

# JUST SAY NO

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Our father Yaakov sends emissaries to meet his brother Eisav and attempt to mollify him and to head off a possibly violent and even fatal confrontation. There are differing opinions in Midrash and the commentaries whether these emissaries were angels or humans. In any event it appears from the parsha that they were unsuccessful in their mission and were unable to deflect Eisav and his four hundred armed men from confronting Yaakov.

If we agree that his emissaries were mere humans then it is understandable that they could fail in their mission of dissuading Eisav and convince him to leave Yaakov and his family alone. However if we believe that Yaakov's emissaries were truly angels then how could they have failed in their mission? An angel never fails in his mission, right?

But we see from another incident in the life of Yaakov that human will and strength can even overcome an angel. Yaakov himself wrestles the angel of Eisav to a standoff. Yaakov's name is changed to Yisrael because he was able to wrestle and struggle with angels and men and emerge triumphant. Never underestimate the power of a human being for good or to wreak havoc.

Eisav's determination to harm Yaakov is so intense and fixed that even a horde of angels cannot deflect him from his evil purpose. Angels have no freedom of will and action and are therefore inherently weaker than are human beings. Angels have no hidden resource of will and strength - they are what they are. Humans, when taxed, can be righteous or evil in the extreme.

Only when Eisav finally sees Yaakov and his family before him does his will waver and he now becomes much more conciliatory. He is naturally influenced by the vast amount of money that Yaakov showers upon him. That is also part of human nature for humans are always susceptible and are weakened by monetary corruption. It is not the sight of heavenly angels that softens Eisav's heart towards his brother as much as it is the material largesse that is bestowed upon him by Yaakov.

Over the long history of the Jewish people, many a decree conceived against Jews has been thwarted because of monetary considerations paid to the proposed enforcers. As distasteful as this may sound and feel it was always a method employed to aid Jewish survival in difficult times and places.

Angels are not subject to such tactics and temptations but humans are. Humans can overcome angels but rarely are they able to elude temptation and its resulting troubles. However, the same

strength of will that is necessary and is part of the human makeup to overcome angels is also present when humans face temptations and difficult choices in life.

There was a campaign against drug use by teenagers in the United States a few years ago. The campaign's slogan was "Just Say No." I realize that this is a very simplistic way to deal with the problem of drug use by young people but it has the ring of truth to it. The strength to say no to angels is the same strength to say no to harm and evil.

Shabat 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)