



# A Message from

*Rabbi Cohen*

In this week's Parsha, Yaakov Avinu blesses each of his twelve sons. In his blessing to Yehuda, Yaakov says " *ata yoslecha achicha*." The Targum translates this as, "You unabashedly admitted [your actions regarding the incident with Tamar] therefore your brothers will admit [i.e. acknowledge] that you are the king." Rav Wolbe explains (Shiurei Chumosh Parshas Vayechi) that Yaakov was revealing to Yehuda that he possesses the *middah* (virtue) of admitting the truth, and one who possesses such a virtue has what it takes to become a king.

The Mashgiach continues, that it is possible for someone to live his entire life without being aware of his positive and negative character traits. Chazal (our Sages) tell us that when a person passes away and is buried, an angel comes to him and asks him his name. The person answers, "I swear by Heaven and Earth that I don't know my name", and he immediately receives a beating. Why is it that a person doesn't remember his name? The answer is, that the name referred to above is not the name that he was called during his lifetime, rather, the "name" they are requesting is the person's essence. The angels are asking, "What is the essence of your being", and if after the eighty or so years that he lived he doesn't know who he truly is, then he deserves to be lashed. He might answer, "I gave charity", but they will respond that there was something pushing you to give; it was not your true self. The most complex area of a person is his *middos*.

The Mashgiach said in the name of his rebbi, Rav Yerucham Levovitz z"l, that every person possesses an underlying *middah*, and if he would be cognizant of that *middah* he would be able to perfect himself. He elaborated that every person is born with one complete character trait, and through utilizing this trait to its fullest potential, one is able to perfect his character. For example, a child's admitting to a wrongdoing, even though he knows that he will be punished, is an indication that he possesses the desirable quality of truth. However, if he is not cognizant of this good trait, with the passage of time the trait will become eroded through situations that are antithetical to the virtue of truth, and he might turn into a liar and a cheat. In contrast, if he is cognizant of his good traits and he guards them lest they become tainted, then he will be able to overcome every *nisayon* (test) that arises. If he is faced with a situation where laziness is hindering his work, his quality of truth will compel him to continue as best as he can. If he is not fond of doing acts of kindness, his quality of truth will succeed in prodding him to help others. Over the course of time he will be able to rectify each and every one of his negative character traits.

The same is true conversely. Every person possesses a negative character trait that is the basis for all his bad virtues. If he knows which *middah* it is and he protects himself from it, he will be protected from all negative traits. However, if he doesn't protect himself from this trait, he will end up ruining his good qualities too.

The Mashgiach asks that it would seem from the rebuke that Shimon and Levi received that they were not the recipients of a blessing at all. He answers that in essence the above idea was the blessing that Yaakov gave to all his sons. He revealed to each one of them what their underlying trait is, thereby allowing them to be alert as each situation arises. Yaakov was telling Shimon and Levi that on one hand they possess the trait of anger, and on the other hand they possess the trait of brotherhood. This is what brought them to wipe out the city of Shechem and in the future this would bring them to the fiasco of Korach and his cohorts. Yaakov was not only telling them their shortcomings, he was advising them how to prevent any future pitfalls. Similarly, if someone knows that he craves and runs after honor, he should take a position that will not place him in danger of falling prey to his desire.

What is the way that we can become familiar with our underlying character trait? When the Mashgiach was asked, he answered, "If one would keep a daily accounting of the traits that arise in every given situation, after a few weeks he will be able to tell which trait manifests itself most often."

If we can make an effort to recognize our strengths and weakness, after just a short while we might be able to transform the way we relate to the situations that arise on a daily basis.