

KNOW WITH WHOM YOU ARE DEALING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayishlach

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At the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach [Bereishis 32:5], Yaakov sends Eisav the message (according to the Medrashic interpretation) that I have resided with Lavan (im Lavan garti) and nevertheless I have fulfilled the 613 commandments (v'Taryag mitzvos shamarti). Rashi (in his first explanation of the expression "im Lavan garti") interprets "I did not become a dignitary or notable, but a mere transient alien (ger). It does not befit you to hate me over the blessing of your father who blessed me 'Be a lord to your brothers' - - for it has not been fulfilled in me."

In other words, Yaakov is telling Eisav, "I know you are still angry with me because I 'stole' the brochos; but I want to tell you something: You don't need to be upset, because it did not work! Here I am today 34 years later and I am nothing more than a foreigner, a stranger."

Likewise, on the pasuk where Yaakov explains to Eisav that he has acquired "ox and donkey", Rashi comments: Father said to me, 'From the dew of the heavens and from the fatness of the land'. This property (cattle and slaves) is neither from the heavens nor from the land." Again, the bottom line is that the brochos did not work and in hindsight, there is no reason for Eisav to be getting upset!

We must ask two questions: First, Yaakov certainly did not expect that these blessings of Yitzchak would apply right here and now. These were not 'instant blessings'. These blessings were not fulfilled until years later when the Jewish people returned to the Land of Canaan and settled it - up through the glorious period of Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon]. It is like starting a business. Everyone knows that a business does not make money for the first few years. A person does not close his business after 6 months because he "hasn't made his first million yet". When Bill Gates started Microsoft in a garage in Seattle, Washington, he did not become a 40 billion dollar individual overnight. In terms of the long range fulfillment of Yitzchak's blessings to Yaakov, 34 years is merely the blink of an eye. So what type of an argument is this to Eisav that he should not be upset now

because Yaakov still has not seen fulfillment of his father's blessing?

Rav Moshe Feinstein asks a more profound question: This approach of pointing out to Eisav that "the bracha did not work" gives the appearance as though Yaakov is saying that Yitzchak's bracha -- which in effect was prophecy - is not true! He seems to say that the blessing was not worth anything. Heaven forbid can we say that Yaakov did not believe whole-heartedly that Yitzchak's blessings to him would yet come true.

The Sefer Ikvei Erev provides an answer to which I would like to append an idea of the Sforno, which makes the approach even more understandable.

The first rule of public speaking is "Know your crowd". The first rule of negotiations is "Know with whom you are dealing".

Back in Parshas Toldos, when Eisav came in from the field tired, he told Yaakov "Sell your birthright to me AS THIS DAY (ka'yom)" [Bereishis 25:31]. The Sforno explains the nuance of the term "ka'yom": Eisav was a person who lived for the here and now -- a person who lived for TODAY. When such a person is hungry and he wants a bowl of lentils, he wants it NOW. He is willing to sell something (e.g. - the right of the first born - the 'bechorah') which could be tremendously valuable in the future for the sake of acquiring a simple bowl of soup right now.

Yaakov knew Eisav's attitude and his value system and therefore proposed a "sale price" for the bechorah, which he knew would be attractive to his brother. Yaakov knew that these blessings were something that would be relevant and valuable not only for him and his children but for his great great grandchildren for all generations as well. He knew this was something that affected the future of the Jewish people for millennia to come. Future generations and future millennia were not currency for Eisav. He was strictly a man of the present, a man of "ka'yom". He is strictly interested in instant gratification. If it is not right away, it is not worth anything.

In light of this background, we can understand Yaakov's psychological approach to his brother in Parshas Vayishlach. Yaakov tells Eisav, in effect, "Look Eisav, it is now 34 years later. Nothing has come of the blessings I purchased from you." In Eisav's eyes, 34 years is an eternity. He is now more convinced than ever that he got the better deal in the earlier sale. Of course, Yaakov did not doubt the prophetic blessings that Yitzchak bestowed upon him. However, he knew this was a "long term investment" and he knew with whom he was dealing. He was dealing with an Eisav for whom if it is not here today, it does not have much value.

This explains something else. At the beginning of the parsha, Yaakov is full of fear. He prepares for the meeting with Eisav with prayer, with presents, and with preparations for battle. But in fact he had an insurance policy. Eisav had already stated that as long as Yitzchak was still alive, he was not going to kill Yaakov. If so, why was Yaakov so afraid? Yitzchak was still alive at this point!

The answer is that when one deals with an Eisav, the whim of the moment can overpower him.

While theoretically, he may have felt "I don't want to cause pain to my father" but with an Eisav, if he gets set off for a moment in the wrong way, he could decide to kill Yaakov on the spot! This is the way of the wicked. They are subject to their whims and their passions. For Yaakov to rely on the fact that Yitzchak was still alive and Eisav once promised not to kill his brother during his father's lifetime would be foolhardy when dealing with such a personality.

We say these words and we feel smug about ourselves. We say "Yes. Eisav is wicked and he only lives for the here and now (ka'yom)." Unfortunately, all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, many times in our lives make compromises as we live in the "here and now" and we do not take into account the long-range future and certainly not eternity.

The fact is that many people put most of their time, worry, and concern into the temporal things of life -- be it money, careers, houses, or all the things that attract us. We are really making a decision to give up things involving eternity for that which is temporal. How many people, when they are 40, 45, 50 years old and their kids are already grown up, realize that they spent the first 20, 25, or 30 years of their lifetime invested in their careers at the expense of their children? When they finally "wake-up" and they say they want to do something with their kids, the kids are already out of the house and it is too late. This is a case of people having decided for the "ka'yom" (here and now) in lieu of the "nitzchiyus" [eternity].

So we cannot so smugly say to ourselves, "Eh! That is an Eisav. An Eisav sells the bechorah for a bowl of soup. An Eisav gives up Olam HaBah [the world to come] for Olam HaZeh [this world]." We need to ask ourselves how many times we are guilty of the same thing. We need to take the long view of life. We need to take Yaakov's approach.

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