

# AS GOOD AS BAD

*by Rabbi Raymond Beyda*

*"I have lived with Laban" [32:5]*

After leaving his fearful confrontation with Esav, Yaakov Abinu a"h is beset by another meeting that makes him more than anxious. His wicked brother Esav is approaching with 400 warriors. Yaakov Abinu a"h took a multi-faceted approach in order to pass this meeting in safety. He sent gifts to Esav, he prays and he splits his camp into two parts -- preparing for battle should all else fail. Messengers were sent with the simple phrase "I lived with Laban." Rashi explains that Yaakov was telling Esav that he had spent over 20 years living with Laban and he was still able to keep all 613 commandments and he did not learn from Laban's wicked ways.

Certainly Esav was not concerned with the level of Torah observance that Yaakov his brother adhered to while living with their uncle --what was Yaakov trying to convey to him?

Rabbenu Yosef Hayim from Baghdad, The Ben Ish Hai, explains with a parable. One upon a time the Yeser Hatob--the Good Inclination -- met the Evil Inclination --the Yeser Ha- ra. The evil one suggested, "Let's have a cease fire. I will give you my customers and you in return will give me yours." Surprisingly the Yeser Hatob agreed.

One of the more dedicated disciples of the good inclination was a pious man that sat learning Torah day and night. That evening, while the man was sitting in his study learning intensely the Evil Inclination entered the library and made the man feel that he needed to take a break too get a breath of fresh air. As he strolled through the neighborhood, the man stopped by the window of a small cafe where he saw several men playing cards. He was enthralled by the intensity of the competition and fascinated by the fact that the men were so involved in their game that they failed to notice when their coffee was served.

About an hour later the pious man returned home. He went to his study and began sobbing in a mournful tone. His wife, obviously concerned, inquired as to what was causing her husband such grief.

"Until now," answered her spouse, "I thought that I was fulfilling my obligations to G-d in a golden fashion, but I learned today that I am not even copper. Tonight I watched men wasting their time playing cards. But I did notice that as they played they were so enthusiastic and focused on their game that they didn't even notice that the waiter had delivered their coffee to the table. When I learn Torah I do not forget to drink!" That evening the man accepted upon himself to try even harder

in his studies to reach the same level of devotion to his Torah as the gamblers had for their game.

The next morning the Evil inclination approached the Good Inclination and said, 'I am canceling the cease-fire. It's every man for himself. When I work with your clients, Instead of bringing them down I rile them up to a higher level of devotion to Torah.'

Esav knew that war with Yaakob must be fought on a spiritual level even more so than on a physical level. Yaakob Abinu wanted Esav to drop his guard. He sent the message to Esav -- "Don't be overly concerned by my success in the house of Laban. It is true as your agents have probably reported to you that I did keep the 613 commandment, however, I did not learn to maximize the good by doing my misvot with the excitement and enthusiasm that Laban did his wicked deeds".

A person has to know them self. Self-evaluation on a regular basis is the path to self-improvement and spiritual growth. Yaakob was honest with himself. He knew that until his Torah observance was as "hot" as the evil doings of Laban, he had not yet reached the ultimate service. None will deny that when "partying" staying awake, alert and energetic until dawn is not difficult, while reading a little Torah at night is a perfect antidote for insomnia. Everyone must try to their best to maximize their service to G-d by doing their misvot with the excitement and intensity of those who are in the clutches of the Evil Inclination.

### **DID YOU KNOW THAT**

A person should be actively involved in preparing for Shabbat. Even if a person is well off and has many "servants" the person should be involved personally in preparing for Shabbat. Even though one's wife and children do most of the preparations a person should do some things for the honor of Shabbat. The Kabbalah teaches that the perspiration created by Shabbat preparations erases sins from the person's soul like the tears of repentance and prayer. It is recommended that when purchasing items for Shabbat that one verbalizes "Likhbod Shabbat" --i.e. "I am buying this item for the honor of Shabbat." [Source Yalkut Yosef, O'H Siman 250:1]

### **CONSIDER THIS FOR A MINUTE**

The Zohar explains that out of love for the Jewish people Hashem gave them His holy Torah. He also gave them the gift of Shabbat in order to demonstrate His affection and to insure that they will stay close to Him. Shabbat is a day that is holier than the other days and is also more peaceful and happy than the weekdays. Shabbat, explains the Zohar, is equal to the whole Torah. One who observes the Shabbat is considered like one who keeps the entire Torah. [Source Zohar, B'Shalah, p 47a]. Text Copyright &copy 2004 by [Rabbi Raymond Beyda](#) and [Torah.org](#).