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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Vayishlach

Walking on the Path of Life in the Spirit of *Yisrael Saba*

Our *parasha* states (32:4), "Then Yaakov sent angels ahead of him to Esav, his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom ... (33:8) And he [-Esav] asked, 'What did you intend by that whole camp that I met?' He answered, 'To gain favor in my lord's eyes.' Esav said, 'I have plenty. My brother, let what you have remain yours.' But Yaakov said, 'No, I ask of you ... Please accept my gift which was brought to you ... inasmuch as I have everything.'"

Questions

- 1 - "Then Yaakov sent angels ahead ..." Rashi says that these were actual angels. Why did Yaakov need to send actual angels to Esav?
- 2 - Why did Yaakov repeat himself and say, "Save me from my brother, from Esav?" Isn't "my brother" and "Esav" speaking about the same person?
- 3 - The *Beit Ha'levi* asks a similar question: Yaakov only had one brother - once he said, "My brother," isn't it self-understood that he was talking about Esav? Why did Yaakov add that he wished to be saved "from Esav?"
- 4 - Esav said, "I have plenty (*rav*)" while Yaakov said, "I have everything (*kol*)."
Why did Yaakov use a different expression than Esav when describing his wealth?

The Young Generation Today

To explain the *mussar* that we learn from Yaakov Avinu's encounter with Esav, we should first examine the new attitude of many young *charedi* couples today. To our great distress, although the men have learned in *yeshivot* and the women have lived their entire lives in *charedi* settings, many young couples prefer to live in places and neighborhoods which are irreligious or not in accordance with the spirit of *Yisrael Saba*. They claim that the quality of life in these places is better and the irreligious don't interfere; each person lives his life in accordance with his personal beliefs and does not get involved in the affairs or practices of his neighbor. They also argue that their children's *chinuch* will be unaffected - it's clear to the children that they are not like their neighbors, and no harm will befall them; in fact, often the children who grow up in irreligious settings turn out best. However, these young couples are making a big mistake: our environment, our neighbors, and our surroundings all exert a tremendous influence, and it's very difficult to remain unaffected; we can't rely on miracles when raising children and assume that they will be unaffected and not develop any relationships with those around them. But it's not only the children that are affected; the parents as well will undoubtedly be affected by their surroundings and will grow less enthusiastic in their own *avodat Hashem*. In general, if they truthfully examine themselves, they will find that they are motivated by a desire to free themselves from the watchful eye of *charedi* society, live in greater luxury, and feel no pressure about the way they dress and the way they pray. Usually, this leads to tragic results and "Many are those that have fallen." Eventually, the damage is irreversible. The *Tanna* could be alluding to this in *Avot* (1:7), "Natai Ha'arbali says that we should distance ourselves from a bad neighbor, not get close to an evil person, and 'not give up on punishments.'" When the *Tanna* said "not give up on punishments," he may have meant that at times when a person has a bad neighbor, he may not at first feel the effects; but he should know "not to give up on punishments," and that, ultimately, the terrible consequences of being in a bad neighborhood will



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be perfectly clear. This is a lesson that we can learn from Yaakov Avinu, who taught the future generations how do go on the proper path in the way of *Yisrael Saba*.

The Beit Ha'levi's Answer

With this introduction, we can better appreciate the words of the *Beit Ha'levi*. He explains that Yaakov knew that two possibilities lay before him: either Esav would regret his earlier behavior and would want to live together with Yaakov in brotherhood and friendship, or Esav would continue to hate Yaakov and attack him. This is why Yaakov asked to be saved from 'my brother Esav' – he wanted to be saved from "my brother," from living together with Esav as brothers, and from "Esav," from having to fight Esav, who hated Yaakov. It would seem that the primary fear of Yaakov was that Esav would come ready for battle, but the Torah hints to us that Yaakov was really more concerned that Esav would want to live with him as brothers. This is why he first said, "Save me from 'my brother'" and only afterwards said "Esav." He first prayed that Hashem save him from the negative influence of Esav, from Esav ruining the *chinuch* he was giving to his children. Only afterwards did he ask to be saved from having to go to war against the cruel Esav. This could also explain why the Torah says, "And Yaakov was very afraid, and it distressed him." He was very afraid from having any connection with Esav, and it distressed him that he might have to go to war with Esav.

Why Yaakov Feared Esav's Friendship

Why indeed was Yaakov so afraid of Esav's friendship? We can explain his fear based on the exchange between Yaakov and Esav later on in the *parasha*. When Esav at first refused to accept Yaakov's gift, he said, "I have plenty." However, when Yaakov tried to convince Esav not to refuse his tribute, Yaakov said that he had no need for the livestock he was giving Esav as, "I have everything." What exactly is the difference between Esav's "I have plenty" and Yaakov's "I have everything?"

A World of Difference

Our Sages (*Baba Batra* 16B) state that three people tasted *Olam Haba* in this world - Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. We learn that this was true for Yaakov because it's written in the Torah that Yaakov said, "I have everything." Our Sages words are puzzling: The *Avot* led lives filled with suffering and hardship; how could they say that in this world they already tasted *Olam Haba*? The answer lies in the words of the *Tanna (Avot)*, "Jealousy, desire, and [pursuing] honor take a person out of the world." In essence, all the dissatisfaction, animosity, and strife that a person has in this world can be understood based on the words of the *Tanna*. If a person walks around with the Torah perspective and believes that everything that comes to him is the Will of Hashem *Yitbarach* and that no one can touch or take away what is coming to him, he will rejoice in his lot and feel himself to be a wealthy man. However, when a person runs after his physical desires, he will never be satisfied. Our Sages have already informed us that no man dies with having satisfied even half his physical desires - whoever has 100 wants 200. When a person is completely wrapped up in an endless pursuit of wealth, power, and glory, he will never enjoy life, but will be forever distressed by what he is lacking and is out of his reach. The *Avot* were so removed from the negative traits that take one out of this world - from jealousy, from physical desire, from honor seeking - that they experienced a sense of *Olam Haba* in this world. In *Olam Haba* there is no jealousy, no hatred and no physical desires, and when a person lives his life with the knowledge that no one can hurt him, he will feel no jealousy, no hatred and will be perfectly content with what he has.



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Such a person will feel boundless joy in his life and will already have a taste of *Olam Haba*. This is what we pray for at the end of *birkat ha'mazon*: Hashem should have mercy on us and bless us with a complete blessing, just as he blessed the *Avot* with "kol." We are asking that Hashem should help us feel as the *Avot* felt, that we have everything we need and be able to enjoy the world and have a taste of *Olam Haba*.

Yaakov's Concern

This is the fundamental difference between the seemingly trivial difference between the words of Esav and the words of Yaakov. Esav said he had plenty and meant that although he had much, he was still lacking, still incomplete. In contrast, Yaakov said that he had everything - he was missing nothing and had everything he needed. This difference in perspective was the cause of Yaakov's concern. He knew that he could be influenced negatively by Esav and, as a result, forget that his mission and purpose in this world is Torah and *mitzvot*. This particularly worried him, because he would not even be aware of the powerful effect of Esav's friendship as the influence is faint and barely noticeable at first. However, slowly but surely a person becomes immersed in the vanities of this world and forgets his mission and purpose. This also answers our question why Yaakov had to send real angels to Esav – He was afraid that regular messengers of flesh and blood would be corrupted by Esav and adapt Esav's perspective on life.

Why R' Chaim Brisker Shut His Windows and Bolted His Doors in the Middle of the Day

The *Sefer Ashrecha Yisrael* (Ch. 2) relates a personal experience of R' Avraham Kalmonovitz, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir in America. He related the following: "During World War I, R' Chaim Soloveitchik fled from Brisk to Minsk. I once visited R' Chaim's home in Minsk and, although it was the middle of the day, I found the windows closed and the doors bolted shut. I walked around the house but everything was sealed. I wasn't sure what to do and knocked on the door. I heard Rav Chaim's daughter ask who it was. I answered that it was the Rakover Rav. She opened the door and I went inside. When I saw R' Chaim, I asked him why he locked himself up in the middle of the day. He went to the bookshelf and took out a Rambam and began to read (*Hilchot De'ot* 6:1), 'It is the way of people to be drawn after the ideas and deeds of their friends, associates, and countrymen. Therefore, a person must associate with *tzadikim* and always keep company with *chachamim* to learn from their actions ... [If the people around him] are wicked and sinful and do not allow him to live in the country without joining them and adapting their evil practices, he should go out to the caves, to the wilderness, to the desert, and not go in the ways of the sinners, as it is written (*Yirmiyahu* 9:1), 'Who will give me a place to dwell in the desert?' After reading the Rambam, R' Chaim added, 'We see from the Rambam that when the holy *Yirmiyahu HaNavi* said, 'Who will give me a place to dwell in the desert?' it was not just a parable or a poetic expression but a genuine *halacha* – if the whole world is evil, one is obligated to run to the desert. If one can't run away to the desert, one must make his house like a desert and separate himself from his surroundings. In Minsk they are cruel to the refugees and force their children to join 'cultured' schools. Therefore, acting in accordance with the Rambam, I lock up my house with metal bolts.

What Frightened the Chafetz Chaim

The *Sefer Netzach HaTorah* (Ch. 2) relates a story told by the Chafetz Chaim's disciple, R' Elchanan Wasserman zt"l, may Hashem avenge his blood, about his great rebbe: The Chafetz Chaim's *yeshiva* in Radin was in dire financial straits and someone suggested that the Chafetz Chaim should go to Moscow,



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gather the wealthy men there for a meeting, and ask that they give sizable donations to the *yeshiva*. The Chafetz Chaim was taken aback by the suggestion and stalled; he was afraid that going away for so long to a strange city and having to deal with wealthy men, some of whom were not observant, would damage his spirituality. Time went by, and the *yeshiva*'s financial situation became unbearable and needed to be resolved. The Chafetz Chaim cast a *Goral HaGra* [the lot of the Vilna Gaon], which landed on the *pasuk*, "I will go down with you to Egypt and I will bring you up ..." Yaakov Avinu was also afraid of the negative influence of Egypt and Hashem promised him that He would still be with him. The Chafetz Chaim saw from this that those who go to do a *mitzvah* are not harmed, and he traveled to Moscow. R' Elchanan finished the story by saying, "If *Rabbeinu*, the Chafetz Chaim, was concerned about being negatively influenced by his surroundings, even on a short trip, even when the whole trip was completely *le'shem Shamayim*, for the sake of Heaven, what do we have to say for ourselves?"

Words of Mussar

We should learn from Yaakov Avinu the proper approach to life: Although he had spent many years in the company of his father-in-law, Lavan the cheater, he still was afraid of having any ties of friendship to Esav. He was afraid of Esav's whole attitude towards life, of seeking pleasure and running after money, the attitude so well expressed in Esav's words, "I have plenty" - but not everything. Yaakov did not want his children to be influenced by Esav's deeds and perspective and did all that he could to sever any potential connection to Esav and keep his children on the path of *Yisrael Saba*, represented by the belief of "I have everything." A person should be happy with his lot and put all his thoughts and energy into the welfare of his soul. He should pray more for the welfare of his soul than of his body, as his body comes and goes, while his soul is eternal. *Maaseh Avot siman la'banim* - the deeds of the fathers are a lesson for their children, to what extent a person must be careful and guard himself and his offspring from bad company and irreligious neighborhoods. He shouldn't rely on his wisdom and abilities to overcome the influence of his surroundings because one's environment influences him to an immeasurable degree as the Rambam has written so clearly and emphatically.

Shabbat Shalom
Rav Mordechai Malka