

WORRIED?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ya'akov was frightened and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, the flocks, the herds and the camels, into two camps. (Bereishis 32:8)

WHEN YA'AKOV AVINU heard that Eisav was coming out to "greet" him with 400 men, who were probably just as fierce as Eisav, he became afraid. Who wouldn't have been afraid? He was coming up against a brute of a person and his vicious army, and even if Ya'akov could take care of himself, he had to also take care of his young family and all his possessions, which made him far more vulnerable. So again who wouldn't have been afraid?

But this was Ya'akov Avinu, "Man of Truth." This was a man who all of his working years had to survive against the odds, and who witnessed first-hand how miraculously God can save a person. As Lavan just finished telling Ya'akov at the end of last week's parsha, he had the ability to harm Ya'akov, and would have, if God had not warned him to leave Ya'akov alone. A lesser man might have feared Eisav, but Ya'akov Avinu?

After all, we were also just told that once Yosef was born, Ya'akov was not afraid to return home and confront Eisav. Compared to the "flame" of Yosef, Eisav was considered to be like straw. With his army of 400 Eisav-like people, they were just a LOT of straw. So, what was he worried about?

The commentators ask this question, because such fear seems to have been below Ya'akov's level of bitachon and emunah—trust and faith in God. When it comes to the Avos and the Shevatim, though it may LOOK like something we would say, do, think, or feel, it is usually not, and it requires some kind of spin to make it sound right.

So, for example, it is explained that Ya'akov Avinu did not fear Eisav per se. Rather, he feared that his inability to honor his father and mother for 22 years, while Eisav did, left him spiritually vulnerable, and therefore physically vulnerable. He might escape Eisav, but would all those whom he loved and protected escape too? OUR spiritual mistakes can leave OTHERS vulnerable.

True, God had protected him until that point, but Divine protection is not an open check. It COSTS. The problem is, who knows how much and for what? The Talmud says that God has much greater expectations of righteous people than average people, so the slightest slip up for them can be equal to huge mistake for an average person.

The upshot is that no one really knows where they stand with God, or what they have coming to

them. An average person knows that he has more than enough red marks by his name to justify being left high-and-dry when in a bind. A righteous person may know that he serves God well, but that only means that his smallest of "sins" may also cause him to be left in a bind, as Ya'akov found himself the day he confronted Eisav on his way home.

So, can Ya'akov be faulted for being afraid of Eisav if it was a result of his own humility? If, in one's own humility, a person deems himself unworthy of a miracle when he needs one, even if through no fault of his own, can he be blamed? If anything, it is such humility that should make a person worthy of a miraculous redemption!

Not really, explains the Leshem. Quoting the Midrash Tehillim, the Leshem explains that bitachon—trust in God—is a trait unto itself. "Trust in God whether you're a good person or an evil one," the Midrash says, and the Ramban reiterates. Trust in God won't erase sins of the past, but it will push them aside momentarily in a time of need and bring success.

As the Ramban explains, once the miracle is over, a person has to still make a point of doing teshuvah for past transgressions. Otherwise, after a person's bitachon saves them from trouble, their unrectified sins can put them right back into it again.

Therefore, Ya'akov Avinu really had nothing to worry about as long as he trusted in God. It's not a question of humility. It's a question of trust, and the more complete the trust is, the more of a miracle a person will see. As the Leshem puts it, "Nothing stands in the way of bitachon."

NOTHING.

This makes bitachon one of the most important traits to develop. Like a muscle, it is there, but if left undeveloped, it will be weak when called upon to lift a "load." Bitachon has to be constantly exercised, on all levels of living. We just don't realize it because God allows us to enjoy all kinds of miracles on a daily basis without us even thinking about them, like your heart beating regularly, or your digestive system doing its job from hour to hour to keep you alive and feeling good.

Considering the importance of bitachon, it is surprising that it is not taught and developed in cheder, and yeshivos. It is ridiculous that more classes are not on the topic, or that rabbis don't address the issue from the pulpit on a regular basis, even if only for 10 minutes at a time. It's a mentality, and if forgotten about, we won't have it when we need it the most.

As a nation that has known no end to anti-Semitism and national crisis, we should know better. And yet . . .