

# WHAT ARE YOU WORTH?

by Rabbi Label Lam

*"I have plenty" (Essav-Bereishis 33:9)*

Essav spoke boastfully, proclaiming: I have plenty more than I could ever want. (Rashi)

*"I have all" (Yaakov-Bereishis 33:11)*

Everything that I require. (Rashi)

Give to Him what is His, because you and what is yours are His!  
(Pirkei Avos)

Take away the ocean and what have you got?!  
(Groucho Marx - trying not to be impressed by a friend's ocean-front villa)

In one brief dialogue, the divergent philosophies of Yaakov and Essav are manifest. Their candid attitudes reveal dramatically different world-views. What is the source of the great divide?

Essav evaluates his personal wealth in terms of quantity, ("plenty"), as opposed to Yaakov who refers to the quality of his relationship to his possessions ("all"). These simple words betray that while one is still hopelessly addicted to temporary material existence the other is living life on a higher frequency.

A powerful king once approached the famous Baron Rothchild and candidly asked him "what he was worth." The Baron is reputed to have answered that he was worth some 50 million Drachmas (or whatever the local currency happened to be). The king felt that the answer somehow understated his true holdings and did some investigations. When he discovered that Baron Rothchild really was worth 500 million Drachmas he felt betrayed, and confronted the Baron again. "Why have you misled me and violated our trusting relationship? I am aware that your assets exceed 500 million Drachmas!" The Baron humbly replied that true his holdings are some 500 million Drachmas but the king had asked "how much are you worth?" To that the Baron was compelled to tell the truth. "What I gave to charity approaches 50 million Drachmas. What I have managed to give away is actually accounted to my "worth". That is what I carry with me. It is locked in a vault of mitzvos forever. As to what will happen to the remainder of my wealth I am uncertain. I do not count it as my personal "worth".

The spiritually oriented person is not compelled to impress or be impressed by that which lies outside of himself. His true ambition is aimed at goals that are within his reachable realm and his

objects are merely means to achieve those ends and not the ends themselves.

"All" expresses a vertical orientation, as the ladder in Yaakov's dream, and not a horizontal approach, which experiences only the playing field of the jungle floor. The physical world is competitive because two cannot hold the same object simultaneously. It's a zero sum game.

In the spiritual dimension of life a person only competes against his own potential. One is never better than another, but only better than himself had he not striven. "A candle for one is a candle for one hundred." Any spiritual gain for one benefits the many. Possessions, then, are experienced as vehicles that can bring us into closer proximity to The Divine source of those objects. The ideal drive is for a state of being rather than a condition of having.

If one has a deeply invested relationship with the Almighty, then one can truly say that he has all, even if materially he is deficient. Any small number times infinity is infinity and any great number times zero will be zero. When The King will ask us about our net "worth" will our eyes look outward or inward? Will we answer "I have" or "I am". Will we have been deceived by Essav's slight of hand or alerted to the eternal echo of that voice that resonates so deeply within, the voice of Yaakov? How do you answer the question, "what are you worth?"

*This week's Dvar Torah is dedicated to the memory of Kalman ben Gedalia A"H.*

**We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of this week's Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam, of FOUNDATIONS for Jewish Learning Monsey, N.Y. 10952 914-352-0111. Fax-914-352-0305, 800-700-9577**

---

Text Copyright &copy 1998 [Rabbi Dovid Green](#) and [Project Genesis, Inc.](#)

---