

Each of you shall not wrong his fellow Jew. (25:17)

The *Chafetz Chaim* observes the famous maxim: The world thinks that the fool is a fool only with regard to other people's interests. However, *Ven es kumpt tzu zich*, "When it involves himself, his own interests, he suddenly becomes quite clever." Conversely, when it comes to one's personal vested interests, the otherwise clever man may act foolishly. When one allows his petty prejudices and self-serving opinions to drive his actions and control his life – he is a fool. The sage expounds on our *pasuk*, noting the added word, *V'lo sonu Ish es amiso*: The word *es* is extra. He explains that, when the Torah writes the word *es*, it comes to include something else in addition to that which is specified in the *pasuk* (*Pesachim 22b*) (*es l'rabos*). In this context, the word *es* implies something other than deceiving others. The Torah alludes to deception that can, at times, have a longer and more harsh effect: self-deception. One is not allowed to deceive himself. Lying to oneself is as much a lie as lying to others. How often does one convince himself that a food which is prohibited is kosher, or the endeavor upon which he is about to embark has the approbation of Torah giants – when, in fact, this is a misconstrued notion?

The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, expresses the same idea, only with a different twist on the *pasuk*. He quotes *Horav Mendel, zl, m'Riminov*, who notes that the Hebrew letters *aleph* and *ayin* are interchangeable. We read the *pasuk* as *Es amiso* – which is translated, his fellow Jew. When we substitute the *aleph* for the *ayin*, it would read, *Es amito*, "Each of you shall not wrong his 'truth,' his true essence." One should not lie to his inner truth. Do not deceive yourself. In the recesses of one's heart, a person knows quite well when he is acting inappropriately. He might be able to fool others, but he does not fool himself. This, in and of itself, is self-deception at its nadir.

Chazal (*Bereishis Rabbah 63:8*) expound concerning Eisav's name, splitting it into *hai shav*. (The *sin* and *shin* have different sounds.) Eisav is a person of *shav*, falsehood, attempting to present himself as devout, when, in fact, he is evil incarnate. He is compared to the pig who displays his split hooves (which are one of the kosher signs of an animal), but ignores the fact that it does not chew its cud. (This is like Eisav, who sins surreptitiously, while presenting a public display of piety.) Eisav married at the age of forty, following in the footsteps of his father, ignoring the fact that his father had led a completely righteous life up until that point – while Eisav had not. Eisav lives for show, wanting people to consider him virtuous, which is a front for his covert evil.

The *Midrash* continues, Hashem says: *Hai shav shebarasi b'Olam*; "Behold falsehood which I created in My world." Was Eisav the first one to manipulate the truth, to live by deception? The snake that brought down Adam and Chavah was spewing his lies long before Eisav entered into the picture.

The *Shem MiShmuel* explains that there exists a marked difference between *shav* and *sheker*. The snake represents *sheker*, falsehood, which is knowingly expressed by the prevaricator. The snake knew from the get-go that he was a liar and that what he planned to do was a lie. Eisav, on the other hand, represents *shav*, a falsehood so deceptive that the liar himself does not even know that

he is lying. This deception is self-deception. Eisav believed his lie. He felt strongly that the birthright belonged to him, that his overt display of piety was appropriate enough for him to foolishly disregard his inner evil.

The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, was well-known for his brilliance, his sharp wit and uncompromising search for the truth. His aphorisms are deep insights into the manner of serving Hashem, as well as to how one should live. He was wont to say, "*Lo signov*, 'Do not steal' means that one should not steal from himself – do not deceive yourself." In addition, he offered the following insight, "Better a *rasha*, evil person, who knows that he is a *rasha*, than a *tzaddik*, righteous man, who knows that he is a *tzaddik*." A *tzaddik* who thinks he is a *tzaddik* is far from being a true *tzaddik*, because one's level of humility should be commensurate with his level of virtue. He should know how distant he is from true righteousness. If he thinks he is there – he is nowhere, neither here nor there.

One primary area in which we deceive ourselves is with regard to *frumkeit*: We either feel that we have to put on a show for others in order to be accepted; or we judge others by some of their actions, thus labeling them as "different." Let us glean a lesson from the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*.

The *Chafetz Chaim* was well aware of the spiritual havoc which the *Haskalah*/Enlightenment movement had wreaked. One of the sage's cousins had "freed" himself from the "shackles" of Orthodoxy and was living a completely secular life, devoid of any religious observance. One day, the *Chafetz Chaim* received the tragic news that his cousin and wife had drowned as a result of a boating accident. Their only son, David, was attending a school in Paris, and, as the *Chafetz Chaim* was the only relative to be found, the lawyer for their estate asked if the Kagan family (*Chafetz Chaim*, *Horav* Yisrael Meir Kagan) would recognize the plight of this eleven-year-old orphan and open their home to him. The Kagans immediately accepted the responsibility to prepare a home for David.

The boy arrived one month later. While he was emotionally stable following the tragedy, he was totally secular and ignorant of Jewish law and ritual. He brought with him many books written in French, a library of classical music, and a small violin. David loved music, and he asked if he could continue practicing on his violin. His wardrobe was au courant, adhering to the latest styles worn in western Europe. His turn-of-the-century French attire caused a stir in the small town of Radin – a bastion of Torah, but neither up-to-date nor caring about the latest in fashion. Since David wanted very much to fit in with the *Chafetz Chaim's* family, he was willing to change his attire for the more simple, almost dull, Lithuanian village wardrobe. He also agreed to study Hebrew and religious subjects. The *Chafetz Chaim*, however, refused to have him change certain things about himself.

Every Sunday morning, a smartly-dressed man arrived at the train station where the *Chafetz Chaim* picked him up and accompanied him to his home. After the man entered the *Chafetz Chaim's* home, one could hear violin music emanating from it. The neighbors assumed that their holy *Rav* had hired a violin tutor for young David. While the music was pleasant to listen to, it was not Jewish. Who knew where this would lead? What had their spiritual leader done? Their fears

became more alarming when they discovered that the man was not merely teaching music, but French subjects and even philosophy as well!

When the rumblings reached the ears of the *Chafetz Chaim*, he decided to clear the air. [The people meant well, but their understanding of the larger picture was limited.] He explained that, by accepting responsibility for David, he obligated himself to avail the boy of his needs which heretofore had been part of an alien culture and lifestyle.

The *Chafetz Chaim* viewed his cousin as a survivor whom he had plucked from the abyss of spiritual extinction. True, he dressed and acted differently, but he was climbing the ladder to spiritual return. It would require time and patience. What about what people would think? Apparently, the *Chafetz Chaim* felt that this boy's future was more important than what a few people might think. We are here to do what is proper and correct – not to satisfy the insecure feelings of people whose self-inflicted myopia allows them to focus only on the small picture.