

MONEY IS TIME

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn" Beresheet 32:25

Yaakov Abinu a'h survived his encounter with Laban only to face his wicked brother Esav. Since the animosity that Esav felt had not subsided in the 20 years since Yaakov fled to Haran to marry and build a family, Yaakov prepared for war. Prayer, strategy and bribery were the three elements of his defense. Firstly, he prayed to Hashem to protect him as He had promised on Har Hamoriah the night Yaakov slept there and dreamt his "ladder dream". He then split his camp into two so that should Esav encounter one camp the other could flee to safety and insure the survival of the Jewish people. Lastly, he sent to his brother an entourage bearing gifts of cattle and valuables in order to bribe his brother and to get him to forgive and forget.

Under the cover of dark Yaakov ferried his family and possessions across a river called Nahal Yabok, in order to place a body of water between his camp and his brother's soldiers. After completing the transfer, Yaakov went back across and was left alone on Esav's side of the river. Rashi cites the Talmud's interpretation. Yaakov had forgotten some small earthenware jugs and risked his life to go back into danger to retrieve them. The Sages comment: "From here we learn "to the righteous, their money is dearer to them than their bodies." Since the honest person struggles to earn every penny without deception the money that he earns is dear to him.

Of course, our Rabbis are not suggesting that one risk one's life for even significant amounts of material wealth. Their intent is that to the righteous, the spiritual use of honestly earned money has a value that should not be treated with indifference.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller zt'l wrote that every moment of life is a precious opportunity for spiritual achievement and therefore, a person should be very particular about the use of every minute of time. One, he proposed, should minimize the amount of time spent on acquisition of the things of this world. The Hafetz Hayim said, "Many feel time is money when in fact money is time." If a person squanders materialistic possessions, one will then be forced to expend more precious time from his or her life to acquire more to sustain them self.

Rav Hasda was a wealthy sage in the times of the Gemara. When he would walk through an area where there were thorn bushes, he would lift his robes exposing his legs to the painful scratches and cuts of the thorns rather than allow his robe to become damaged. If he was rich why would he subject himself to pain rather than let the garment rip? He too realized that this would cost him TIME

-- the time it would take to earn the money to buy another robe. He chose to suffer physical pain rather than lose a moment latent with potential for spiritual growth. [Baba Kamma 91B]

There is a remez -- a hint -- to this attitude in the message that Yaakov Abinu sent to Esav. He enumerated the wealth he had earned while in the employ of his father-in-law Laban -- "Vayehi lee shor, v'hamor..." ["I have acquired oxen and donkeys..."]. The Gemara explains that the word "Vayehi" indicates sorrow [Megillah 10B]. Yaakov was hinting to Esav -- "The wealth I have accumulated causes me sorrow when I think of the time I had to invest in order to get it." His preference was for spiritual achievement not material success.

We too must learn from our Patriarchs and Sages. Everyone was created with a mission. The goal is to create a beautiful abode for eternity in the World to Come. The most important tool we were blessed with to perfect our eternal home -- is TIME. Every moment in this world is an opportunity to earn untold spiritual wealth for one's future. The righteous knew that one must survive and support themselves while here in this world -- but they felt sorrow over every moment they had to waste in the pursuit of survival. One should take this lesson and make it one's credo -- "No price can be set on my possessions -- they cost me time to acquire." Keep what you have. Preserve your time wisely. You will become rich -- forever!

Shabbat Shalom

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