

POWER TO CHOOSE

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"But G-d came to Lavan the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, 'Beware lest you speak with Yaakov (Jacob) either good or bad.'...And Lavan awoke early in the morning; he kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them, then Lavan went and returned to his place." (Beraishis/Genesis 31:24; 32:1)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1) notes that Lavan's return to his "place" is not simply a geographic reference; it speaks to his psychological return to his long-held corrupt values. Even though he experienced a personal Divine revelation, the experience did nothing to improve his character or impact him in the slightest. How could such a profound experience simply fail to sway him?

Lavan appreciated that as G-d instructed him not to perpetrate evil toward Yaakov, He neither actively withheld Lavan's freedom of choice nor prevented him from taking any specific action. Ultimately, Lavan retained his power to decide for himself. And while he chose to follow this particular Divine directive, his deeper understanding of his freedom to pursue evil prevented this experience, great as it was, from making any impression.

There are two thoughts that eternally run through the minds of most: "Why must there be evil in the world?" and "I would be a better person if only G-d would express clearly what to do with my life". G-d created evil because it is only through evil that creation has purpose: without it there is no "choice" in the world, no reason to want to do anything but fulfill G-d's will. But such service would be empty and devoid of meaning. G-d's essential expression of kindness in creation is His allowance for us to foster a relationship with Him and grow in our G-d consciousness through fulfillment of the mitzvos (Divine commands) of His Torah while resisting the tug of the Yetzer Hara (2) to do otherwise (3). And Lavan demonstrates that, with a properly functioning Yetzer Hara, even a personal audience with the Master of the Universe that brings a complete cognizance of the Divine mission of humanity, a person has the prerogative and power to squander the opportunity and sully the relationship.

Or not to.

Have a Good Shabbos.

(1) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through

much of the last century

(2) the evil inclination: Satan's personal tampering with one's thoughts creating temptation to sin and do wrong

(3) see Kol HaKollel Vayishlach 5763 (www.torah.org/learning/kolhakollel/5763/vayishlach.html)

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