

TO YOURSELF BE TRUE

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

The servant [Eliezer] asked, "What if the woman does not want to return with me to this Land? Shall I bring your son back to the land that you left?" (Bereshith 24:5)

The prophet Hoshea said, "Canaan has in their hands scales of deceit and they love to exploit others" (1). Our Sages explain that "hands of deceit" refers to Eliezer, who sat and pondered, "Perhaps my daughter is fit to marry Yitzchak..."; "...love to exploit others" refers to Eliezer's offer of his daughter as a wife for Yitzchak (2).

Is this not an overly harsh criticism of Eliezer? After all, Eliezer didn't try to cheat Avraham, he only offered his daughter as a potential wife for Yitzchak, and when Avraham would not accept his offer, Eliezer did not question Avraham's response. What's more, Eliezer's entire doubt was only on a subconscious level (3). When Eliezer left Avraham, he thought he was setting out on his mission with totally pure intentions. It was only after he met Rivka that he realized that on some level he had hoped that his trip would result in failure, and that Yitzchak would marry his daughter (4).

The message of our Sages is that had Eliezer been absolutely honest with himself, he would have recognized on his own that his daughter would not have been an appropriate wife for Yitzchak. The fact that Eliezer did not realize this shows that there was some small measure of self-deception in his thinking process. Such is the practice of every charlatan: not only does he deceive others, he fools himself as well. Doubt is rooted in deceit; and everyone is expected to make decisions based on clear, unbiased thinking (5). When a person leaves this world and faces his final judgment he will be asked a number of questions, the first of which is whether he was honest in his business dealings (6). The glaring question is what purpose that interrogation serves, since in the World to Come all is already known. Such questions, it seems, are meant as tests for us: did we recognize the truth about our life, or did we live all our life in self-deception?

1. Hoshea 12:8.

2. Bereshith Rabbah 59:9.

3. The Kotzker Rav derives this from Rashi who does not mention Eliezer's doubt on the verse cited above (Bereshith 24:5). Rashi waits until later, when Eliezer repeats his story to Lavan and Bethuel (Bereshith 24:39).

4. It is noteworthy that before Eliezer met Rivka (24:12), he prayed that God act with kindness towards Avraham and find a wife for Yitzchak. After meeting Rivka (24:27), he thanked God for having performed an act of kindness and truth for Avraham.
5. Chidushei HaLev pp. 86-7.
6. Shabboth 31a.

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