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## 613

In the beginning of the *parasha*, we learn how Yaakov sent emissaries to his brother in order to, “find favor,” in his eyes (*passuk* 6). He also intended to bribe his brother. He instructed the emissaries to say to his brother, “I have spent time with Lavan and I have acquired oxen and donkeys, flocks, servants, and maidservants, and I will send them to you, to find favor in your eyes.”

Rashi notes that the word גרתי (“I have spent time”) has the same numerical value as 613. Yaakov was hinting that although he had lived in a spiritually hostile environment—after all, Lavan was a potentially dangerous influence—he nevertheless kept all the mitzvos and did not learn from Lavan’s evil ways. On the simplest

level, this means Yaakov was subtly warning Esav not to underestimate him; despite being away from home, he remained righteous and was therefore still protected by Hashem.

However, others understand these words differently.

The *Damesek Eliezer* cites the well-known question asked by *many* commentaries. These commentators assume that when Yaakov mentioned he had lived with Lavan for so many years and kept the mitzvos, this too was part of his attempt to find favor in Esav’s eyes. In other words, the concluding phrase—“I will send them to you, to find favor in your eyes”—refers not only to the previous words

(“I have acquired oxen...”) but also to “I have spent time with Lavan.”

If so, they ask: How does telling Esav that he kept all the mitzvos help him find favor in Esav’s eyes? How does the fact that he maintained full observance assist the effectiveness of the gift he was sending?

The *Damesek Eliezer* does not name the *many* questioners, but this question appears in both the *Noam Elimelech* and the *Peh Kadosh* (Rav Yitzchak Volozhin).

## SAVIORS

To answer the question, the *Damesek Eliezer* first quotes Rav Shmuel Frimo (1634–1708). Rav Frimo notes that

## ר' אליעזר ב"ר ישראל הגר מויז'ניץ

*The Damesek Eliezer*: R. Eliezer Hager (22 Shevat 1891- 2 Elul 1946), the *Damesek Eliezer* was a son of R. Yisrael (1860-1936), the third Rebbe of Vizhnitz (*Ahavas Yisrael*). His father once stated: When I come to the world to come, they will ask me, “Who are you? And what did you accomplish?” And I will answer, “I am the father of Eliezer'l.” In 1907, R. Eliezer married Chava, daughter of R. Yitzchak Meir Heschel (1861-1935) of Kapishnitz (Ukraine). During WWI he was in Vienna where he became close with the Gedolim who were there. In 1922, R. Eliezer was appointed as Rav of Vizhnitz, and following his father’s passing, in 1936, he succeeded him as Rebbe. In April of 1944, he managed to escape to Eretz Yisrael, only to pass away in 1946.

The *Damesek Eliezer* once commented to Rav Meir Shapiro, “I envy you, for you have such exceptional *talmidim* in Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin.” Rav Meir answered, “I envy you even more. In my yeshiva, only *bachurim* who have already become *talmidei chachamim* are accepted, and we develop them to a higher level of *talmidei chachamim*. We accept *bachurim* who already have *yiras Shamayim*, and we raise them to a higher level of *yiras Shamayim*. But in your yeshiva, you take *bachurim* with limited Torah knowledge and limited *yiras Shamayim* and develop them into real *talmidei chachamim* with real *yiras Shamayim*. Our accomplishments cannot compare to yours!”



THE DAMESEK ELIEZER

the physical world was (conceptually) given to Esav, while the spiritual world was given to Yaakov. If so, he asks: How may Jews enjoy or own even the smallest amount of physicality beyond what is necessary for survival? Wouldn't that be stealing from Esav's portion?

Rav Frimo answers based on a principle (*Bava Metzia 22b*) that if a object is about to be swept away and effectively lost to humanity, it becomes halachically ownerless, and the finder may keep it.

He then explains that since the world would revert to nothingness without the Jewish people constantly studying Torah, the physical world is considered "on the verge of being lost." Therefore, Esav's ownership over the physical world lapses, and it becomes ownerless. This grants the Jewish people the right to benefit from the world's physicality even beyond bare necessity.

### YAAKOV THE SAVIOR

The Damesek Eliezer uses Rav Frimo's idea to resolve the question "asked by many."

Yaakov was sending Esav a large quantity of physical goods as a bribe. But Yaakov knew Esav could argue that Yaakov had no right to these items in the first place. Since Yaakov's domain is the spiritual world and Esav's is the physical, Esav might claim that Yaakov was merely returning what belonged to him.

To preempt this argument, Yaakov emphasized גרתי—that he had kept all 613 mitzvos even during his years in Lavan's home. By maintaining full observance, he effectively sustained the world and prevented it from becoming "lost to mankind." According to Rav Frimo's reasoning, this means that Esav's ownership of the physical world had lapsed, rendering the physical world ownerless and giving Yaakov the right to all the wealth he had acquired.

Only after establishing that the wealth was rightfully his did Yaakov add that he was giving it to Esav "to find favor in his eyes."

### YAAKOV'S CUSTOM

As cited this question is discussed by "many." The *Satmar Rav* also discusses it in a drasha delivered in Tyachiv, Ukraine, in 1936 (*Divrei Yoel*, p. 164).

The Satmar Rav offers a different explanation.

Esav knew that Yaakov had a long-standing custom: he would not keep any profit earned outside Eretz Yisrael, and certainly nothing obtained from a wicked person like Lavan. However, Esav was unsure whether Yaakov—after spending so many years in Lavan's home—might have relaxed some of his personal stringencies. Perhaps Yaakov would keep part of the wealth and only send a portion as a gift.

Yaakov therefore reassured him. By telling Esav that he had kept all the mitzvos and had not learned from Lavan's ways, Yaakov was effectively saying that he maintained all of his spiritual standards and personal customs. Esav could be confident that the gift was a genuine, wholehearted gift—including everything Yaakov had acquired.

Thus, it becomes clear why Yaakov believed that mentioning his steadfast mitzvah observance would help him "find favor in Esav's eyes."

## ר' יואל טייטלבוים

R' Yoel Teitelbaum, (1887-26 Av 1979) was a son of the Kedushas Yom Yov and a grandson of the Yetev Lev. R' Yoel served as Rav of Orsheva and Krula before taking on the mantle of Satmar in 1934. R' Yoel survived the war by escaping with the famous Kazsner train, and went to Eretz Yisrael after the war for a short time before coming to America and building up the Satmar Chassidus. He had three daughters who pre-deceased him. Esther passed away in her youth (12 Elul 1921); Rachel shortly after she married (2 Nisan 1931) and Chaya Roisa (15 Cheshvon 1953).