

## I have been diminished by all of the kindness and by all the truth that You have done Your servant. (32:11)

*Rashi* explains that Yaakov *Avinu* feared that his merits had been reduced as a result of the kindness and truth that Hashem had performed for him. He was concerned that, since the time that Hashem had promised to be with him, he had become soiled with sin, and this sin would cause him to be given over to Eisav. *Rashi* seems to be making two statements. First, the Patriarch was worried that the merits which might have protected him had been reduced by his acceptance of Hashem's favors. True, he possessed many *z'chusim*, but he was spared until now from falling into the hands of his father-in-law, Lavan, which occurred after he had narrowly escaped the clutches of Eisav. Therefore, Yaakov realized that he was riding on Hashem's favors, which were the result of his merits. At a certain point his "merit" account was going to be greatly reduced.

Second, *Rashi* appears to be saying that Yaakov feared the effects of sin. Perhaps he had become spiritually tarnished due to behavior that was unbecoming to him. We could simply suggest that Yaakov feared both: the reduction of merit; and the effect of sin. Thus, we may say that the Patriarch's primary anxiety resulted from the fear that he had become tarnished by sin. If so, why did his merits not protect him? He feared that his merits had been deflected as a result of the overwhelming kindnesses he had received from Hashem. Therefore, he feared that he could no longer rely on the merits to protect him from the consequences of his sin.

**Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl**, offers an insightful explanation to connect the two: depletion of merit; and the tarnishment of sin. When a person observes the multifold kindnesses that he receives from Hashem; when he takes into account the incredible Divine Providence which guides his life; when he takes these wonderful gifts and thinks about them – their meaning – their value – their outstanding benefit, suddenly the demand for him to act properly and serve Hashem better increases greatly.

This is what Yaakov intimated. Although the sins that he might have committed were very "light" in nature (and, quite possibly, considered a "sin" only commensurate with the Patriarch's personal elevated spiritual plane), now that he took into account all of the Heavenly kindnesses and truths he had experienced, he feared that his sins had become magnified. The more one is aware of Hashem, the greater is the infraction when he acts out of line. Yaakov's deeper cognition of the gratitude he owed the Almighty gave his actions, which before seemed miniscule, much greater weight.

We can derive a powerful lesson from here. Some of us are convinced – or at least have convinced ourselves – that they lead perfectly observant lives, and whatever minor infractions they "may" commit, are just that – minor. Do we, however, take into account the many favors that *Hashem Yisborach* has accorded us? If we were to tally up the wonderful kindnesses against the "minor" infractions, would we still be so smug in the self-righteous portrayal of ourselves? I could be wrong,

but it is an idea to consider.