

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

Upon hearing the grim news that Eisav was approaching, Yaakov was gripped with a terrifying fear. He immediately began preparing for this confrontation. He prepared for battle, prayed ardorously to Hashem, and did *teshuvah*, repentance. Fear can either be a remarkable asset or a debilitating hindrance.

Horav A.H. Lebowitz, Shlita, cites the *Midrash* which describes another fear experienced by Yaakov's descendants, centuries later at the time of the miracle of *Purim*. When Haman's decree to annihilate every Jew in the Persian Empire, was issued, the Jews searched for a similar precedent in history. The initial response of the past would guide them to an avenue for the present. When they looked back at Yaakov's confrontation with Eisav, they became overcome with fear. They deduced the following: Hashem assured Yaakov not to be concerned with Eisav. Yaakov, nonetheless, still feared Eisav. The Jews of Persia, who had received no such assurance of Divine intervention were convinced that their death was imminent. This lack of confidence produced feelings of sorrow and despair. The Jewish people completely relinquished hope for salvation. They felt justified in their sentiments, for, after all, Yaakov was still gripped with fear despite Hashem's pledge to him. They were only emulating their grandfather!

Horav Lebowitz explains that, although outwardly these two anxiety provoking situations appear to be the same, they essentially represent two very distinct fears. The outcomes were contrasting as well. One fear was constructive in nature, while the other was destructive. By conceding to their overwhelming fear, the Jews of Persia became so depressed that they dragged themselves deeper into despondency. This emotional process rendered them incapable of helping themselves. Indeed, they lost their will to fight for life!

Conversely, Yaakov's fear was restorative. The fear which gripped Yaakov transformed him into a spiritual fighter. The fear strengthened his resolve to pray and to do *teshuvah*. He intensified his *bitachon*, trust and faith, in Hashem. This enabled him to confront the *gezeira*, decree, with peace of mind, comfort and security. Yaakov's fear was laudatory, for it spurred positive action. The fear which enveloped the Jews of Persia was demoralizing.

It is imperative that when we are gripped by fear, we examine the focus of this fear. Does it overwhelm us or edify us? Do we implement it as a tool for our improvement or do we fall captive to it? This concept is summarized in one question: Whom do we fear? Do we fear Hashem Himself or the punishment which He employs? Yaakov feared Hashem's displeasure, so he did *teshuvah*. The Jews of Persia feared His punishment, so they disintegrated. If we internalize the appropriate fear of Hashem, we will no longer fear others. We will become a much happier, and more productive people.