

I HAVE EVERYTHING

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"[Esav] said, 'what is your relationship to this camp that I encountered?' And [Yaakov] said, 'I sent it] in order to find favor in the eyes of my master.' And Esav said, 'I have plenty, my brother; let what you have remain yours.' ... [but Yaakov replied] 'G-d has been kind to me, and I have everything,' and he persisted and [Esav] took." [33:8-9, 11]

Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, explains that "I have everything" means that *Yaakov* claimed to have all that he needed. *Esav*, on the other hand, said "I have plenty" - bragging that he had far more than his real needs.

The *Chofetz Chaim*, Rabbi Yisrael Mayer Kagan, notes that we can also read in these expressions two entirely different outlooks on life and money. *Esav* said "I have plenty," but even a very rich person desires still more: "one who has 100, desires 200." *Yaakov*, on the other hand, said "I have everything," meaning that he did not feel any need to acquire more. *Esav* wanted more and more money, while *Yaakov* was satisfied with what he had.

Based on experiences with Eastern religions, many people think that an emphasis on the spiritual means becoming an ascetic - denying the physical world. *Yaakov* set out for us the Jewish way: "I have what I need." "Who is rich?" asks the *Pirkei Avos*, the Sayings of the Fathers. "One who is satisfied with his lot."

Yaakov, in reality, was quite wealthy at the time. Spiritual health does not demand poverty, just a healthy attitude towards money.

There was once a man who came to see a psychiatrist. "Why are you here?" asked the doctor.

"I don't really know," replied the man. "My family insists that I have a problem."

"So, what's the problem?"

"I love pancakes," explained the patient.

"But what's wrong with that? I also like pancakes a great deal!"

"Really, doc? Then you must come to visit! I have 9,000 pancakes in my attic!"

On the other hand, a person does not need to be wealthy in order to have the wrong attitude. A person is supposed to make "normal efforts" to earn a living - but not go to extremes, or go into debt over luxuries.

In an on-line financial forum, one writer presented his dilemma: over the past two years, he had managed to reduce his debt a great deal, but there was still \$6,000 against his car, financed at 12%. It was clear that each \$1,000 was being repaid with difficulty. Now he had two choices: to pay off the debt quickly... or spend \$4,000 on his fiancée's engagement ring.

This is not to say that an \$8,000 ring is inherently bad (he was able to purchase at half the retail cost). It should, however, be out of the question for an individual who would be deeply in debt as a result - even before the wedding expenses. This individual did note that it was an "astronomical" figure, and his fiancée did decide to go with a more modest ring. But how many people make the wrong decisions in similar situations?

"*Yesh li Kol*," said *Yaakov* - "I have everything." I can meet my physical needs on a more modest level, and devote myself to higher pursuits.

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.