

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know.” (28:16)

Rashi explains that after discovering the level of holiness of the place in which he presently was, Yaakov *Avinu* was lamenting having slept. How does one dare to sleep in such a holy place? The *Brisker Rav, zl*, would become emotional when thinking about Yaakov’s reaction to discovering that he was in a consecrated place. The Patriarch had escaped from his brother, Eisav, who was bent on killing him. On the way, he was waylaid by Elifaz, who took away all of his money. Therefore, since he had just received a prophecy that assured him, *U’shemarticha b’chol asher teilech*; “I will guard you wherever you go,” he should be filled with overwhelming joy. Instead, he was depressed that he had slept in a holy place. In other words, it was worth it for him to have forfeited all of the Heavenly blessing spelled out in the prophecy just so he did not violate one transgression! If he manifests any taint of impropriety, then all the blessings are of no value whatsoever!

The *Rav* explained that the Torah’s laws are not arbitrary for us to decide whether to “trade” *mitzvos*, to do less here, be lenient there, all in order to benefit in the larger picture. In reality, no larger picture exists. We are charged with carrying out the will of Hashem, performing His *mitzvos* as they are individually stated. It is forbidden for us to make calculations to determine how we will benefit the most. We do not transgress for the purpose of later benefit.

The *Rav* cites the well-known *Tosefta (Terumos 7)*, which states a *halachah* that might raise eyebrows among those who feel that the *mitzvos* of the Torah are negotiable. A group of idolaters came to a Jewish community and demanded they give over a certain Jew (whom they would murder). If the community did not comply with their demands, they would slaughter the entire community. The *Tosefta* states the *halachic* ruling that no Jew may be given over. It is an act of *retzichah*, murder. The question is obvious: This man will die regardless – either as an individual or as a part of the community. Why jeopardize the lives of an entire Jewish community to save one man? We do not make calculations concerning the Torah’s laws. The man may not be handed over, even if this inaction will result in the deaths of others. The *Brisker Rav* would quote his father, *Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl*, who said that the Torah is likened to fire. As such, it is prohibited to touch. To touch it, even with the intention of somehow adding to it elsewhere, carries the risk of being burned.

During World War II (as related by *Rav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*), as the Nazi war machine was overrunning Europe, it reached a point that the Nazi army would reach England within two weeks. The English government issued a call for all able-bodied men to sign up to the army, to assist the country in this challenging time. No one was absolved from the draft except for English *yeshivah* students who were studying full-time. Those *yeshivah* students that were from outside England, however, had to sign up or be deported. *Horav Moshe Schneider, zl*, refused to allow anyone – not one single *bachur*, student, to join the army. He declared, “We are prepared for *mesiras nefesh*,

self-sacrifice. Even if they arrest us, we will convene the *yeshivah* in prison! The Torah is our heritage, and they are unable to sever our relationship with it. We are already drafted into Hashem's legion and, through the power of our study, we will save the country!"

When the government inspectors saw that *Rav* Schneider was intractable, they threatened to deport him. Perhaps this way he would loosen his hold on the students. The *yeshivah* administration turned to Chief Rabbi Hertz to intercede on their behalf. *Rav* Hertz suggested that they compromise and offer two or three students in order to satisfy the government's demands. The *Rosh Yeshivah* stood resolute – not one student would he relinquish. They were his students who came to his *yeshivah* for his guidance; thus, they were under his protection. He would protect them. They were all going to remain together as one unit. He would not compromise *vis-à-vis* the Torah. Each and every Jew has inestimable value.

The Chief Rabbi convinced the government's inspectors to speak directly with the students, to hear what they had to say. Understandably, the students opted to stay with their revered *Rebbe*. They felt that this was their only chance of surviving the war. The Torah would protect them. The government promised to render its decision the following day. The *Rosh Yeshivah* declared the next day as a day of *taanis u'tefillah*, a day of fasting dedicated to prayer, to pierce the Heavens and have the government's decree rescinded. Hashem listened and provided a positive response. The students were declared emotionally unwell and, consequently, absolved from serving in the military. The order of deportation against the *Rosh Yeshivah* was also revoked, on grounds that he singlehandedly was maintaining a "school" for depressed, emotionally challenged young men. He was lauded for his magnanimous, selfless personality. The *yeshivah's* status was hereby changed from "school" to "hospital", catering to the needs of the emotionally disabled. Their refusal to alter their commitment one iota resulted in their survival. Torah does not brook compromise.