

"So you shall say unto my master Eisav, 'So says your servant Yaakov, I have sojourned with Lavan and stayed until now.'" (32:5)

Rashi explains that the numerical equivalent of the word *h,rd* is 613, which corresponds to the number of *mitzvos* in the *Torah*. Yaakov was proudly relating to Eisav that during his stay with Lavan he kept the entire *Torah*. His sojourn in the harmful environment of the crooked Lavan had no adverse spiritual effect upon him.

A number of issues regarding Yaakov's dialogue with Eisav should be addressed. First, what did Yaakov imply with his assertion, "*And (I) stayed until now*"? Did he owe Eisav an excuse for returning so late? Is Eisav his "brother's keeper" that he must be placated? Second, whom was Yaakov trying to impress by lauding his spiritual accomplishments? Would it really make a difference to Eisav that Yaakov performed *mitzvos* altogether, let alone that he adhered to the entire *Torah*?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, z.l., suggests a novel interpretation of Yaakov's and Eisav's conversation. Eisav, the evil apostate, did not believe in Hashem or in anything spiritual. He still had the arrogance, however, to expound his accomplishments in the area of *chesed*, kindness and human relations. He rejected the *mitzvos* that focused on man's relation to Hashem and lauded his proficiency in *bein adam l'chaveiro*, *mitzvos* between man and his fellow man. He derided Yaakov, "*While you were cooped up in the yeshivah of Shem and Ever, I stayed home and attended to the needs of our father.*" Eisav's outward display of *kibbud av v'eim*, respect towards his parents, was exemplary.

Eisav's outward devotion to *tzeddakah* was also remarkable. Not only did he give *maaser*, tithe, from those items which were mandated by the *Torah*, but he also questioned the manner for giving *maaser* from straw, which is not a food. Eisav began by attacking Yaakov's degree of devotion to social justice. Then he lauded another *mitzvah* he performed -- settling *Eretz Yisrael*. Eisav remained in *Eretz Yisrael* the entire time that Yaakov was gone. These two areas of commitment should have earned him his father's blessings. Why then did Yitzchak ultimately give the blessings to Yaakov?

Yaakov's response to Eisav's challenge is classic, shedding light upon the philosophy of *Torah yiddishkeit*. Yaakov felt it necessary to enlighten Eisav concerning his whereabouts during these twenty years. He was with Lavan raising a family, laying the foundation for *Klal Yisrael*. True, while Yaakov acknowledged the *mitzvah* of settling *Eretz Yisrael*, he wanted to go there together with his children. To send children away without an education and without the family's moral support would be spiritually dangerous. Only when we are able to go together as a viable entity, as *Klal Yisrael*, building *Eretz Yisrael* under the guidance and direction of *Toras Yisrael*, will our settling there take spiritual root.

In regard to Eisav's arrogance in lauding his "singular" *mitzvah* performance, Yaakov said, "*I have lived with Lavan and performed all taryag mitzvos.*" We do not ascribe to the notion of selecting *mitzvos* at random, playing favorites among *mitzvos*. Emphasizing the social justice *mitzvos* and preserving the *bein adam l'chaveiro mitzvos*, while denigrating the *bein adam l'makom mitzvos*, does not represent a *Torah* orientation. In order for any activity to be considered a *mitzvah*, it must defer to the purview of the *Torah*. We have 613 *mitzvos*, **all** of which comprise our religious code. Selective Judaism is simply self-serving. It does not reflect *Torah* perspective. Yaakov's response to Eisav was simple, but piercing -- two *mitzvos* do not sum up the entire *Torah*. Hence, Eisav did not deserve the blessings.