. Specifically, the Roman nation wanted to take our role, and when they were at their height they tried to destroy us, and thus replace us.

B. What did Yitzchak see in Eisav?

If Eisav was really so wicked, a rapist, murderer, and scoundrel, how did Yitzchak not notice? Rivka was aware of Eisav's personality. She could have known it through prophecy, or perhaps as their mother she knew her children. Why did Hashem put such an evil person into such a holy family? And why did Hashem give Eisav the ability to compete with Yaakov?

C. *Ikar* and *Tafeil*

Shem Mishmuel discusses the questions of this *parsha* in the context of two important concepts: *ikar*, primary, and *tafeil*, secondary. The worlds that God created, including this world and the unseen spiritual worlds, have *ikar* and *tafeil*, a primary value and secondary concerns.

Consider a fruit, such as an orange. The fruit and the juice of an orange are the *ikar*, the main part of the fruit. The peel of the orange is *tafeil*. It protects the fruit and serves an important purpose, but it is

not the primary part of the fruit. Nobody plants the orange tree dreaming of the great peels that it will produce. People do dream about the amazing fruit that will come from the tree.

Another example, the United States of America has some 300 million people living in the country. Among those millions of people however, there is one person who we could say is the main person in the country, the President. He has the most power. Everything in the government revolves around this one man. In this perspective we could say that he is the *ikar* of the country. The rest of the citizens are secondary, *tafeil*.

D. Many Worlds

God created many worlds, not just our world. Every human being, Jew and gentile alike, is put into this world for the purpose of doing good things, serving Hashem and following His laws and *mitzvos*. The primary purpose of creation, though, is not this world. The next world, the world that is coming, Olam Haba, is the primary world. This is the world that the soul will go to after the body dies. If the soul does a responsible, good job in this world, it goes to the Garden of Eden and Olam Haba after death.

There is another Olam Haba, which will appear after the Messiah comes and the dead will come back to life. Our huge universe, with all of its planets, stars and galaxies, will be available for people to explore and populate. Life expectancy will change. People will live for thousands of years and maybe even forever. The future world, Gan Eden after death and the post messianic Olam Haba are the primary worlds. Olam Haba is the main place for the human being to go to. This world is *tafel*, the secondary destination for a person. Chazal say that this world is a *prozdor*, the foyer before the main ballroom of the real palace, which is Olam Haba, the world that is coming. We must prepare ourselves in the hallway for the great experience of the palace. We have to complete the process of creation in this world, primarily within our own souls. Then we will merit to experience the next world, which is the main purpose of God's creation.

During the week we also find the relationship of *ikar* and *tafeil*, primary and secondary. The six days of the week serve as a preparation for the main day of the week, Shabbos. Shabbos is a holy experience, when our souls revel in the spiritual beauty of the day. This is why we were created, to enjoy our closeness with Hashem on Shabbos. We eat the food of Shabbos, recite the Shabbos prayers and sing the songs of Shabbos. We are together with the King and Queen of Shabbos. The six days are all really preparation for Shabbos. People exert themselves daily for one main purpose – to have a beautiful Shabbos once a week.

Most of us are harried during the week. We have financial and other pressures. We have little time to spend with our families, children and wives. We have one day, the most important day of the week, to focus on what's really important in life – to *daven* well, to be close with our families, to eat and sing together, to learn with our children and walk with them and spend time with them. It is a tragedy for someone to waste Shabbos. It shouldn't be spent sleeping it away, without spending time with our children. We should go to *shul*, study Torah, go to classes. Shabbos is our most important day. It is the whole reason that time exists. It is a taste of Olam Haba, of the world that is coming!

We see in the world certain things that are *ikar* and others that are *tafeil*. We must always be cognizant of what is *ikar* and what is *tafeil*.

We have to understand that making a living and gathering funds to support our family is important. However, it is not the *ikar*, primary value. The more important value is the family itself. Spending time with family and investing time in the family is of primary importance. That is *ikar*. The *tafeil* is making money for the family. A lot of people though, unfortunately have it backwards. They think that the main thing is their business or career, while the family takes a secondary place in their mindset, as they climb the ladder of economic and social success. If you are in this situation I beg of you to rethink your priorities. Put your family *before* your career!

This priority will impact many career decisions. A woman must think of her family's needs when she is deciding on a career. A man must consider what is necessary and good for his family. Will your career choice allow you to spend time with your family? It doesn't make sense for a person to leave at 7AM, return at 11PM, and to work so hard that he doesn't see his wife and children during the week, and then when he is home on Shabbos to be too exhausted to spend time with anyone.

E. The Doctor's Story

One Shabbos I sat next to a doctor in *shul*. The doctor told me that he used to work in a hospital that was about 15 miles away from his home. Then he moved to be close to the hospital. Why? He explained that even though he enjoyed his old neighborhood he had good reasons to move. He explained with a story.

“Doctors are pressed for time, and I had a lot of responsibilities in the hospital. I wanted to beat the traffic in the morning. Normally I'd have to leave home at 6:30 for my 8AM shift. Instead of sitting for an hour and half on the road I'd leave my house at 5AM and *daven shachris* near the hospital at around 6:30 or 7. Then I would start working at 8. I'd finish working at 9 or 10 at night. I'd get home around 11:00 PM and my children never saw me except on Shabbos. But then I was so tired, so the meals were short and I just went to sleep. I worked on Sundays also. One Sunday morning I overslept. My six year old son saw me sleeping in the bed. He exclaimed, 'Mommy! Who is sleeping in this bed? I don't know this person!' I heard with my own ears that my own child didn't recognize me in my pajamas! My son only recognized me on Shabbos for a few minutes. After that event, I told my wife that we had to move. We certainly have friends and a social life here. But we need to move because I have to spend time with my children.

“In our new place near the hospital, I don't have the same friends. But in the morning I now see my children off to school at 7:15, and then I go to the hospital. I have a break for a few hours from 6 to 8 at night when I go home, help with supper and help put the children to sleep. Thank God, now I have a completely different relationship with my children.”

This is a true story about *ikar* and *tafeil*. This doctor learned that family time is more important than work and socializing with friends. This can be a hard decision to make, but it is so important. We must know what is *ikar*, primary, and to focus on it. We must not get carried away by the *tafeil*, secondary matters.

Think about this. Hashem gives us many blessings. Thank God, Hashem gives many of us the blessing of good health. When we think of people who are not as healthy as we are we should realize that we are very fortunate to be so healthy. Some people get worked up about various issues in their life. As a teacher I know some students who get angry about receiving a B grade instead of an A. Does it pay to

get upset about something like this? We must take things in perspective. You still have a family, you are still healthy! People get upset when they lose a contract or a business deal. Isn't it more important to thank Hashem for our children, for our health, or for our community? We should be thankful to Hashem that we have the State of Israel. We should be jumping and dancing in the streets for the amazing gift of the State of Israel. And in America we should jump for joy daily over the amazing wealth and tranquility we now experience so soon after the Holocaust.

One of the great missions of man and woman is to combine Olam Hazeih and Olam Haba. We must connect this world with the next, to connect the physical and spiritual domains. We must do the *mitzvos* of Hashem and study His Torah and thus bring Olam Haba into Olam Hazeih. We need to remember that the main world is Olam Haba. That world will last forever. Who can compare the short span of human life in this world to the billions of years of Olam Haba? Who can compare the beauty and wonder and enjoyment of closeness to Hashem there with the tough, rough world that we now have? That future world is so much greater and better. That is the world we should always focus on. It is *ikar*.

F. Yaakov and Eisav's respective choices – *Ikar* and *Tafeil*

According to Shem Mishmuel, this was the essence of the clash between Yaakov and Eisav. The twins of Rivka and Yitzchak were both blessed with great power. They were children of two great *tzadikim*, and Yitzchak had been on the altar of the *akeida*. They were grandchildren of Avraham Avinu, who they knew and grew up with. They saw his goodness and love for every person in the world. They saw Yitzchak's *gevura*, his absolute commitment to do the right thing. These were their role models, people who knew how to connect the two worlds.

They had a choice, just like everybody does. Even if you are born into the house of Yitzchak and Avraham, you still have a choice and it is possible to make the wrong choice. In that special home, the *yetzer hara* was very strong. Hashem makes the world so that wherever there is more *kedusha*, there exists the opportunity for greater *tuma* too. Yaakov understood that he had the ability to bring spirituality into this world, and that the main world is the one that is coming. This world is only a preparation for that one. Yaakov was ready to make sacrifices that reflected his understanding. He wasn't interested in becoming rich and famous, and in building empires. He was only interested in getting to the next spiritual level and Olam Haba. He wanted to study, pray, and do good deeds, and he was ready to sacrifice some of this world's pleasures for these goals.

Eisav unfortunately gave in to the temptation of the evil side that existed in their home. He wanted to pursue power, fame and fortune, to build empires and to lead them. No matter who he would step on, this is what he wanted. He also knew of the spiritual world. But instead of sacrificing this world for that sacred world, he sacrificed that holy world for this profane world. He knew about Olam Haba. However, he used the lessons he learned from Yitzchak and Avraham about Olam Haba to serve his own ends. The midrash says that Eisav would learn with his father. He would ask questions of his father as if he loved Hashem. Eisav wanted Yitzchak to give him things, so that Yitzchak would think he was the better of the two sons. Eisav wanted all of the fabulous wealth that Yitzchak had inherited from Avraham. Avraham's wealth was the envy of kings. And Yitzchak had inherited all of it. Eisav knew that Yitzchak wanted him to be spiritual. So that's what he pretended to be. For Eisav, religion was a tool for self-advancement. He sacrificed Olam Haba for Olam Hazeih. He perverted spirituality to support his own materialism. What a tragedy!

We know from our history how much the Jewish people have suffered from these kinds of attitudes. How many times have we been attacked by foreign nations and countries who claim spirituality, who claim to be the true servants of God? They tried to destroy the nation of Israel, the devoted nation of God. We, though, are ready to give up this world for the next! The others will use the next world to achieve more in this world! We know that they are following in the footsteps of Eisav. At the end of time Hashem will declare that the followers of Yaakov are truly the devotees of Hashem. The Torah Jew is the real servant of Hashem. These are the people who know what is *ikar* and what is *tafeil*!

G. Eisav's Failure – *Gaava*

What went wrong with Eisav? How could Yitzchak and Rivka have failed with this child? They must have invested as much energy into Eisav as they did in Yaakov. How did he miss their message? We Jews do *mitzvos* for Hashem's sake, not for ourselves. Why didn't Eisav grasp this?

Shem Mishmuel cites an explanation of his father, the Avnei Nezer. The book of Mishlei, Proverbs, says that a certain character trait causes much grief. It blocks *teshuva*. It stops a person from learning from others and from his or her own life experiences. This is the *mida* of *gaava*, egoism. The Zohar says that sometimes on a hot summer day, clouds suddenly block the sun, making the day dark. The bright sun still shines above the clouds, but it is blocked by the dark clouds. *Gaava*, likewise is so dark that it blocks the light of *mussar* and *chassidus*. Eisav had this *mida* of *gaava*. He was very talented, strong, and courageous. He had a lot of Yitzchak in him. Yitzchak had *gevura*, strength of character. Yitzchak, though, channeled his strength to do God's will no matter what the challenge. Eisav was powerful too, but he used his power to get his way, not for Hashem. His talents, successes and conquests blinded him with excessive pride.

The sages say that this is reminiscent of the Roman Empire, which was so powerful and so successful – and yet so wicked. It was full of idolatry, promiscuity, and hatred for religion. It destroyed our holy temple and enslaved us. The Romans were full of contempt for the sweet goodness of the Torah. Their massive military successes produced an overwhelming egoism. They thought they would exist forever. But today, we know that the Romans no longer exist, they're completely gone. Even the name they gave to the Land of Israel is gone. Even if man builds a great Empire, like Rome, his achievements are only human. His time is limited. However, Hashem is eternal. We have seen this again in our own times. The Soviet empire was an evil, atheistic empire. One day though, like a cloud in the wind, this grand empire disappeared. *Gaava* blinds a person, but inevitably Hashem will succeed.

Eisav was unfortunately blinded by his conceit. He couldn't listen. Whatever Yitzchak and Rivka taught him was distorted by his own twisted egoism. Religion was his way to conquer, not a way to serve. The Torah though teaches us to serve and to be humble. Hashem is the *ikar* of the world. We are privileged that Hashem lets us live. He gives us blessings and tells us how to live. Hashem gave us wonderful gifts: the Torah, the land of Israel, and Shabbos. Hashem gave us Jewish families, Jewish children and Jewish holidays. We appreciate these and we know that they are the main thing. The Torah is against conquering the world. Torah Jews never held that agenda. We are humble, we just want to be left alone. We are a tiny nation, and don't want to be big and mighty. Jewish enemies accuse us of wanting to conquer the world. This is ludicrous! Israel is such a small country you can't even see it on a globe without squinting. It is not a huge landmass like Russia, China, America or India. All we Jews want are the simple, small borders of the land that Hashem has given us.

The Jewish nation was taught about *ikar* and *tafeil*. We don't want to misplace the primary and secondary in our order of values. This was the central confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav, and throughout the ages between Yisrael and Edom, the Jewish people and the Roman empire.

H. Eisav's Angry and Arrogant Response to Death

The Shem Mishmuel adds an interesting point. The midrash teaches us that the key event in Yaakov's and Eisav's lives was the sale of the birthright. Avraham Avinu had just died. Eisav came home from the field after a sinful day. He asked Yaakov for hot soup and Yaakov responded with his proposition. The midrash says that at this time, Eisav was upset that his grandfather Avraham had died. He asked, "Is it true that God's wrath and justice killed my grandfather Avraham?" Yaakov said, "Yes, it's true. Yitzchak our father is sitting on the floor now mourning because he lost his father." Eisav said, "If Avraham died, this means there's no justice in the world. I can do anything I want. If Avraham Avinu can die then there is no justice!" Eisav continued. "There is no Olam Haba. I will do anything to make my life better. Take the *bechora*, Yaakov! The *bechora* is about serving Hashem, but Hashem is unjust. He killed Avraham, the great *tzadik*!"

This midrash is incredible! Was Eisav so crazy as to think that anyone can live forever? Wasn't he taught by Avraham about the sin of Adam and Chava, who ate from the *etz hadaas* and were punished forever with the punishment of death? Humans beings all die. Why was he so upset about the death of Avraham?

Shem Mishmuel explains this based on Rashi's comments on this section of the *parsha*. There was a tradition in the family that Avraham would live at least 180 years, as Yitzchak did after him. At that time, fathers usually lived at least as long as their sons. Avraham, though, died five years earlier than his son Yitzchak eventually did. Rashi explains that Avraham died earlier so he wouldn't see the evil of his grandson Eisav. Eisav committed murder, rape, and theft on that very day. Avraham died so he wouldn't have to see Eisav's evil ways. Eisav said "Our tradition said that Avraham would die at the age of 180. But he died at age 175. Apparently Hashem repaid Avraham's kindness with injustice. Divine cruelty is the only reason why Avraham could have died prematurely. This means that God is not judging the world fairly. Who knows what God is? Maybe this world is more important than the next world." Meanwhile, Eisav *himself* was guilty for the premature death of Avraham!

Truly, we only know so much. Hashem knows much more. We can only bow our heads and accept the divine decree, even death, which is so hard to fathom. Avraham did this at the *akeida*, as did Yitzchak. Eisav could not accept it though, because his *gaava*, pride, prevented him. He wasn't humble and so he could not understand why Avraham, the essential man of kindness, should be struck down by the justice of Hashem five years before his time.

Rabos machshavos blev ish vaatzas Hashem hi sakum. "People have many thoughts. But Hashem knows better than everyone else." Hashem knew that it would be better for Avraham not to see Eisav committing those heinous crimes. Eisav *himself* was the cause of Avraham Avinu's early demise.

What a lesson for us. As Torah Jews we follow the example of Yaakov, a humble person. We lead a simple Jewish life, we strive for this and are happy with it. We don't dream of the fame, glory, and conquest of Eisav. That glory is not part of our agenda. We want the glory of Yerushalayim and of the Beis Hamikdash. We want to serve Hashem, to perform small kind deeds that aren't necessarily noticed.

Let us pray that one day the whole world will see what is *ikar* and what is *tafel*, primary and secondary. Jews and non Jews will recognize that the main mission in this world is to serve Hashem, to enjoy His blessings, to build wonderful families and to make this world better. Let us pray that the blessings of Yitzchak and Avraham that were given to Yaakov will reach their full fruition in our very own times.

Questions:

1. What was the basic difference in attitude between Yaakov and Eisav?
2. How did Eisav use his attitude in his dealings with Yitzchak?
3. Give three examples of *ikar* and *tafeil*.
4. What is primary and what is secondary in responsibility to family – level of income or time spent with family?
5. Why couldn't Eisav grasp the message of *ikar* and *tafeil*, as Yaakov did?
6. How did Avraham's death affect Eisav?

Exercises:

1. Keep a log of your activities during the day. Rate them as *ikar* and *tafeil*.
2. Do you think your priorities are correct? Or could they be readjusted?
3. If they need adjusting, what can you do to fix them?