



# Shaking the Heavens

Adapted from a Shmuess by Rabbi Stulberger

Parshas Vayishlach

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In the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach, we learn of the confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav. Returning home after twenty years of work for Lavan, the Pasuk relates how Yaakov felt deeply apprehensive of facing Eisav and his impending formidable army. In response, Yaakov prepares by davening to Hashem, dividing his family into separate camps and sending a lavish gift to Eisav.

What stands out as peculiar is why Yaakov would exactly be afraid. Contrasting the righteousness of Yaakov Avinu with the unsavory character of Eisav, there clearly exists a great gap between the two. As the Torah itself attests, Yaakov was known as a wholesome and refined Torah scholar, while Eisav was reputed as an unruly hunter. Moreover, Yaakov Avinu was well aware that he was to father twelve children of unparalleled greatness, from which the entirety of the Jewish people was to descend. Eisav, on the other hand, stood as the paradigm figure who shunned a life of spirituality and caused reckless harm to others. In consideration of all the above, it remains difficult to explain why Yaakov was afraid.

Amongst the numerous answers given, the Daas Zekeinim offers a particularly enlightening one. While Yaakov spent years away from home, Eisav was involved in performing a very special mitzvah: *kibbud av va'em*. Remaining amid the environs of his parents, Eisav was capable of performing this momentous mitzvah of honoring his father and mother. Additionally, explains the Daas Zekeinim, while Yaakov traveled away from home to stay with Lavan, he was as well leaving Eretz Yisroel. Eisav, on the other hand, who remained at home accrued the merit of living in Eretz Yisroel.

Considering this explanation of the Daas Zekeinim carries profound implications. While in the overall picture Yaakov was by far much more virtuous than his brother, the impact of a mitzvah can never be underestimated. Eisav's mitzvos instilled fear into Yaakov because, after all, Yaakov had not been performing *kibbud av va'em* and living in Eretz Yisroel like Eisav. The tremendous value of even Eisav's mitzvos was overwhelmingly great. In fact, the true weight of Eisav's deeds is accentuated considering that for fourteen of the thirty-four years Yaakov was away from home he was learning Torah day and night in the Yeshiva of Shem. Even with the overarching mitzvah of Talmud Torah, which is the greatest mitzvah, Yaakov was still frightened. And that was because he understood that any mitzvah performed, even by someone the likes of Eisav HaRasha, goes a far longer way than can be imagined.

Such an idea should serve as an incredible source of inspiration for us all. While we may feel encumbered by our faults and foibles, every little positive action we take bears reverberating results. Upon sitting down to learn Torah for even just a few minutes, helping a fellow Jew in the subtlest of ways or davening even one tefillah, we are to feel invigorated and proud of our accomplishments.

What is particularly interesting to ponder is why specifically these two mitzvos stood so prominently in Eisav's merit. Why was *kibbud av va'em* and living in Eretz Yisroel the two mitzvos which Eisav involved himself with?

Rav Tzadok of Lublin writes that Eisav especially excelled in the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'em* due to his characteristic nature. Immersed in materialism and the physical world, the one mitzvah which resonated most perfectly with Eisav was honoring his parents who brought him into this world. He was appreciative of his parents for they were the ones who gave birth to him and thereby enabled him to indulge in worldly pleasures.

In light of this, the fact that living in Eretz Yisroel was the other mitzvah which bespoke merit for Eisav is understandable. Living in a land of bountifulness and flowing with milk and honey, Eisav valued the Land of Israel. It was a mitzvah which he respected and could relate to.

As it therefore appears, these two mitzvos were not arbitrary commendable qualities of Eisav. Given the fact that they fit with Eisav's personality, he honored his parents to the greatest extent and merited fulfilling the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisroel. The message is clear: carrying out mitzvos with endearing love and affection is no small achievement.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian once encountered a student of his walking with a transistor radio. Looking at the radio, Rav Elya asked, "Does the radio work without being plugged into an electrical socket?" "Yes it does," replied the student. "What would happen if a little screw was missing from the radio? Would it work?" "No it wouldn't," answered the talmid again.

Unsure what his Rebbe was trying to tell him, Rav Elya soon explained: "Why do we find it hard to believe that if we place a little black box on our arm and head (i.e. Tefillin), it channels holiness to and from Shamayim? It should be no different than a transistor radio which doesn't need to be plugged in to work! And at the same time, if one letter is missing (from the Tefillin), the connection signal fails and the kedusha is inhibited. This is the lesson we are to learn from the transistor radio."

The same is true with every mitzvah. Every good deed registers in Shamayim and echoes cosmic effects. It may not be seen by the visible eye, but such is the case. However, there is a very important caveat. For the mitzvah to achieve its full impact, it must be done with as much devotion and meticulousness as possible. Yaakov was fearful of Eisav because he realized that he was confronting someone who had so carefully and endearingly adhered to two mitzvos. And when these conditions are met, even the slightest mitzvah shakes the heavens.