

HEAVENLY PROTECTION

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Of all of the patriarchs, Yaakov is the most representative of all later Jewish history. His story therefore should be viewed as the story of Israel and its relations with the other peoples and faiths in the world. Yaakov flees from the sword of Eisav. On the way to the house of Lavan where he senses that he will find some sort of refuge, he is despoiled and robbed of all of his worldly possessions by Eisav's son, Elifaz. He arrives in abject poverty at Lavan's house as an unwanted guest that is tolerated to an extent but who is always destined to remain a stranger and outsider. Yet in spite of all of the obstacles and bigotry that Yaakov encounters, he rises to power and wealth in the house of Lavan.

This deserved and hard won success, a success that also makes Lavan wealthy in the process, becomes a cause for enmity and jealousy amongst Lavan's sons and family. They do not count their own blessings but rather begrudge others - Yaakov and the Jews - their blessings. They repeat the accusation that Yitzchak faced in the land of Grar at the hands of Avimelech and his cohorts - "Leave us, for you have become wealthy from us."

It is too galling to the insider to witness the success and wealth of the outsider. No matter what Yaakov will do he will remain the eternal pariah, the outsider who somehow has exploited the insider - so thinks Lavan and his family. There is no refuge from such feelings of paranoia and envy. The only thing that Yaakov can do is to move on again and return home to the Land of Israel and the home of his parents. And this in an encapsulated nutshell is the story of the Jewish people over its centuries of dispersion and exile.

The inherent disdain towards Jews generally and currently focused primarily on the Jewish state of Israel is a product of millennia of Lavan attitudes. In the 1930's, though Franklin Roosevelt was appalled by the treatment of Germany's Jews by the Nazis, he nevertheless commented that Hitler was correct in asserting that there were too many Jewish doctors and lawyers in Germany. His fashionable, Hudson Valley manor house upbringing imprinted this attitude upon his psyche.

The weakness of Lavan lies not only in his cheating and lying behavior but rather in his inability to allow Yaakov credit for his success. Every success of Yaakov is viewed as having been at Lavan's expense even though at the end of the parsha, Lavan himself admits that his own success and great wealth is directly traceable to Yaakov's efforts, talents and industry.

Yet this admission does not truly reflect any change of attitude in Lavan regarding Yaakov. Only

God's interference, so to speak, in warning Lavan not to attempt to physically harm Yaakov saves Yaakov from a most unpleasant and violent confrontation with Lavan.

Perhaps it is this knowledge that God's interference, so to speak, is necessary to preserve the Jewish people is, itself, the ultimate lesson of this story and of the parsha itself. May such heavenly protection and interference always continue.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

Text Copyright © 2006 by [Rabbi Berel Wein](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**