

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS
VAYEITZEI

בשבת

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

THE ULTIMATE FOOL

As we enter into the *Parshiyos* of Yaakov Avinu, we are introduced to Yaakov's father-in-law, Lavan. Lavan has the terrible distinction of being known for his deceptive ways. Not only did Lavan earn the moniker "לבן הארמי" - 'Lavan the trickster,' but he is even referred to as 'the father of all tricksters,' implying that he was so skilled at his craft, all other con men stood in his shadow.¹

What did Lavan do that made him so capable at deceiving others? And, more importantly, is there anything we can learn from his actions to grow in our own lives?

R' Shalom Shwadron² (1912-1997) explains the secret to Lavan's success. Lavan was so good at deceiving others, *because he first deceived himself*. Before fooling others, Lavan first truly believed that his cause was just, and that his side was correct. Once he had that mindset, not only was he justified in tricking others, but it was an obligation! Lavan was an expert because he had no conscience telling him to do otherwise.

We see this when Lavan explained to Yaakov that it was improper to marry the younger daughter before the older one is married.³ Yaakov, asserted Lavan, was the one who wanted to change the tradition, and tear down the walls of all that is good and right! Poor Lavan simply wanted to follow common decency!

And we find at the end of the *Parshah* Lavan accusing Yaakov of trickery and deceit, all the while protesting his own innocence.⁴

While Lavan may make for a good villain, it would be proper to recognize the instances in our own lives when we trick ourselves. When we really want something, like winning a game, or getting a particular toy, we rationalize and convince ourselves that we are right and the other person is wrong. Consequently, the way we react is correct and justified. This also plays out between us and Hashem - "I just can't be on time to *Davening*, I'm so tired!"

The more truthful we are with ourselves, the more we will improve our relationship with Hashem and with others.

1 *Tanchuma Vayishlach* 1:1

2 *Lev Shalom on Bereishis* 29:12

3 *Bereishis* 29:26

4 *Bereishis* 31:26-28

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Tricking oneself is a challenge that is very difficult to overcome. We are usually aware of our overt behaviors, and once we are aware of them, we can take steps to correct them. However, the very nature of tricking oneself does not allow one to see that they need improvement. How is one supposed to grow, then, if they are not even aware that they have this problem?

One idea may be to utilize the help of others. When we act in ways that hurt others, you can be sure that people will tell us. However, we may justify our behaviors, telling ourselves that we were actually the wronged party. With this attitude we will not listen to the advice or admonishment of anyone else.

If we are told that we have hurt others, or that our actions need improvement, at the very least we can take a moment to recognize that there's at least a *possibility* that they might be right, and we might be wrong.

Even allowing for the possibility is a step in the right direction. It can break down the wall around us, and help us finally see the truth.

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If a person is missing the proper level of self-knowledge, all of his work towards fixing his Middos won't help. And even if he thinks it does help, it won't be enough to fix them to the point where they should be.
- R' Avraham Grodzinski, *Toras Avraham*, p. 184

A FATHER'S PRAYER

Rabbi Heshy Goldbaum* had a problem on his hands, was totally bewildered, and simply did not know what to do. Rabbi Goldbaum had always told himself that he will do whatever he can to make sure that his children grow up to learn, *Daven*, and keep *Halacha*. And he made good on that promise - as soon as his first child, Dovid, was old enough to come to *Shul*, he brought him to *Shul*, and taught him how to *Daven*.

As Dovid grew older, though, it seemed that everything Rabbi Goldbaum did was for naught. Not only did Dovid not enjoy the *Davening*, he even told Mrs. Goldbaum how much he disliked going! As time went on, no amount of cajoling, encouraging or even threats seemed to work. And so, with a heavy heart, Rabbi Goldbaum went to his Rebbi, Rabbi Kelemberg, to ask his advice.

"What I really don't understand," said Rabbi Goldbaum, "is that I did everything to make sure he would *Daven*. It's so strange to me that, of all things, this is the particular area that Dovid doesn't like!"

"It sounds to me that he's a fine child in all other areas - tell me, what did you do to teach Dovid about *Davening*?"

"Well, since he was young, I would bring him to *Shul*. When the other boys were outside playing or talking, I made sure that he was looking into his *Siddur*. I didn't want him to develop any bad habits! And when he was younger, he stayed in his seat, and you can be sure that he *Davened*! I don't know what has gotten into him lately!"

Rabbi Kelemberg nodded. "I think I understand. Heshy, I am sorry to say this, but I don't think you realize what *Chinuch* is. *Chinuch* is not simply training another human being. Rather, *Chinuch* is instilling a child with a love, a warmth, and a desire to do *Mitzvos*.

"I know that your heart is in the right place. You truly want the best for your child, and *Tefillah* is certainly an important part of connecting to Hashem. I'm afraid, though, that your method needs to be changed - you might think that this works, but you have to be open to recognizing that you may have been wrong in your approach until now. After that, we can discuss a new approach."

Rabbi Goldbaum was at his wit's end, and was quickly convinced that his way of doing things were just not working. That was, in fact, the reason for this visit. After a few more consultations, and some creative thinking, Dovid indeed started to enjoy *Tefillah*.

*Based on a true story, adapted from איל תחטאו ביד by Rabbi Yechiel Jacobson.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The *Yetzer Harah* is a master at distorting our reality, causing us to believe things that are not accurate.¹
- All the *Mussar* study in the world won't work without self-knowledge.²
- The wisdom of self-improvement is the most complicated and intricate wisdom there is.³ This is because this is the wisdom of understanding oneself.⁴

1 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Chap. 3

2 *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 31

3 *Mesillas Yesharim*, Introduction

4 *Toras Avraham*, p. 183