

I have sojourned with Lavan. (32:5)

Yaakov *Avinu* implied his fortitude in maintaining his observance of the *Taryag* 613 *Mitzvos*, by using the term "*garti*" - as the numerical value of the word "*garti*" is 613. Why did Yaakov emphasize the fact that he observed the 613 *mitzvos*? Why could he not simply have said, "I did not learn from Lavan's actions; I have maintained my own spiritual level? Why did he stress his performance of the actual *mitzvos*? *Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita*, notes that the catalyst for spiritual concern is not always complacency, degeneracy or free-thinking. Some individuals take the original pristine *Torah* and purposely amend it. They might supplement it with ideas and practices "borrowed" from contemporary society, or they might eliminate that which seems archaic. There are those who might even introduce a new *Torah*, a new perspective, a new set of laws, which they think is more "attuned" with society. The danger does not emanate from a lack of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, or from a disdain for the *Torah* and *mitzvos*. The problem occurs when we attempt to replace the *Torah*, to take the place of the *Nosein HaTorah*, Giver of the *Torah*. An individual who is antagonistic to *Torah* poses a greater threat than one who thinks he is "*frumer*", more pious, more devout than his fellow Jew.

Lavan had no desire to denigrate *yiraas Shomayim*; he did not seek to promote secularism. He simply wanted to "supplement" his own *mitzvos* and perhaps "amend" a few *mitzvos*. "Remain *frum*, continue with your observance, just refocus yourself, de-emphasize certain *mitzvos*, while accenting others." This was Lavan's credo.

Yaakov *Avinu* realized the crucial importance of retaining the *Torah* in its pristine character, with its 613 *mitzvos* - no more, no less. He understood that Lavan's invidious approach was far more dangerous than a direct assault upon the *Torah* and *mitzvah* observance. He told Eisav, "I lived with Lavan, and I observed the *Taryag mitzvos* in their entirety. Lavan could not sway me - neither will you."