

"I have sojourned with Lavan and stayed until now. And I have oxen and donkeys." (32:5,6)

Rashi explains that Yaakov was telling Eisav, "Despite my stay with Lavan, I have still been able to observe the *taryag*, 613, *mitzvos*, and I did not learn his evil deeds." *Horav Yitzchak Z. Soloveitchik z.t.l.* once met the *Rav* of Hamburg. During the conversation, the *Rav* explained how Yaakov was able to live in the presence of the evil Lavan and remain pure. Yaakov himself gave the reason for his success, when he said, "I have (an) ox and donkey." As far as Yaakov was concerned, Lavan was equal to an ox or donkey. To Yaakov there was no distinction between the wicked Lavan and the average animal. With this perspective in mind, it is no wonder that Lavan's influence did not harm Yaakov.

Horav Soloveitchik responded that, although this interpretation is not consistent with the text of the *pasuk*, its message is definitely true. Only when we attribute importance to wicked people, when we dignify them or their activities, do we fall prey to their baneful influence. When we truly respond to them as an ox or donkey, then we can say, "I did not learn from his evil deeds."

The *Chofetz Chaim* offers another interpretation for Yaakov's not "*learning from Lavan's deeds*." Yaakov maintained that his *mitzvah* observance was not "equal" to Lavan's evil deeds. Lavan applied more fervor and devotion to the practice of evil than Yaakov did to positive *mitzvah* performance. "I did not learn from Lavan that my *mitzvah* performance was lacking, for my devotion to do good was not as great as Lavan's devotion to evil.

Indeed, *Rav Yisrael Salanter z.t.l.* would say that we do not loathe the wicked as much as they hate the righteous, because we are not as righteous as they are wicked!