

Yaakov spoke up and said to Lavan, “What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?” (31:36)

Enough! Yaakov had been quiet long enough. Yaakov realized that Lavan’s trumped up charges against him were nothing more than a pretense to allow him to search his possessions. Our Patriarch allowed his pent-up emotions to counter every one of Lavan’s accusations respectfully. In a powerful exposition, the *Chasam Sofer* (*Teshuvos, Chelek 6, Likutim 59*) writes that every *tzaddik*, righteous person, must contend with his personal Lavan, his nemesis who will do everything in his power to make his life miserable.

To paraphrase the *Chasam Sofer*: “There is no Yaakov (metaphor for holy, righteous man) who does not have his Lavan (evil nemesis who will do anything to take him down). However, there are few Yaakovs who will engage Lavan (and pick a fight).” The righteous have their detractors. It goes with the territory. “These harassers can come from any camp, even erudite scholars, who externally present themselves as virtuous, who seek the truth. This is a façade to conceal their true intentions. All one can do is ignore them and accept them as agents whom the Almighty sent for His own purposes. Accept this with love. At the end, you will emerge victorious.” [The Lavans of every generation and every faction are eventually exposed for the deceitful men that they are, and their malevolent intentions do not achieve their desired result.] Indeed, the metaphor for the evil person who battles with the Torah scholar is Lavan. Why is this? It is not as if we have encountered a shortage of evil men whose goal in life was to take down and destroy the Torah leader: Eisav, Elifaz, Amalek, and our home grown Dasan and Aviram, and who could forget Korach? Yet, the nemesis who contends with the *tzaddik* is called Lavan. [Veritably, the *Chasam Sofer* addresses Yaakov *Avinu* and his enemies, but the idea holds true to every Torah leader.]

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, explains that Lavan stands out in terms of a particular iniquitous character failing which makes him the greatest threat to the Yaakovs of each generation. This moral failing makes Lavan particularly dangerous. Lavan does not openly reveal his contentious hatred of Yaakov. On the contrary, he seeks to honor and elevate Yaakov’s esteem. He will manipulate every ploy accessible to him to cover up his true intentions and to beguile Yaakov into believing that he is his friend and wants only what is best for him, while simultaneously attempting to sabotage his success. It goes so far that Lavan begins to believe that his intentions are actually noble, and that Yaakov deserves what he gets. He will find excuses to rationalize his ruthless behavior, because, after all, it is *l’sheim Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. What does one do? Do not engage; ignore him. Evil has a way of ultimately being discovered and exposing the charlatan. We may not stoop to the level of Lavan; we may not act as he acts. At the appropriate time, Hashem will intervene, as he did for Yaakov.