

VAYISHLACH (GENESIS 32:4-36:43)

All or Nothing?

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

When preparing to meet a sworn enemy, one should make three arrangements. He should sue for peace, prepare for war, and pray for divine assistance. Jacob did all three.

A thirty-six-year separation had not moderated Esau's hatred for his brother. Jacob was returning to Canaan after all these years, and it was time to get even. Esau resented Jacob for having received Isaac's blessings. He had 400 soldiers with him, and it was "payback time."

Jacob wanted to appease his brother. ... *he selected a gift for his brother Esau...200 female goats, 20 male goats, 200 ewes, 20 rams, 30 nursing camels with their young, 40 cows, 10 bulls, 20 female donkeys, and 10 male donkeys.* (Genesis, 32:14-16)

Each herd was sent separately to Esau. Hopefully, Esau would accept the gift graciously and let bygones be bygones. If not, Jacob was prepared to defend himself and his family. And, of course, he had prayed to G-d for protection.

Jacob's efforts worked. The brothers met, hugged and kissed. (The commentaries differ as to how sincere Esau's kiss was.) Their first argument at that meeting was as to the ownership of the gift. Initially, Esau refused to accept it:

"I have a lot, my brother," said Esau. "Let what is yours remain yours"... "Please! No!" said Jacob..."Please accept my blessing...G-d has been kind to me. I have everything (that I need)." (33:10-11)
Esau changed his mind and accepted the gift.

Notice the difference between the brothers' attitudes toward their possessions. Esau said, *"I have **a lot."* Jacob said, *"I have **everything**."*

The Talmud (Avos, 4:1) asks us, *"Who is rich? He who is satisfied with his portion."* Wealth is measured not by how much you have, but rather, by how much you want. Esau was a wealthy man. By his own accounting, he had plenty. But, he didn't have *"everything."* There was always room to increase his holdings and amass more wealth. It didn't take much convincing.

Jacob, on the other hand, had *"everything."* He had no need for more than whatever G-d had allotted him.

Trump and Gates are multi-billionaires. But, as King Solomon writes, "*One who loves silver is never satisfied with silver.*" (Ecclesiastes, 5:9) As long as there are more financial kingdoms to conquer, they will always hunger for more. Someone who is not satisfied with his current financial status is, in a real sense, poor. A person can have a hundred million dollars. But if he wishes he had two hundred million, he'll never be a rich man. He doesn't have as much as he feels he needs. He's a hundred million dollars short.

If, on the other hand, we recognize that whatever we have is gift from G-d, we are truly blessed and truly rich.

Jacob's and Esau's conflicting attitudes toward wealth were completely reversed when it came to spiritual matters. Esau was content with his spiritual level; he saw no need for additional holiness in his life. Jacob looked for every opportunity to get closer to G-d. He lived his life according to a different interpretation of the above verse: "*One who loves silver is never satisfied with silver.*" Rashi interprets the word "*silver*" as a reference to Torah -- One who loves Mitzvahs will never be satisfied with the Mitzvahs he has fulfilled; he will always look for more. King Solomon tells us in Proverbs 2:4-5, "*if you will seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of G-d, and you will find the knowledge of G-d.*"

If we choose Esau's approach, we'll never be happy. If we choose Jacob's, we will attain peace of mind and untold riches, regardless of the size of our bank accounts.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz