

HONOR AND SUSPICION

by Rabbi Dovid Green

And Yaakov sent messengers in front of him to Aisov his brother to the land of Seir to the field of Edom. And he commanded them saying; "So you shall say to my master to Aisov; So says Yaakov your servant; I have lived with Lavan and tarried till now and I have oxen and donkeys and sheep and servants and maid servants and I am sending to my master to find grace in your eyes. (Breishis 32:3-5)

Here is a multi-layered complex message that Yaakov needed to deliver in order that his brother Aisov should spare him and his family's future. Why did he choose to tell Aisov that he has been by Lavan till now?

One of the major reasons Yaakov went into exile in the first place was to learn how to deal with the "outside world". Ever since Aisov was deemed unworthy of playing a "team game" with Yaakov and "rounding off the ticket" by being the "public persona" while Yaakov would have ideally remained devoted to the less gritty but no less rigorous scholar world of scholarship, Yaakov now needed to go to get his masters degree in "the way of the world".

He stepped out onto the rugged campus of Lavan University where his salary and "the rules of the game" changed more frequently and arbitrarily than winter weather. After twenty-two years of losing battles. Yaakov emerged wholesome and even holy from that oft-twisted battlefield.

This little speech is his brief but sophisticated valedictorian address. How is that so? Part of the meaning of the message is "I have lived with Lavan- "Im Lavan garti" is a declaration that he has never benefited from the disputed blessing which is the source of Aisov's anger. "Garti" means that "I have been living as a stranger" for so many years. You Aisov are landed gentry. You have land and a house etc.

Rashi says that "garti," "I lived", is a reference to the 613 commandments of the Torah, which is the numerical value of that word. Yaakov is sending to his brother a subtle message that he is still the innocent and naïve introverted scholar that he was when he left. I have been involved in spiritual pursuits and I am therefore no threat, no competition to you, Aisov. I only have cattle and sheep as if to understate his material accomplishments.

However the work "Zohar Niglah" explains that Yaakov is actually announcing that he has successfully walked out of the mouth of a the lion. He wishes to plant in the mind of Aisov a seed a

doubt. How could he have survived the crippling treachery of one of the world's most evil geniuses and emerge not only unscathed but with wealth yet intact? Aisov would have to suspect that Yaakov had successfully applied his studious mind to understanding and mastering the artfully deceptive ways of Lavan and still remain honorable. What is his secret ability to survive?

Yaakov was aiming with a few well-chosen words to both disarm his brother, by posing as a non-threatening figure, and implying that he is also capable of out-maneuvering the best of the best. The layers of meaning in his terse message speak volumes about a graduated, Yaakov earning for himself a healthy dose of honor and suspicion.

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