



***"To share, to care. To make the world a better place."***

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*DISCRETION, THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR*

וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֶשָׂו אָחִיו אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר  
שְׂדֵה אֱדוֹם

*Yaakov sent messengers before him to Esav,  
his brother, to the land of Se'ir, the field of  
Edom (32, 3)*

By sending these messengers to *Esav*, Yaakov was pre-empting a contact, which potentially held considerable danger to Yaakov and his family.

The Sages (*Bereshis Rabbah*) appear somewhat critical of Yaakov's pre-emptive strategy, saying that his action was a fulfilment of the following *Pasuk*: 'One who involves himself in anothers' fight, grabs the ears of a dog (in the middle of a fight)'.

Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz, the legendary Rosh Yeshiva of Mir Jerusalem, and a noted Mussar thinker, whose life story and insight into human behaviour Abba felt so close to, explained that when a wild dog is mid-fight, he has no sense of limits, nor measure, nor who is on whose side. To take hold of his ears, even to prevent the fight is just asking for trouble.

Thus, explains Reb Chaim, one who positions himself uninvited in the middle of two people who are fighting against each other – will be seen as an enemy by both parties. He will not solve the issue by his actions, rather, he will invite their combined wrath upon his own head. They may, in fact become friends, but you, the interferer, will remain at odds with both.

The difficulty however is, that the *Pasuk* in *Mishle* refers to one who gets himself involved in 'another's' fight; a fight that isn't his. How could this apply to Yaakov and Esav? Surely Esav *was* Yaakov's own sworn nemesis? Surely, he had expressed the desire and intent to harm Yaakov? Why did the Sages view this as a poor strategy, and liken it to getting involved in someone else's fight?

The Sages answered their own query: they said that, true, Esav was a sworn enemy, but he was asleep, and Yaakov roused him from his slumber.

This means that the Sages view was that if you understand Esav deeply, you will see a man of profound distraction. He gets pulled into all forms of pleasure and leisure, and loses himself totally in those activities. He was truly as though 'in a slumber'.

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*You'll not do anyone a  
favour by jumping head first  
into a furious battle just  
because you feel for the  
victim. Think first – can you  
stop the fight. Perhaps you  
could just make it worse?*

*You cant single-handedly  
stop a Paton tank in it's  
tracks – you will need a  
strategy and some support.*

*Don't underestimate the  
aggression of the bully in  
mid-fight.*

*Often you can rely on him to  
lose interest quickly. ~ Rav  
Avraham Chaim Tanzer*

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Yaakov, the Sages felt, should have realized this trait of his brother, and left him to his own vices and his somnambulism, and no harm would have come from it. He had, for now, effectively forgotten about his brother Yaakov, because he was steeped in a new diversion, a new pursuit. It was as good as stepping in to the middle of someone else's furious fight, and drawing all the attention of all the aggrieved parties to yourself.

True, Yaakov was correct to take the precautionary measures of Tefilla and even preparation for a possible war, but he should not have initiated the actual contact with Esav; he should have had the confidence and the Emuna that he would be alert to any change and able to address any eventuality.

The Sages thus taught an additional dimension of the character of Esav: he was always in the middle of a furious fight, to the point that he forgot the previous rounds.

Yaakov should have trusted this read of Esav's character.

An indication of the correct reading of Esav's mindset: Why was Esav not dumbstruck by meeting the many Angels who Yaakov sent as emissaries; surely that would be sufficient to cow anyone?! We see that Esav had his head and heart so deeply in the bowl of lentil soup or it's replacement, that he did not

even have the headspace to contemplate the full significance of the events around him!



Abba zt'l used to use this Midrash to point out the *Chachmas HaChaim* of the Sages: the importance of not jumping head first into a furious battle. Don't think that this is the way to assist anyone, unless of course you clearly ascertain that you can stop the fight immediately. But, to simply lead with your chin, because you feel for the aggrieved party, is not the better part of valour.

Also, we learn from here not to hastily presume the other fellows hostility, and thus to pre-empt with your own action; rather, best to keep level-headed and open and prepared for any possible outcome, but only pre-empt when you're sure that the action is coming. Teach yourself to profile the people and look keenly for clues.



Abba zt'l was unique in many facets, none more than in his intuitive and legendary *Chochmas Hachayim*, the special wisdom and sensitivity to know the best response to different people in changing circumstances. It's not book-knowledge, but rather a rich application of the Wisdom of the Sages, combined with a sensitivity and an ability to think things through in an objective manner, and to always remember what the favoured outcome in any situation is.



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**“D***on't have an*

*argument today, that you can put off till tomorrow.*

*Wait a bit; give them a chance to correct it.*

*Be wary of confrontation and try head it off in advance if you can.*

*Once a 'farieble' begins, it's like a hole in a dyke, that just grows with pressure and can consume families and communities. Repair it immediately. ~ Rav Avraham Chaim Tanzer*

One of Abba's great aphorisms: Don't have a fight, or *machlokes* today, that you can put off till tomorrow. He was a great believer in heading off confrontation, and often declared his own fear of confrontation, understanding, as he did, that once the *machlokes* begins, it's like a hole in a dyke, that just grows with pressure and can consume families and communities.

Better, he said, to be a 'coward'; one who has a deep mistrust of *machlokes* and *farieble* and a healthy fear of being drawn into discord.



**“H***e always*

*recommended giving the other party an opportunity to correct a negative behaviour, saying: He probably has thought about it and regrets it. If not now, soon.*

*When a dispute arose, he would advise: Put it away immediately. No need to chew over why you or they were justified, because such conversations simply reawaken the need to justify on the part of the other.*

*Always be ready and eager to accept an apology, without analysing the depths of the person's sincerity. Accept it and move on. ~ Rav Avraham Chaim Tanzer*



THE REASON FOR YAAKOV'S ANXIETY

וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרָר לוֹ

*Yaakov was very afraid and distressed (32, 8)*  
The question has puzzled many: Why was Yaakov so afraid of meeting Esav? Surely,

Hashem had promised him Divine protection?

Abba used to explain that it's the very nature of a Tzadik not to rely on his own merits, and not ever to discount the possible *zechuyos* of others. Yaakov was well aware that Hashem had assured him of His assistance and blessing, but, he thought, the human being is very complex, and our personality and character are layers deep. Even if he isn't specifically aware of an *Avera*; who can guarantee that at some level he hasn't been as *Ehrlich* as he could or should be?

Sure, he had the Divine assurance of his safety, but perhaps since that promise he had failed in some way. Perhaps he had abrogated that guarantee. Yaakov was teaching his generations to have respect for the volatility of the human nature and condition. It's very quickly and easily led astray. We are not carved out of stone; we are most uncertain of our spiritual station. The Chofetz Chaim taught: Don't assume that because you behaved yesterday in an uplifted fashion that today will follow suit; you need to be mindful and focused every single day.

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*“Don't presume that your opponent is worthless and has no merit – even if you are on the right and good side of a battle that you never chose. Have a respect for the other side. Prepare well.”*

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Also, he knew that Esav had, in his own way, served his great father Yitzchak, and thus

Yaakov was mindful of Esav's *zechuyos* that could protect him.

Yaakov taught that we need not to convince ourselves of our deservingness, and to convince ourselves of other's worthlessness. There is a different model. That's why Yaakov decided that he needs to approach his brother with great respect and Tefillah to Hashem.



*SOMETHING YOU COULD LEARN FROM EVERYONE YOU MEET*

*כֹּה אָמַר עֲבָדְךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם לָבוֹן גַּרְתִּי*

*I lived with Lavan as a sojourner*

Rashi comments that the word 'Garti' has the same letters as *Tarya'g* – an allusion to the fact that Yaakov was effectively saying to Esav: Though I lived with Lavan for so long, I have kept the *Tarya'g* Mitzvos. Why would Yaakov impress Esav with this piece of information? Of what benefit?

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*“Yaakov was introspective; he felt that he should have learned more from Lavan's energetic pursuit of his devious schemes; he should have learned to apply that to good and worthy projects.”*

*You can learn from all. Everyone has something to teach you.*

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Abba used to answer, in the name of Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin, that Yaakov was bemoaning the fact that, although he lived with Lavan and he witnessed Lavan's single-minded devotion to his materialism, and how he invested all his energy toward that end; he, Yaakov had not learned the pursuit of materialism – and was thus no threat to Esav; and even his Torah was simply the same as it was before he met Lavan.



The Chofetz Chaim wrote that we are meant to note the incredible passion that the market people follow and single-mindedly pursue the markets. We need to learn that dedication and to pursue our Torah and our Mitzvos with that passion.

Torah needs to be pursued with all the professional and business acumen and focus you can muster. Just as a shopkeeper never leaves the shop closed for a day, similarly should you never neglect your true business – your spiritual wellbeing, your times that you have set aside for Torah and Tefillah. Be a professional.



### *YOUR GREATEST WEAPON - PRAYER*

**וְהָיָה הַמַּחְנֶה הַנּוֹשֵׂא לְפָלִיטָה**

*The second camp will survive (32, 9)*

*Yaakov prepared himself in three ways: he sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for battle  
(Rashi 32, 9)*

If prayer would not be effective, how would the gifts or the battle possibly help?

Some answer that he didn't only Daven to Hashem, rather, He davened that his actions would be blessed with success. Yaakov davened that his gifts would find favour in the eyes of Esav. He also prayed that if he would be forced into battle, that Hashem bless him with victory. He also prayed that his Tefillah should find favour in Hashem's eyes.

Yaakov was scared of harm befalling him and his family. He was equally afraid that he not be a source of harm to his brother. He Davened for the best possible outcome, realising the danger of the situation, but preferring to head off the danger through peaceful means, trying with gifts and his self-effacing talk to head off the confrontation.

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***“E****ven when you believe that you are strong enough to fight, prefer the route of appeasement; only fight when there is simply no*

*alternative. Rav Avraham  
Chaim Tanzer*

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Abba z'l used this as a direction for dealing with many people. Better the path of cowardice, avoiding a fight if you possibly can emerge victorious without the fight. Never underestimate the power of a gift – even to a man of means. Everyone likes, and even needs, to feel that you appreciate them enough to show it with money and gifts – it's a form of offering; it means that your relationship with them is serious; serious enough to sacrifice for them.

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*“P* *rayer is not only  
handing the matter over to  
Hashem; it's also the finest  
Hishtadlus that you can  
possibly perform.*

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There is simply no other strategy other than prayer – even for the self-reliant man. True, you will need to prepare, but you need to pray first. Daven for the correct approach and the best preparations. You will need to take action; but daven first for the wisdom to choose the best course of action. Daven for the best outcome.

The Sages taught that Prayer is the first and best of all the 'action plans' – for Yaakov, and indeed for each of us. That's what they meant when they said that he 'prepared himself through prayer'; prayer is not only handing the matter over to Hashem; it's also

the finest human preparation that you can possibly perform.



*MY BROTHER, MY FOE*

*הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו*

*Save me from my brother, from Esav.(32, 12)*

Surely Yaakov only had one brother, Esav? Why the need to specify?

Abba z'l often spoke about the two polar types of danger to the Jewish People: The obvious antisemitism rears its ugly head in the form of vicious Jew-bating and hatred; excluding and marginalizing the Jews from mainstream culture and society. That is a readily recognizable form of antisemitism.

There is however, an equally pernicious and much less recognizable form of Jew-hatred; it's when the antisemite opens the doors to mainstream culture and welcomes the Jewish people as part of the larger mother-culture – encouraging and enticing them to just leave the Yiddishkeit at the door. That is the more dangerous form, because we mistake it for sincere friendship and belonging.

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*“T* *here are two forms of  
antisemites; both equally  
harmful: those who wish to  
expel and annihilate chas  
veshalom, and those who  
wish to absorb and  
assimilate us. In each*



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*generation we need to  
navigate these perils.*

Abba noted that as a nation and Torah culture, we survived the former form of antisemitism much better than the latter – partly because we had less experience with it, partly because we know innately how to cope with our enemies; we are unsure how to defend against our ‘friends’.



He frequently spoke of the time when Franz Josef, Emperor of Austria, opened the walls of the ghetto allowing the Jews to participate in all levels of society, culture and vocation. The Jews till that point had faced constant discrimination and exclusion; yet they remained strong in the Yiddishkeit – their spiritual life was strong despite the terrible efforts of the persecutors to cease the practice of Torah and Mitzvos. Yet when the new emperor welcomed them with kindness, many could not remain firm in their faith; they fled the open gates of the ghetto. Franz Josef responded to the stinging rebuke of one of his cousins, who queried how could he be so kind to the Jews, when that went against the centuries old family tradition of persecution of the Jews; he answered: ‘Dear cousin, you deal with the ‘Jewish problem’ in your way; I will in my way. Let us see who is more succesful’. Abba reflected: Often it’s the antisemites who keep us Jewish...

Yaakov davened for protection against both forms of danger. He was unsure whether Esav approached as friend or foe, brother or

enemy. So, he davened for both – two Tefilos: Please Hashem protect me from him should he come a brother – spare me the spiritual devastation that could result from his pernicious ‘brotherhood’. Equally, he davened to be spared should he come as ‘Esav’ – the archenemy and sworn foe, which would place Yaakov and his loved ones in immediate mortal danger.



#### WHATS IN A NAME

וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה נָא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לְמָה זֶה  
תִּשְׁאַל לְשִׁמִּי וַיַּבְרֵךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם:

*Yaakov asked, "Please tell me your name." He said, "Why do you ask my name!" And he took leave of him there.(32, 30)*

The Angel asked to be released because it was morning and he had to return to heaven. Yaakov answered that he would not release the Angel until he gave Yaakov a *Beracha*. The Malach asked Yaakov what his name was and, when Yaakov answered, then told him that he would no longer be known as Yaakov, he would from here on be called Yisrael. Then Yaakov asked the Malach what *his* name was. He responded: “Why do you ask me what my name is?”

Why does Yaakov want to know his name? And what does the Guardian Angel of Eisav mean when he says “Why are you asking my name?”

Rashi explains the Angel's response as "we Angels have no definite names — our names are dependent on the mission on which we are currently being sent."

Abba explained that Yaakov's question wasn't simply to discover the angels called name, rather he wanted to know the identity of this angel; because this angel, he realised represented the archangel of Esav and thus antisemitism, and also it represented the arch-enemy of Torah – the Yetzer Hara, the Satan. Yaakov asked give me your mission so that I will know how to protect from you in the future.

\*

The angel responded that 'we have no clear identity' – Abba explained: The Yetzer Hara is simply an illusion, it can never be pinned down to a reality. It is a whimsical spirit catching your attention with this or that distraction, beguiling you into believing that it offers something real; but, said the angel, there is never anything real to be found in it. It's simply and endless, self-destroying chase of whisps of vapor on a winters morning – nothing you can ever catch in your hand; your hand will remain forever empty! Abba explained that the angel was essentially answering: 'Our name is 'no-name'. Our identity is vacousness, emptiness, nothingness'.

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