

What is my crime? What sin did I commit that you were in such hot pursuit of me? (31:36)

After over two decades of being cheated and surrounded by his evil father-in-law, Lavan, Yaakov *Avinu* left in the hope of finally having a home undisturbed by the nefarious machinations of his father-in-law. Lavan, of course, accused our Patriarch of every evil endeavor known to man. Yaakov's response? "What is my crime?" No screaming; no shouting; no malediction; just a relaxed and calm, "What did I do?" How did he contain himself after so many years of suffering and degradation? **Horav Reuven Karlinstein, Shlita**, explains that Yaakov did not respond to Lavan, because he was acutely aware that Lavan was merely a pawn, part of Hashem's Divine Plan. A Jew who lives with such awareness takes a blasé attitude to life's experiences. He knows that he does not call the shots; Hashem does. He might as well accept what comes at him. Ranting and raving will not alter the sequel to his story.

So many factors are instrumental in Hashem's determination of what, when and how He will have the final curtain played out. We are not privy to all of the factors, and certainly not to the decision-making process. We must, however, never lose sight of the big picture. Every decision that we make must take Hashem into consideration. The issue of secular education was once raised in Lithuania. The government felt that the Jewish school children should have their secular education during the morning hours together with gentile children. During the latter part of the day, if the Jewish children desired to study Torah subjects, they were free to do so. The primary times of the day, when the children's minds were sharp, should be devoted to secular knowledge. Obviously, two things were wrong with this demand: the child's minds would not be functioning at their optimum acuity in the afternoon; studying secular subjects together with gentile children would be damaging to their spiritual health. The problem quickly reached crisis proportion.

The *Ponevezer Rav, zl*, **Horav Yosef Kahaneman**, was a very wise man, and he knew that the only way to overturn this decree was with sharp logic. The Lithuanian ministers were not moved by tears – only rationalism. The *Rav* asked to meet with the education minister. He asked that a dispensation be made on behalf of the Jewish children, so that they could learn secular studies in the afternoon. The education minister was very understanding, listening respectfully to the *Rav* present his case. He then asked, "Rabbi, you have not explained to me why the Jewish children are unable to study secular disciplines together with our wonderful Lithuanian children. Is there something different in the way you teach secular studies so that you must study separately?"

"Yes, we count differently than you. For example, you begin counting with zero, one, two, etc. We begin nothing with "zero." Every subject, every issue, every occurrence, begins with the number "One," the One G-d in whom we believe!"

It is a basic tenet of our belief that nothing "just happens." Every occurrence in life is pre-ordained by the Almighty. The sooner we learn to accept this verity, the less complex life will be.