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When Anything is Everything

When we wish our family or friends that they be blessed with everything, what do we mean? Do we mean to say that all their wishes come true and that their basket of good tidings and material sustenance should overflow? Or do we intend that the recipients of our blessings have all that's necessary for a good life?

Looking at the interaction between Yaakov and Esav after they finally meet might offer some insight on this matter. We recall that after their initial “embrace” and introductions, Yaakov entreats Esav to accept his generous gift, thus, to appease his brother.

Esav's initial response is that “I have plenty” (*Yesh Li ROV*), and he desists from accepting Yaakov's gift. Yaakov then begs Esav to take his present because “God has been gracious to me, inasmuch as I have everything” (*Vechi Yesh Li KOL*) (*Bereishit* 33:9,11).

Notably, there is a subtle difference in how each of the brothers reflected on their wealth and material independence.

Rashi notes that when Esav remarked that he had “plenty,” that statement

reflects that he had more material assets than he needed. Esav smugly boasted of his wealth and flaunted his acquisitions. After all, he was a hunter who, in our parlance, became a wealthy man proudly portraying his personal prowess and never entirely satisfied, wanting more.

Yaakov, in comparison, talks about his possessions, invoking the beneficence Hashem bestowed upon him. For he had previously left Eretz Yisrael with but a staff in his hand. Following Rashi, when Yaakov confirms to Esav that “I have everything,” he means he had enough for his needs. Nothing of benefit to him had been spared. As such, he was thankful and content.

However, the Sefat Emet raises a question: How can people declare that they have *everything*? Clearly, that is not the case: everybody lacks something! But, notably, for the Sefat Emet, the term KOL has more than material overtones; the message is metaphysical.

For when one appreciates that anything that exists in this world emanates from Hashem and derives its physical existence and vitality from the Higher Source, then every substance is KOL – complete and perfect and sufficient. That thought, perhaps, is what we might wish for ourselves and others to contemplate. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

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