

Anti-Wealth Prayer (Vayetze)

He who knows he has enough is rich. -Lao-Tzu

Our Patriarch Jacob becomes a wealthy man. He leaves his uncle Laban, who is also his father-in-law, after twenty years of hard work, laden with massive wealth. What is curious about his wealth is his view of it, or at least the interpretation of Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619) as to Jacob's philosophy of wealth.

Twenty years earlier, as Jacob sets out from his father's house on his journey to Haran, Jacob prays to God. He prays for a safe return home. In the material department he asks for only two things: "bread to eat and clothing to wear." A minimalist request from a future tycoon.

The Kli Yakar on Genesis 28:20 explains that Jacob's request for sustenance was also part of his request to return home safely and uncorrupted. It's obvious that bread is eaten, and clothing is worn. Why did Jacob need to add those verbs?

The answer is that Jacob only wanted enough bread to eat and no more, just clothing to wear and nothing extraneous. The Kli Yakar quotes from Proverbs (30:8):

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with mine allotted bread.

He claims that wealth has the potential to both corrupt and cause conflict. It can corrupt its owner from following a straight path, a path of service to God. The wealthy are always at risk of servicing their Wealth. It can also cause conflict with those who want to get their hands on their wealth.

Therefore, Jacob pleads that if God will merely give him his basic necessities to support himself and his family then "I shall return in peace to my father's home."

May our basic needs always be covered and may the wealth we are granted be harnessed for God.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memory of Rabbi Israel Francus z"l.