

## Then you shall call out and say....”An Arami tried to destroy my forefather...He descended to Egypt and sojourned there. (26:5,6)

The text of the *pasuk* implies that there is an integral relationship between the fact that Lavan attempted to destroy Yaakov and Yaakov’s subsequent descent to Egypt. This does not seem to be consistent with the historical perspective as suggested in the *Torah* and commentaries. Lavan the *Arami* was one *tzarah*, tormentor of Yaakov, and Pharaoh was another of *Klal Yisrael’s* persecutors. The two do not seem however, to have any relationship.

The **Netziv** offers a striking explanation. Originally *Klal Yisrael* were to have remained in Aram with Lavan and his descendants for the duration of their four hundred year exile. Hashem saw the depravity of Lavan’s evil and his vicious cruelty. He saw that “*Arami oveid avi*,” “The Arami would destroy Yaakov.” The Patriarch could not withstand the evil of Lavan. Hashem, therefore, sent him to Egypt, to complete his exile.

What was it about Lavan that was so intolerable--more so than the cruelty of the Egyptians? Egypt was the center of debauchery. The Egyptian had descended to the nadir of depravity. Do we have to recount the long list of cruel persecution to which we were subjected at the hands of the Egyptians, to demonstrate how malicious they were? Yet, we are told that Lavan was worse. After only twenty-two years, Hashem determined that the Jews would not complete the full term of their exile with Lavan.

We may suggest that while Lavan’s persecution did not exceed that of Egypt, the fact that he was supposedly a “relative” made it more dangerous. One tends to trust individuals to whom he is close. Consequently, the cruelty takes on a new perspective. It becomes much more devastating when it emanates from an individual from whom we would least expect. Moreover, Lavan used the guise of relative in the most deceitful manner. When the persecution comes from an enemy, it is more tolerable than when it comes from a “friend.” The hurt is deeper and lasts longer in the latter case. The ensuing depression would have devastated *Klal Yisrael*. Thus, Hashem delivered us to the hand of the Egyptians, who made no pretense about their feelings towards us. Unfortunately, we received what we expected.

We turn to examine another aspect of the “Lavan” type of evil and its destructive effect upon *Klal Yisrael*. When one realizes that his enemy is “family,” it is often too late and too difficult to extricate oneself from the tight grasp. Lavan sought to destroy us by absorbing us as his family. He strove to assimilate the Jewish family into his own. The danger of Lavan’s evil was more harmful than that of Pharaoh. One only has to look at Jewish history and read the statistics--we have lost more Jews to assimilation than to pogroms. At least in the pogroms, Jews died as Jews!

It is interesting to note that the *Torah* places its emphasis upon two of *Klal Yisrael's* enemies--Lavan and Pharaoh. What happened to Yaakov's brother, Eisav? Are we going to disregard his enmity toward his brother? Indeed, Eisav was Yaakov's enemy from birth! The **Maharal** distinguishes between two forms of hatred. The first has a reason behind it. The second is hatred purely for the sake of hatred. Eisav's hatred towards Yaakov was, to an extent, mitigated by the fact that Yaakov took what he felt were his rightful blessings. Lavan and Pharaoh, on the other hand, had no reason to hate Yaakov and his descendants. When enmity is based upon a reason, it will eventually dissipate as the reason disappears or is justified. Indeed, when Yaakov told Eisav not to concern himself over his loss of the *brachos* since he did not become rich either, we are told that Eisav's animosity towards Yaakov eased slightly. Lavan and Pharaoh represented evil incarnate. They sought to destroy us simply because they detested us. They had no reason, no rationale--just pure, unmitigated hostility towards a nation who tried to live peacefully and serve its Father in Heaven. For some, that would be reason enough.