

# AROMA OF CALM

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And he (Yaakov) bowed down to the earth seven times until he reached him until he reached his brother. And Essau ran to greet him and he hugged him and fell on his shoulder and he kissed him and he wept. (Breishis 33:3-4)*

With the bridges behind having been burnt and with a mandate to return home Yaakov finds himself between a rock and a hard place. Somehow he must navigate past his brother who has harbored a deep and brutal hatred, which was part of the reason for his twenty-two year absence.

Yaakov employed a number of strategies. 1) Direct diplomacy 2) Preparation for the possibility of war 3) Passionate prayer 4) Gift giving 5) Mental preparation, wrestling intellectually with his opponent in anticipation of their eventual confrontation. Something was done right, because miraculously Yaakov was able to skate by Essau unscathed. Which one was it that made the difference?

A number of years ago my wife and I went to make a shiva call, unfortunately, for the passing of a relative of mine. We brought along one of our young children who was not yet in school. As we sat talking, we were suddenly interrupted.

A beige poodle was sniffing and barking and climbing all over the couch and us. The child was startled and began to cry but the little doggy kept sniffing and barking and licking like we had biscuit hidden in our clothing. I was trying to remain calm and casual but was not entirely comfortable with the situation either.

The relatives reacted immediately, first with words unsuccessfully and only later by taking action. "Bad coffee! Down coffee! He won't hurt! He won't bite! He's really a good dog! Bad coffee! Down bad coffee! He really loves people and children especially! Down coffee! No coffee!" Eventually they just picked coffee up and put him back down behind the scissors- gate. They apologized for having excited the child and for coffee's uncharacteristically bad behavior.

At that moment it occurred to me that this is something that happens once in a thousands of years. It may never happen again in human history. It's a shame that it's a solemn occasion like a shiva call. I could hardly resist. Perhaps it might help just reset the mood in the room. So I yielded to my urge to comment and said, "Many times in my life I have been told to wake up and smell the coffee. This is the first time that coffee ever woke up and smelled me!"

Yaakov did everything humanly possible in advance, in anticipation of the confrontation. He didn't

wait until coffee smelled him first. He woke up in a big way and smelled the coffee. After having exhausted his efforts and having responsibly done all that was necessary in his circle of influence he could do no more than calmly yield control and be ready to accept happily from Hashem whatever the outcome.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson the sixth Lehavitcher Rebbe was being led to prison on trumped up charges. The guard pointed a gun into his face and threatened to shoot him. He told the abusive officer, "That weapon can only scare a person with one world and many gods. I believe in two worlds and one G-d! Now put that toy away!" He did.

The enemy smells fear and thrives on the power and control their terror is able create and grow in the hearts of their victim. It wasn't one thing that Yaakov did but that he did all that he could do. Acting in advance rather than reacting, he was able to achieve a humbly tranquil state of mind. The enemy was neutralized and calamity was averted simply by a freshly brewed and potently disarming aroma of calm.

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