

Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. (32:8)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 75:13) expound on Yaakov *Avinu's* prayer to Hashem, a prayer that was generated by fear of Eisav. *Chazal* say, *V'raah es Eisav she'hu ba mei'rachok*, "When Yaakov saw Eisav coming from afar," he immediately began praying more passionately, until Hashem assured him that all would be well. He would protect Yaakov. Apparently, the closer Eisav came to Yaakov our Patriarch became more fearful, until he actually saw him from afar, at which point he went all out in terms of the intensity of his prayer. Yaakov's fear of confrontation begs elucidation. It is not as if Yaakov lacked the physical ability to challenge Eisav. Yaakov fought with a Heavenly angel and emerged triumphant. Why was he afraid of Eisav? Furthermore, it seems that he became especially fearful when he saw Eisav from afar. What was it about the *mei'rachok*, "from afar," that inspired Yaakov with such fright?

The *Maggid, zl, m'Dubno*, offers an explanation, employing his signature parable to add pragmatism to the answer. A community off the beaten path did not have a physician to respond to the ailments which its members were experiencing. The only medical professional in the area was the personal physician of the community's ruler. One day, the ruler decided to take a journey. His private physician – who was always on call – went with him. Shortly after the ruler left for his trip, a plague broke out in the community, and, with no physician, the situation appeared hopeless. The ruler, however, had a close friend, a wealthy businessman with whom he had grown up. Whenever the ruler's friend became ill, he would call for the ruler's private physician to provide medical care for him. Concerned for the welfare of the community, the "friend" became "ill" and called for the ruler's physician to come post haste. The doctor came, and, after a thorough examination, determined that he had nothing to be concerned about. The man was well. The man then asked the doctor that since he was here "anyway," could he treat the members of the community who had been stricken with the plague. He did so and then returned to his vacation.

The members of the household (of the ruler's friend) were furious with their father. They knew that he was not ill. Why did he make this ruse in order to have the doctor come to town during his vacation? He explained that while he was not ill, the other members of the community were dangerously ill and suffering. He knew that the doctor would not come for them, so he made him come for him, with the hope of convincing him to treat the other members of the community.

This, explains the *Maggid*, was Yaakov's intention when he saw Eisav "from afar." *Mei'rachok* does not apply to geographical distance, but rather, to a time – in the distant future, when Eisav would utilize his machinations to attack his descendants. Yaakov prayed, "Hashem, I am not frightened for myself. I fear for my descendants who will fall prey to Eisav." We know that our battle with the forces of Eisav/evil have not always been confrontational. At times, they were as *achi*, "my brother," when his descendants embraced us as brothers. How many Jews assimilated and drank from the baptismal font courtesy of Eisav's minions? How many of our people suffered at the cruel hands of Eisav's/Amalek's descendants throughout history? We have only to look back to World War II to recognize what Yaakov feared. *Horav Michael Weismandel, zl*,

writes (*Min Ha'Meitzer*) concerning the Holocaust, "Anyone who was sane should have gone out of his mind (from what occurred to our people), and one who did not lose his mind was not sane to begin with!" This is what Yaakov *Avinu* feared, this is why he prayed to Hashem to protect us. He did not fear for himself; he feared for us.