

TODAY DEPENDS ON TOMORROW

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The story of our father Yaakov, as portrayed in this week's parsha, is certainly the harbinger of all of the Jewish story in the long centuries of our exile and dispersion. Yaakov arrives penniless and persecuted - a survivor from the ravages of the enmity and sword of Eisav. He is subjected to further humiliation and discrimination in the house of his erstwhile father-in-law and employer Lavan who exploits his talents and labor to the fullest.

In spite of this unfair treatment, Yaakov prospers and builds a family and future for himself. Yaakov's success in the face of overwhelmingly negative circumstances only enrages Lavan and his sons and Yaakov is eventually forced to flee and return to the Land of Israel. Here, he will again encounter enmity and great challenges to the survival of his family and himself.

Through all of this tumult and danger Yaakov perseveres and succeeds in building a family that will develop into an eternal and holy nation. And this is pretty much the story of the Jewish people over its over three millennia of existence. No other people or group of immigrants has ever done so much for its host nation as have the Jews. Yet, in the main, their efforts and achievements have been unrewarded if not even resented.

This phenomenon of ingratitude is Lavan's inheritance bequeathed in full measure to the non-Jewish world generally. The Jew may be elevated, exploited, rewarded or persecuted but rarely if ever is he truly appreciated. The world has a mental block against truly appreciating the role of the Jew in the progress of civilization. And in our current world, that mental block has been extended to focus mainly on the Jewish state of Israel.

The secret of Yaakov's ability to overcome Lavan, and to succeed in preserving the heritage of Avaraham and Yitzchak, lies in his constant recollection of the great dream that he dreamt at the beginning of his sojourn in exile. God's presence in the house of Yaakov was a palpable one. He always felt God's presence over him and thus his vision of the long game that he was to play triumphed over the near sighted short game that Lavan always played. Yaakov, who is aware and confident in God's promise that "I will be with you," realizes that reversals and even tragedies are still only temporary events in the march of Jewish history.

It is the constant recollection of his great vision and dream that fuels Yaakov's strength and sense of purpose. Lavan's vision from Heaven is merely a warning not to further harm Yaakov. But he lacks grander visions - no ladders that can ascend heavenward and no sense of eternity. In this respect

Lavan and Eisav resemble each other acutely. They are all about "now" - the additional pot of lentils and labor that can be squeezed out of the weak and defenseless with no thought about the ultimate future and the consequences of their behavior. Yaakov states that "tomorrow I will come into my reward" - Jews are concerned about their ultimate tomorrow and not just their today. He who is concerned about tomorrow is also successful today.

Shabbat shalom.

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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