



## Precious Priorities

More than thirty years passed since Yaakov Avinu had last seen his brother Eisav. Now, as Yaakov is returning to his father's house, he reaches out to Eisav with an assertion that seems rather irrelevant. Yaakov declares that he sojourned, *garti*, with Lavan and was delayed in meeting Eisav until this point (*Bereisheet* 32:5). Rashi comments that the word *garti* carries specific significance; it has the numerical value of *taryag*, the number of mitzvot in the Torah. Yaakov is telling Eisav that he kept the mitzvot and did not learn from Lavan's evil ways. How are we to understand this message? By no means could Yaakov have kept all 613 mitzvot even if he had wanted to! Let us look a little deeper and see how these compelling words hold much wisdom and direction as to Yaakov's, and by extension our, trajectory in this life. Rashi tells us that Yaakov Avinu particularly used the word *shamarti*, I guarded, as opposed to *kiyamt*, I upheld, to express his loyalty to mitzvot. Rav Bick in *Chayei Moshe* notes here that one who learns about a mitzvah, albeit is unable to do it, is considered to have been involved in the mitzvah. Thus, for example, one who says the portion of *Karbanot* in his morning prayers is considered to have brought *korbanot* although he didn't

bring a physical sacrifice. Similarly, says Rav Dunner in *Mikdash Halevi*, the word *shamar* connotes hope and anticipation for the opportunity to do a mitzvah. Yaakov Avinu kept the mitzvot that he could and waited with expectancy to fulfill the mitzvot that he was unable to while living with Lavan. Yaakov Avinu's message to Eisav and to us is clear. A Jew's attitude toward mitzvah performance is with anticipation: we view mitzvot as opportunities! We look forward and are excited to be an extension of the Divine by doing as many mitzvot as we can!

Moreover, Yaakov Avinu was telling Esav that although he lived with Lavan for many years, he was not influenced by his ways. Rav Epstein in *Sefer Hearot*, notes that one can observe the whole Torah, keep every letter of the law and simultaneously be a *naval b'reshut haTorah*, indulge in physicality and forget his spiritual focus. How is this message pertinent for Eisav? Rav Grossbard in *Da'at Shraga* explains that Yaakov Avinu was communicating a deep truth to Eisav. Do not think that you will influence me with your "brotherly love"! My devotion to Torah and mitzvot is stronger and more powerful than your coercion. There will always be Jews that resist the affection of the gentile world as they try to kill us with their "love" and manipulate us to become like them.

Yaakov Avinu specifically used the word *garti* to convey his true perspective of his life's mission as Rav Roberts in *Prism* of

Torah points out. A Jew should always view this world as a temporary dwelling. Yaakov Avimu knew he was not a *toshav*, a settled dweller in *olam hazeh*. He understood that living a higher existence requires total devotion to spiritual purpose and sacred meaning. ■



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