

TOLDOS

IKAR AND TAFEIL—THE DIFFERING GOALS OF YAAKOV AND EISAV

A

The Eternal Struggle

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

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

B

Ikar and Tafeil

The Shem Mishmuel discusses 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. No one plants the orange tree dreaming of the great peels that it will produce.

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. From this perspective, we could say that he is the *ikar* of the country. The rest of the citizens are *tafeil*.

D

Many Worlds, Two “Olamos Haba”

God created many worlds, not just our world (*olam hazeh*). For us human beings, two of these other worlds are most important. Both are called “*olam haba*,” the World to Come—but they are different. The first *olam haba* is the world the soul goes to after death. It contains Gan Eden, the place for the righteous souls, and Gehinom, the place for the wicked. The second *olam haba* is the physical world after Mashiach comes. The righteous among the dead come back to life (*techiyas hameisim*) and enter a new and better physical world.

Every human being, Jew and gentile alike, is put into *olam hazeh* for the purpose of doing good things, serving Hashem, and following His *mitzvos*. The primary purpose of creation, though, is not this world. The next world, *olam haba*, is the primary world. That is the world the soul will go to after the body dies.

There is another *olam haba*, which will appear after Mashiach 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 possibly even forever.

The future world, Gan Eden after death and the post-messianic *olam haba*, are the primary worlds. *Olam hazeh* is *tafeil*, the secondary destination for a person. Chazal say that this world is a *prozdor*, the hallway before the main ballroom of the real palace, which is *olam haba*, the world that is coming (Avos 4:16). 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 by doing *mitzvos*. Then we will merit to experience the next worlds, which are the main purpose of God's creation.

E

Shabbos and the Six Days of the Week

During the week, we also find the relationship of *ikar* and *tafeil*. 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. 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 Hashem, the King, and with the Queen of Shabbos. The six days really are all 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. 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, to walk 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, and 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!

As we go through the world, we must always be cognizant of what is *ikar* and what is *tafeil*.

F

Making a Living and Family

We have to understand that making a living and gathering funds to support our family is important. But it is not the *ikar*. The more important value is the family itself. Spending time with and investing time in the family is of primary importance. That is the *ikar*. The *tafeil* is making money for the family. A lot of people, unfortunately, have it backwards. They think that the main goal is their business or career, while their family takes a secondary place in their minds as they climb the ladder of economic and social success. If you are in this situation, I beg 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 7 A.M., return at 11 P.M., and to work so hard that he doesn't see his wife and

children during the week—and then the one day when he is home, on Shabbos, he is too exhausted to spend time with anyone!

G

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 told me his 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 8 A.M. shift. Instead of sitting for an hour and half on the road, I'd leave my house at 5 A.M. and *daven shacharis* 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 and my children never saw me except on Shabbos. But then, because I was so tired, 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 had friends and a social life where we were; but we needed 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 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 extremely important. We must know what is *ikar* and focus on it. We must not get carried away by the *tafeil*.

Think about this. Hashem gives us many blessings. Thank God, He 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 still are healthy! People get upset when they lose a contract or a business deal. Isn't it more important to thank Hashem for our children, our health, and 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 this amazing gift. 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 humankind is to combine *olam hazeh* and *olam haba*. We must connect this world with the next, the physical with the spiritual. We must do the *mitzvos* of Hashem and study His Torah and thus bring *olam haba* into *olam hazeh*. 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, 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*.

H

Yaakov and Eisav's Respective Choices— *Ikar and Tafeil*

According to the 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 *tzaddikim*, and Yitzchak had been on the altar of the Akeida. They were grandchildren of Avraham, whom 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 doing 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 someone born into the house of Yitzchak and Avraham has a choice, and it is possible to make the wrong choice. In that special home, the *yeitzer hara* was very strong. Hashem makes the world so that wherever there is more *kedusha*, there exists the opportunity for greater *tuma* as well. 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 this understanding. He wasn't interested in becoming rich and famous or building empires. He was interested only in getting to the next spiritual level, *olam haba*. He wanted to study, pray, and do good deeds, and he was ready to sacrifice 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 lead them. 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*, but 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 (Tanchuma Toldos 8). Eisav wanted Yitzchak to give him things and to think that 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 this kind of attitude. 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, while 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 the true 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*.

I

Eisav's Failure—*Ga'ava*

What went wrong with Eisav? How could Yitzchak and Rivka have failed with this child? They must have invested as much energy in 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?

The Shem Mishmuel cites an explanation from his father, the Avnei Neizer. The book of Mishlei 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 *midda* of *ga'ava*, arrogance. 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 dark clouds, but it is blocked. *Ga'ava* is like those clouds. It is so dark that it blocks the light of *mussar* and Chassidus. Eisav had this *midda* of *ga'ava*. He was very talented, strong, and courageous. He had a lot of Yitzchak within him. Yitzchak had *gevura*, strength of character. But Yitzchak channeled his strength to do God's will no matter what the challenge, while Eisav used his power to get his way rather than using it for Hashem. His talents, successes, and conquests blinded him with excessive pride.

Chazal say that this was the fault 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 "Palestine," which they gave to the Land of Israel, has utterly lost its original meaning. Even if man builds a great empire, like Rome, his achievements are only human. His time is limited. Hashem, however, is eternal. We have seen this again in our own times. The Soviet Union was an evil, atheistic empire. One day, though, like a cloud in the wind, this grand empire disappeared. *Ga'ava* blinds a person, but inevitably Hashem will reign supreme.

Eisav, unfortunately, was 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 God. The Torah, though, teaches us to serve Hashem and to be humble. Hashem is the *ikar* of the world. We are privileged that Hashem lets us live. Hashem gave us wonderful gifts: the Torah, the Land of Israel, and Shabbos, to name but a few. Hashem gave us Jewish families, Jewish children, and Jewish holidays. We appreciate these and we know that they are the *ikar*, the main purpose of life. The Torah is against conquering the world; Torah Jews never held that agenda. We are humble and just want to be left alone. We are a tiny nation and have no desire to be big and politically mighty. Enemies of the Jewish People 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, the US, 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.

J

Eisav's Angry and Arrogant Response to Death

The Shem Mishmuel adds an interesting point. The Midrash teaches us that the key event in the lives of Yaakov and Eisav was the sale of the birthright. Avraham 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 in mourning because he lost his father.” Eisav said, “If Avraham died, this means there is no justice in the world. I can do anything I want.” 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 *tzaddik*!” (Bereishis Rabba 63:11).

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 Eitz Hada'as and were punished forever with the punishment of death? All human beings die. Why was Eisav so upset about the death of Avraham?

The Shem Mishmuel explains this based on Rashi's comments on Bereishis 25:30. 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 before reaching the age that his son Yitzchak eventually would. Rashi explains that Avraham died earlier so that 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 responsible 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 Akeidah, as did Yitzchak. Eisav, though, could not accept it because his *ga'ava* interfered. He wasn't humble, 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 machashavos b’lev ish, va’atzas Hashem hi sakum*, There are many thoughts in a man’s heart, but God’s plan—that shall stand” (Mishlei 19:21). Hashem knew that it would be better for Avraham not to see Eisav committing those heinous crimes. Ironically, Eisav *himself* was the cause of Avraham’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 deeds of kindness that aren’t necessarily noticed.

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

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the basic difference in attitude between Yaakov and Eisav?
2. How did Eisav display this 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 did Yaakov?
6. How did Avraham's death affect Eisav?

PERSONAL QUESTION

1. Give three examples of *ikar* and *tafeil* in your own life.

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 re-adjusted?
3. If they need adjusting, what can you do to fix them?

