**The Art of Manipulation**



**#1**

Today's Learning Material

**Torah Bereishis 25:28**

*Yitzchak loved Esav, for trapping was in his mouth; but Rivka loved Yaakov.*

(Yitzchak and Rivka were the parents of both Esav and Yaakov)

**Rashi ad loc.**

*"For trapping was in his mouth"- with the mouth of Esav, for he would esnare Yitzchak and deceive him with his words.*

**Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch**

*Esav was a hunter also with his mouth; i.e., he employed the skills of a hunter even when he spoke. He knew how to use the tricks of his trade even against his father. By contrast, Rivka's love for Yaakov came of its own. Yaakov did not have to "capture" it. He won her love through his very personality.*

**Questions:**

* **What are the main reasons why people try to manipulate others?**
* **What does manipulative behavior involve?**
* **What are some manipulative methods people use?**
* **Is complimenting people a form of manipulation?**

**#2**

**The Gates of Repentance**

One is not allowed to coerce another.

And if one knows that another is afraid of him, or is embarrassed to go against his will, then one should not command him to do small or big things, unless it’s obvious that they really want it and it’s for their benefit. Even (something small, such as:) to warm up a kettle of water, or to send him on an easy errand …

**Questions:**

* **If you want someone to do something for you, are you usually open in your request?**
* **When you want to change the behavior of others, are you open in your approach or do you try to conceal your intentions?**
* **Does it make it easier to ask people to help you if you're fully open with them?**

**#3**

**Meet the Snake, Braha Bender**

The Torah begins the human narrative with a story about this struggle. The Almighty frames the human drive towards selfishness and destruction in the character of a snake. The snake is sinuous, conniving, and seductive. Selecting his goals with vicious brilliance, the snake slinks into the most vulnerable pockets of the human heart so slyly, so slickly, that his presence is barely detected - until he attacks. Then it is too late.

The snake begins by selecting his first target: Chava (Eve). Chava had not received the commandment forbidding the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil directly from the Almighty. She had received the commandment through her human partner, Adam, making her far more vulnerable to the snake’s wiles.

Throughout his sneaky dialogue with Chava, the snake reveals nothing of his secret intentions. To the contrary, the snake is all smoke and mirrors, a game of carefully crafted misperceptions leading the careless observer directly away from honest recognition of his objectives.

The snake’s first move vis-à-vis Chava is a brilliant mixture of sympathy and encouragement. With all the warmth of a lover, the snake offers Chava a “safe place” in a cold world:

“Did, perhaps, G-d say: ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Torah Bereshis 3:1)

But was Chava living in a cold world? Had G-d so unfairly forbidden her from eating any of the luscious and beautiful fruits surrounding her in Eden? This is what the snake implies. Note the classic manipulation: I am your friend because the other is your enemy. I am better because the other is worse. I am superior because He is inferior. Is this true?

See for yourself:

“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, you must not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die.” (ibid 2:16-17)

Just a few verses earlier, the Almighty makes plain that He is nobody’s enemy. He permits and indeed invites humanity to enjoy every pleasure the world had to offer save for one small exception. Only one tree among many is forbidden, and for good reason, but the rest are just as delicious and free for the taking. Aside from the one that happens to be poisonous, every single tree in the garden is fair game!

Yet the snake skews reality to fit his own twisted objectives. Every good lie has a little bit of truth, but truth taken so grossly out of context that it misleads the listener into an entirely mistaken conclusion:

“Did, perhaps, God say: ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” You poor things! ...

**Questions:**

* **How do you tell if someone is manipulating you?**
* **How do you feel around manipulative people?**
* **What are the red flags that will tell you someone is manipulative?**
* **What to do about it?**

**#4**

**Talmud Yevamos 63a**

*Rav’s wife would constantly aggravate him. When he would say to her: Prepare me lentils, she would prepare him peas; if he asked her for peas, she would prepare him lentils. When Chiya, his son, grew up, he would reverse the requests Rav asked him to convey to her, so that Rav would get what he wanted. Rav said to his son Chiya: Your mother has improved now that you convey my requests. He said to Rav: It is I who reverse your request to her. Rav said to him: This is an example of the well-known adage that people say: He who comes from you shall teach you wisdom; I should have thought of that idea myself. You, however, should not do so, i.e., reverse my request, as it is stated: “They have taught their tongue to speak lies, they weary themselves to commit iniquity, etc.” (Jeremiah 9:4). If you attribute such a request to me, you will have uttered a falsehood.*

*Rabbi Chiya’s wife would constantly aggravate him. Nevertheless, when he would find something she would appreciate, he would wrap it in his shawl and bring it to her. Rav said to him: Doesn’t she constantly aggravate you? Why do you bring her things? Rabbi Chiya said to him: It is enough for us that our wives raise our children and save us from sin.*

**Questions:**

* **Is there ever a good, permissible reason to manipulate others?**
* **In what ways do you see people refrain from having a positive influence on others because they are afraid that what they do might be manipulative?**
* **Would you manipulate people to do things solely for their own benefits?**

**#5**

**Questions:**

**When you want someone to do something for you, what non-manipulative approaches can you use?**

**What attitudes towards other people would make one less manipulative?**

**#6**

**Question: What's your takeaway from today's discussion?**