

"And (Yaakov) raised his voice and cried" (29:11)

After a long journey, Yaakov *Avinu* finally arrived in Padan Aram and encountered his future wife, Rachel. One would expect Yaakov to have expressed profound joy at the momentous occasion of this first meeting. Instead of rejoicing, however, Yaakov cried. *Rashi* explains that Yaakov cried because he was grieved that he came to Rachel empty-handed. In contrast, his father, Yitzchak, had been sent with jewelry to meet his future wife, Rivkah. Yaakov's sudden poverty is attributed to an unusual altercation between Yaakov and Elifaz, Eisav's son. When Yaakov ran from his parents' home, he narrowly escaped the venomous wrath of Eisav. At his father's behest, Elifaz chased after Yaakov in order to kill him. When Elifaz caught up to Yaakov, he was suddenly unable to perform his mission. Having been raised in a house replete with the sanctity of *mitzvah* performance, he was incapable of committing murder. Elifaz, the consummate student, turned to Yaakov to advise him of a way to fulfill his father's imperative, even though it was contrary to *Torah* law. Yaakov advised Elifaz to take all of his money, which would render him "dead" in a small way, since Yaakov would be incapable of supporting himself and others. The *Baalei Tosfos* explain that although Elifaz was apparently exempt from fulfilling his father's wishes, he nonetheless wanted to find a way to comply while simultaneously conforming with *Torah* law.

Horav A. H. Lebowitz, Shlita, observes that Elifaz's dilemma and ensuing actions demonstrate a remarkable level of appreciation for the value of a *mitzvah*. Because his mission was in direct violation of the *Torah*, he could have rationalized walking away without even trying to execute it. He implored his uncle, however, to contrive some scheme in which he could simultaneously fulfill both obligations: his father's negative wishes and *Torah* law. Thus, Elifaz demonstrated dedication to the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents.

We should also note Yaakov *Avinu's* total devotion to *mitzvos*. He was willing to give away all of his possessions in order to enable another individual to perform a small facet of a *mitzvah*, despite the negative orientation of this "*mitzvah*" towards them. Even more amazing is the fact that this is the same Yaakov who jeopardized his life in order to protect the "*small jars*" (*Rashi* 32:25) which he owned.

Do we nurture equal love for every *mitzvah*? True, we might never attain that level of devotion reached by Yaakov *Avinu*, but our goals must be set towards that objective. Complacency in *mitzvah* performance can be devastating. We should view each obstacle we confront as a challenge to be overcome, while we perceive every *mitzvah* as an opportunity to gain eternity. With these thoughts as a guiding perspective, every *mitzvah* will take on a new meaning.