

I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. (32:5)

The numerical value of *garti* equals *taryag*, 613. *Chazal* teach that Yaakov *Avinu* implied to Eisav, "Although I was with Lavan for some time, I remained loyal to Hashem and observed all 613 *mitzvos*. I have not changed one iota. I am as committed today as I was when I left home." Eisav should not have thought that he could prevail over Yaakov. The Patriarch's merits will still protect him. Yaakov then added, *Va'yehi li shor v'chamor*, "I have an ox and a donkey." Understandably, Yaakov was not informing Eisav of his material assets; rather, as the commentators explain, *shor* is reference to Yosef *HaTzadik*, and *chamor* alludes to Yissachar, the son whose proficiency in and dedication to Torah learning were outstanding. While this may impress a *Rosh Yeshivah*, one can hardly expect Eisav to be struck by two *yeshivah* students. Simply understood, Yaakov intimated to Eisav, "These are my values. You and I do not live on the same plane. I care only about spirituality, which you can see in how I raised my children. What you have, your wealth, power and physical prowess, do not dazzle me."

While this removes the ambiguity in Yaakov's statement, is there more to this? How would Yaakov's two sons deter Eisav from destroying his brother? Furthermore, how indeed did Yaakov survive spiritually in Lavan's proximity? We are so careful concerning the spiritual environment in which we live. Lavan represented moral profligacy at its nadir. How did he not affect Yaakov?

Perhaps the answer lies in the words: "I have an ox and a donkey." As mentioned, the ox and donkey allude to two of Yaakov's sons, each of whom highlighted a spiritual capstone: Yosef, whose righteousness was his hallmark; and Yissachar, who epitomized Torah study at its pinnacle. These two brothers together represented the symbiosis of Torah study and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. The *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who is lacking in an equal level of righteousness is not different than the devoutly religious Jew whose Torah study and knowledge lack requisite proficiency. Yosef and Yissachar together represented spiritual perfection – *emes*, truth, in its absolute form.

Emes is an absolute value, which means it is unchanging, a complete reality which remains consistent, regardless of perspective or circumstance. Absolute truth embodies the most sublime form of reality, free of distortion, subjectivity or imperfection. Thus, the alignment of Torah study/knowledge and *yiraas Shomayim* (which embodies the guidelines for the ethical rectitude of a *ben Torah*) personifies *emes*, truth/perfection. [It is critical to note that this concept is often contrasted with relative truth, which is contingent upon individual, subjective perspectives and situations.

Absolute truth does not vary. It is consistent and, therefore, unbendable. It resists anything flawed or untrue. A person who aspires for such a level of *emes*, who lives his life with total commitment to Hashem, whose every endeavor adheres to the demands of *emes*, will be influenced neither by

one who is *sheker*, falsehood incarnate, nor by one whose life of commitment to the truth is a relative version of the real thing. When it is convenient for him to be truthful – he is. If it is necessary for him to bend ever so slightly -- he will. This is not the truth. Lavan and Eisav could not sway Yaakov, who exemplified the *middah*, attribute, of Truth. Yaakov's commitment is evidenced by the sons that he raised. He took great pride in Yosef and Yissachar and the way of life they represented together.

When we take pause to mull over the Yosef/Yissachar synthesis, we realize that, not only is there more than meets the eye, but it is meant to be this way. The Torah relates that Reuven, Leah *Imeinu's* firstborn, found *dudaim* (mandrakes, jasmine, violets), flowers which were reputed to induce fertility. Rachel *Imeinu*, who still had no children, asked her sister for her *dudaim*. Leah agreed to a "trade." Yaakov *Avinu* would be with Leah that night, and Rachel would receive the *dudaim*. The result of this trade was: Yosef was born to Rachel and Yissachar to Leah. Two Matriarchs, two children, one goal. Together, they produced the perfect approach to Jewish living. With Torah and *yiraas Shomayim*, they were morally and spiritually invincible, regardless of the challenges in life that they may have confronted. The following story demonstrates the extent to which one who is devoted to a life of *emes* will go. *Sheker* cannot deter him.

Horav Yitzchak Shlomo Ungar, zl, was *Rav* in *Chug Chasam Sofer*, following his incarceration in the concentration camps. He maintained a diary of the experiences and holy martyrs he met during his interment. After the war, he recorded from memory the names and *yahrtzeits* of these martyrs who were murdered by the Nazis, and he even attempted to record how each met his mortal end. He was a source of information for many a survivor to learn more about members of their family. During a visit by a distinguished *Rav*, he was asked to relate a story that moved him and impacted his outlook on the spiritual mettle of our people. This is the incident of which he spoke.

"During my incarceration, I was subject to the most cruel persecution. The pain and starvation, the humiliation and beatings, were taking their toll on me physically and emotionally. The most difficult challenge that I confronted, however, was answering and ruling on the *halachic* queries presented to me concerning life and death issues. One especially poignant question, which ultimately gave me the pride and fortitude to look death and the Nazi monsters in the eye and continue believing and hoping for a better tomorrow, was a *she'alah* presented to me by a distraught father. The Germans were meticulous in adhering to order. Everything they did was planned out and carried out in perfect sequence. Indeed, even the manner and time in which they sent the Jewish martyrs to their deaths were carried out in perfect sequence. The Jews had been reduced to numbers, thus they were ordered to the gas chambers in accordance with their number. When the Germans decided it was time to murder Jews, they would pull a Jew off a work detail – if his number was up.

One day, a father ran over to *Rav Unger* and presented the following question. "The Nazis have called out the numbers for the upcoming executions. My son's number is on that list. I am able to hide him and, thereby save his life. If I do so, however, they will continue on to the next number,

since they have a quota to murder each day. By hiding my son, I am causing another Jewish boy to die prematurely. *Rebbe*, I need an immediate answer!”

The *Rav* asked *Rav Unger*, “What answer did you give him?” *Rav Unger* replied, “What could I have told him? You are aware of the *halachah*. I looked up at Heaven and cried broken-heartedly, ‘*Ribono Shel Olam, mi k’amcha Yisrael? Who is like Your nation, Yisrael? Only among the Jewish people will you find such super human mesiras nefesh, willingness to sacrifice oneself for the preservation of mitzvos. This Jew is prepared to let his son die in order to spare the life of another Jewish child!*”

This is the meaning of *emes*. If *halachah* dictates one to live a certain way, then this is the only way to live. Anything else is flawed *emes*. It is either correct and proper, or it is one hundred percent false. When one lives in this manner, the *Lavans* and *Eisavs* are not a challenge.