

# EYE WANT YOURS

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

*"But the seventh year shall be a complete rest of the land..."(25:4)*

The Midrash introduces this week's parsha by noting that Eisav was a "rah ayin" - "possessor of bad eye". This attribute, continues the Midrash is also exhibited by a person who fails to observe the laws of shemita, i.e. abstaining from working the land on the seventh year and allowing others to partake from its produce.<sup>1</sup> Why is Eisav's pursuit of wealth described as possessing an "ayin rah"? If a "rah ayin" indicates that a person exhibits an unquenchable thirst for material possessions to the extent the he is willing to violate the precepts, examples can be shown involving other precepts which require sustaining a financial loss. Why is a violator of the laws of shemita singled out as possessing a "rah ayin"?

The Torah promises that a person who adheres to the laws of shemita will be blessed with an abundance of food for the sixth, seventh and eighth years.<sup>2</sup> Yet Ramban reveals that one of the primary reasons for the Babylonian exile was Bnei Yisroel's failure to observe shemita; the seventy years of exile correspond to the seventy shemitos which were not observed.<sup>3</sup> With Hashem's guarantee that they would not go hungry, why did Bnei Yisroel not observe the laws of shemita?

Rashi, in Parshas Vayishlach, contrasts Yaakov's manner of relating to his possessions to that of Eisav's. Yaakov states "yeish li kol" - "I have all that I need", while Eisav proclaims "yeish li rav" - "I have much more than I need".<sup>4</sup> Generally, we attribute a person's greed to his insatiable appetite. Concerning Eisav, this explanation does not suffice for he admits that he has more than he would ever need. What could be the motivating factor that drives him to continue amassing more wealth?

Eisav is not driven by an intrinsic desire to satisfy his needs. His desire is fueled by his need to ensure that no one else will possess this wealth. Although he is aware that he has no personal need for this wealth, he attempts to obtain it only in order to prevent another from having it. This is the characteristic that the Midrash defines as a "rah ayin", the inability to "fargin" another person his good fortune. Not only does Eisav not appreciate the good fortune of others, but he does whatever he can to prevent others from having this good fortune.

The inability to observe the laws of shemita is a result of possessing a "rah ayin". Even with Hashem's guarantee to supply us with all our needs, we could not tolerate opening our fields so that others could benefit from them. Although the portion that they would have consumed would not

have diminished what we needed for our own well-being, the mere thought of others possessing that which could be ours prevented us from observing the shemitah for the entire duration of the first Temple.

1. Tanchuma

2.25:21

3.26:17, See Shabbos 33a

4.33:11 (see Rashi)

## A One-Sided Affair

*"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember..." (26:42)*

At the conclusion of the "tochacha" - the admonition which records the devastating punishments that Bnei Yisroel will receive for abandoning the covenant with Hashem, the Torah relates that Hashem will ultimately remember His covenant made with the Patriarchs and in their merit Bnei Yisroel will be redeemed.

Rashi cites a Midrash that questions why the word "zachor" - "remember" is juxtaposed to the Patriarch Avraham, "es brisi Avraham ezkor", and to the Patriarch Yaakov, "vezocharti es brisi Yaakov", yet there is no mention of the word "zachor" in connection with the Patriarch Yitzchak?<sup>1</sup>

The Ba'al Haturim addresses the same issue and suggests that Hashem particularly remembers the merits of Avraham and Yaakov, for they observed the mitzvos both in Eretz Yisroel and outside of the land of Israel, whereas Yitzchak only observed the mitzvos in Eretz Yisroel. Therefore, continues the Ba'al Haturim, both Avraham and Yaakov are referred to by Hashem as "avadi" - "My servants", while this appellation is not conferred upon Yitzchak.<sup>2</sup>

Rashi in Parshas Toldos cites the Midrash which states that Yitzchak was not allowed to leave Eretz Yisroel because he was an "olah temima" - "perfect elevation offering", having been offered as a sacrifice by his father. Due to his heightened level of sanctity, he was instructed to remain in the Holy Land.<sup>3</sup> How could Avraham and Yaakov, who served Hashem in a land of lesser sanctity, possess greater merits than Yaakov whose relationship with Hashem was on a higher plane?

In Parshas Eikev, Rashi comments that the purpose of wearing tefillin and placing mezuzos on our doorposts outside of Eretz Yisroel is so that we will be well versed in the observance of these mitzvos upon our return to the Land.<sup>4</sup> The Ramban expands this notion to include all mitzvos, implying that the purpose of observing mitzvos outside of Eretz Yisroel is solely to prevent us from forgetting how to perform them, for only in Eretz Yisroel are we truly bound by their performance.<sup>5</sup>

The Ramban requires further elaboration, for it appears as if there is no intrinsic value in performing mitzvos outside of Eretz Yisroel.

The Midrash records an analogy which offers insight into the Ramban's words. A king who is angered by his wife sends her back to her father's home. While there, her father instructs her to continue wearing her regal clothing and cosmetics.<sup>6</sup> The Ksav Vekaboleh explains that the message of the Midrash is that aside from causing her to remember the required procedure for when she will eventually be summoned back to the palace, continuing to wear her royal garb serves an additional purpose; by maintaining her own elevated status, she affords honor to her estranged husband. Similarly, by performing the mitzvos outside of Eretz Yisroel, we show our desire to continue our relationship with Hashem, and in doing so, we bring Him honor.<sup>7</sup> Mitzvos actualize our relationship with Hashem. In Eretz Yisroel, where Hashem's presence is discernable, the reality of the relationship affords Bnei Yisroel a sense of reciprocity for their actions. We feel closer to Hashem as we perform more mitzvos and being able to sense this closeness gives us fulfillment. Outside of Eretz Yisroel there is no immediate sense of reciprocity, for Hashem's presence is concealed. All mitzva observance is performed as a one-sided relationship. The only motivation for continuing to observe is the desire to obey the word of Hashem, for the fulfillment which is attained through a reciprocal relationship is lacking.

Yitzchak reached great levels of sanctity and maintained a flawless relationship with his Creator, yet he was not faced with the challenge of serving a Creator under circumstances where there was no perceived relationship. Avraham and Yaakov excelled in their observance even when the relationship appeared completely one-sided. Therefore, their merits have a greater impact upon their descendants. It is this notion that the Ba'al Haturim is alluding to when he states that only Avraham and Yaakov are referred to as slaves, for a slave does his master's bidding irrespective of an existing relationship. Yitzchak may be compared to a son following the wishes of his father; whereas it is a relationship of a higher level, it is not as commendable as a person who accepts to be a slave without receiving the fulfillment of a reciprocal relationship.

1.26:42

2.Ibid

3.26:2

4.Devarim 11:18

5.Ibid

6.Sifri 43

7.26:42