

Lavan overtook Yaakov. (31:25)

Imagine how Yaakov *Avinu* must have felt when Lavan caught up with him. He made an attempt to escape. He knew that if Lavan overtook him, he had little chance to remain alive. No one could best Lavan. So Yaakov kept on running, while Lavan continued his pursuit. The *Midrash* teaches us that, while Yaakov was running from Lavan, unbeknownst to him, another enemy, his brother Eisav, was also in pursuit. Armed to the teeth with four hundred trusted soldiers, Eisav was finally free to rid himself of Yaakov. His brother would pay a hefty price for appropriating the blessings.

Let us now see what the *Midrash* teaches about these two enemies of Yaakov, who were both bearing down on the Patriarch. *Chazal* say that Lavan chose not to kill Yaakov for two reasons. First, Hashem had warned him to stay away. The Almighty gave Lavan an offer that he could not refuse. He was told, in no uncertain terms, to stay away from Yaakov. Second, Lavan heard that his other nephew, the one who was so dear to his heart, Eisav, was also after Yaakov. Eisav did not travel light. His entourage was comprised of four hundred killers, whose sole purpose in life was following their master Eisav's command. If he said, "Kill," they killed – regardless of who the designated victim was. Lavan was concerned that, if he killed Yaakov before Eisav arrived, Eisav would claim that he was redeeming his brother's innocent blood! How dare Lavan harm his only brother? Lavan did not harm Yaakov, because he feared Eisav's reaction.

Eisav handpicked four hundred men who certainly put fear in the hearts of anyone who came within their proximity. Yaakov must have trembled, knowing that when they would meet, he would be in serious peril. Little did he realize that these four-hundred men, by their very presence, were responsible for sparing Yaakov from the wrath of Lavan. We may think that we are being besieged by the enemy, when, in fact, Hashem is manipulating this enemy for our benefit.

Man is hopelessly bewildered concerning the ways of Hashem. Indeed, just when one thinks that he is beginning to understand what is taking place, Hashem throws us a curve, just to demonstrate how myopic we are. We grope around, thinking that we actually see; yet, essentially, we either see what we want to see (or what we convince ourselves is present) or what Hashem allows us to see. The big picture, the whole story, remains elusive, because this is something to which man is not privy.

The *Yalkut* teaches that the dog is, by nature, insolent and brazen. In order to curb his brazenness, Hashem created the dog to be "poor," relegated to relying on human beings for food and sustenance. Thus, the dog will serve his master with fidelity and appreciate the favor that he receives. We are being taught that poverty is, at times, a favor. Hashem knows the nature of each individual and, apparently, some people cannot handle the test of wealth. It might go to their heads, which will lead to arrogance. The *shoresh*, source, of their *neshamos*, souls, is such that the fewer opportunities they have for confronting the challenge of insolence, arrogance, brazenness – the better for them. Essentially, poverty is a favor in disguise

The *Chafetz Chaim* comments that people wonder why some are created with a silver spoon in their mouths, while others barely subsist from meal to meal. He explains that what we see before us is merely one frame of a large picture. We do not take into consideration that there is much more to see, as we are not invited to be part of the holistic viewing audience.

He compares this to a visitor who entered a *shul* for the first time and is surprised with the manner that *aliyos*, honors when being called up to the Torah, are being apportioned. Men whom he feels are distinguished are not receiving the more important *aliyos*, while those whom one might consider to be of lesser significance are being called up to the more esteemed *aliyos*. The *gabbai*, individual charged with apportioning the *aliyos*, replies, "You were not here last week, when it was their turn to receive the more eminent *aliyos*."

We are allowed on this world for one lifetime, which, regardless of its length, is never sufficient. During our short stay, we expect to receive the answers to all of our questions. Perhaps the soul of the poor man had been here "earlier" and proved that wealth had been too much of a challenge. Hashem has done him a favor by "easing" the burden of his challenge; thus, He keeps him away from the money. There are many questions, and, for each question, there is a proper answer. For the most part, that answer is: "You do not see the whole picture. There is so much more to the equation than you have the ability to grasp."

When the **Chasam Sofer** was a teenage student, he "dormed" at the home of a certain family. One day, a soldier stationed in the area asked the *Chasam Sofer* to teach him to speak Hebrew. In return for this service, he agreed to polish the *Chasam Sofer's* shoes every day. The *Chasam Sofer* agreed to the arrangement, despite his puzzlement at this request.

Years later, when the *Chasam Sofer* was already the distinguished *Rav* of Pressburg, Hungary, it happened that he was asked to adjudicate a dispute between two wealthy members of the community. As expected, only one of the disputants emerged victorious. The other disputant left the *bais din*, court, enraged with the verdict and dead set upon taking revenge against the *rav*. He was so upset that he conjured up a libelous story about the *Chasam Sofer*, asserting that he was subversive to the secular government. As a result, the *Chasam Sofer* was subpoenaed to appear in court before the magistrate to answer charges of sedition.

On the appointed day, the *Chasam Sofer* appeared in court. It was a military court – no jury. As soon as he entered the court, the chief magistrate came over and said, "You have nothing to worry about. I will take care of everything. When the judge saw the *Chasam Sofer* stare at him incredulously, he explained, "The rabbi does not remember me. I was the man to whom you taught Hebrew many years ago. I never forgot the favor. Now I have the chance to repay you."

As the *Chasam Sofer* left the courthouse, he commented about himself, "This is the meaning of the *pasuk V'raisa es achorai u'panai lo yirah*, 'You will see My back, but My face may not be seen'" (*Shemos* 33:23). At times, man sees Heavenly endeavors which are inexplicable. He neither

understands why Hashem acted in this manner, nor perceives a reasonable purpose in these actions. Everything is sealed before him; with his limited perception, he is unable to penetrate the maze of events which are clearly Heaven-sent. Later on, Hashem's intent becomes clear. The *panai* – My face, up front, when events occur – are beyond our comprehension. *Achorai* – My back – later on, when we are privy to the consequences of those early endeavors, we begin to grasp the reason for Hashem's actions.