

And Yaakov was greatly afraid and was distressed. (32:8)

When Yaakov heard that Eisav was coming towards him with an army of four hundred men, he was filled with anxiety and fear. Why? What caused Yaakov to be overcome with fear? Did not Hashem assure him that He would be with him and protect him? Did Yaakov not have faith in the Almighty? *Rashi* explains that Yaakov's fear resulted from an overriding concern that he had sinned, thereby causing Hashem to rescind His favor. Twenty two years in the evil environment of Lavan affected him. While it did not influence Yaakov, he still feared that he was no longer the same person who had originally been the recipient of Hashem's assurance. Consequently, he entreated Hashem for protection. He performed *teshuvah*, hoping to attain salvation. Yaakov did not believe in himself. He was very demanding. The slightest vestige of change effected a response of introspection and repentance.

The *Midrash* describes another fear, experienced by the Jews of Persia centuries later, when Haman *ha'rasha* announced the edict to kill all the Jews. When the Jews looked back in history and considered how Yaakov feared the consequence of his shortcoming, they felt doomed. Yaakov, who had been assured by Hashem that he would be protected, was still afraid. What should the Jews of Persia, who had not received such promise, do? They felt their end was near, that death was inevitable. They broke down into depression and despair. They felt justified in their feelings, since they thought they were reacting the same way that their ancestor Yaakov had responded. The *Midrash*, however, does not feel that they had correctly assessed Yaakov's fear.

Horav A. Hensch Leibowitz, Shlita, distinguishes between these two fears in that they led to divergent results. Yaakov's fear effected hope and *teshuvah*, while the Jews of Persia gave in to hopelessness and depression. They envisioned their catastrophic end and drove themselves deeper and deeper into despair. Their fear was destructive, while Yaakov's fear had constructive results. It uplifted him, as it inspired him and brought him closer to Hashem. Yaakov's fear catalyzed and energized him. It served as the impetus for spiritual growth and development. He used his fear to reinforce his faith in Hashem and strengthen his conviction. It brought about a peace of mind, a sense of security, a feeling of serenity and comfort.

The Jews of Persia looked at Yaakov's fear--but not at its consequences. They misinterpreted his emotions. Instead of being encouraged and revitalized, they gave in to fear, becoming completely demoralized. They allowed their fear of the future to overwhelm and destroy them. Their fear was a lack of *bitachon*, trust in the Almighty. The only justifiable fear is a fear of Hashem, which brings about a hallowed sense of excitement and trust.

Depression is a devastating spiritual deterrent. It has destroyed many who have fallen into its abyss. Our national history is clouded with catastrophes that would have destroyed a lesser nation. Our heritage demands that we look fear straight in the eyes and never abandon hope. Through *tefillah* and *teshuvah*, we have overcome the vicissitudes of time and life and become better, more observant Jews. When we realize that we have nothing to fear as long as we place

our trust in Hashem, we will lead happier and more productive lives. Yaakov *Avinu* paved the way. We, his descendants, have only to follow him.