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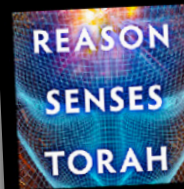
MISSION
God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind
 The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

MESORA
 Summer 2020

EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a religion offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT
FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED
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CHARACTER
PERFECTION

"PERFECTION" REFERS TO ONE WHOSE VALUES AND ACTIONS COMPLY WITH TORAH PERSONALITIES AND LAWS: THE MOST PLEASANT LIFE.



KINDNESS

As equals, all humans must fully treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal or selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness to us.



RACISM: A LIE

Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of Ahab" (Isaiah 48:1). Birth doesn't define us, but how

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THE JOURNAL ON ORTHODOX JEWISH THOUGHT

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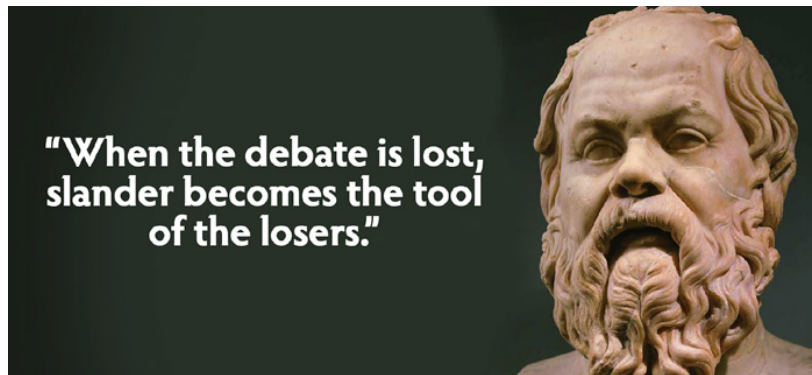
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SOCRATES

LETTERS

Torah vs. Science: Darwin Meets Jacob

READER: The Gemara says that Rabbi Yochanan would hang out by a mikveh so the women would see his handsome features, and somehow through their hopeful conception that night, the women would transmit his facial features to their fetuses. I don't buy into this rationale. It has no real place in science. How do we explain this rationally?

RABBI: Studies show the following:

Effects of Environment on Phenotype (an organism's altered appearance resulting from genotype interaction with environment): Genes play an important part in influencing phenotype, but genes are not the only influence. Environmental conditions, such as temperature and availability of nutrients can affect phenotypes. For example, temperature affects coat color in Siamese cats. Height in humans is a complex phenotype influenced by many genes, but it is also influenced by nutrition. A person who eats a diet poor in nutrients will not grow as tall as they would have had they eaten a more nutritious diet. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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You can barely identify the octopus as it visually matches its environment



Another source states this:

Transgenerational plasticity (TGP) is a change in offspring phenotype that is cued by an environmental signal in the parental generation (and possibly the previous ancestors) without involving genetic change in offspring. It can occur through environmental influence on maternal (or more generally, parental) effects, whereby the phenotype of an offspring depends on the phenotype of its parents, regardless of their genotype. (Read more from www.NIH.gov at this page: <https://bit.ly/pheno2020>)

This validates genetic adaptation: evolution. Jacob peeled branches creating striped patterns and placed them in the watering troughs of his flock. He engaged cunning to protect his interests, as Lavan deceived him. Daas Zikanim comments:

If you were to ask how a righteous person such as Jacob could play such a trick, the answer is that according to the agreement between him and Lavan, Jacob had told his father-in-law to remove all the sheep of his that had speckled and spotted skin patterns, etc., meaning the young animals, so that he could not be accused later on as these having been stolen by him. This did not include mature animals with those skin patterns. Lavan [altered the agreement and] removed all such animals—regardless of their age—making it almost impossible for animals that had never shown such skin patterns to bear young ones that did. Jacob was therefore perfectly fair in looking after his own interests, seeing Lavan had made it almost impossible for him to own flocks of his own without resorting to ingenuity; as a matter of fact he did so, with the help of advice from an angel in a dream, as we read in 31,10. In addition, the sage Rabbi Chaim added that careful reading of the text will show that Lavan changed unilaterally the terms of

their contract, which had referred only to animals with the skin pattern known as nikudim, whereas he now had added those with skin patterns known as akudim. This is why Jacob on his part saw free to do what he did, fulfilling what is written “With the pure You act in purity, And with the perverse You are wily” (Samuel II 22:27).

Jacob followed the Torah principle of acting with others as they act. He placed the peeled sticks in the watering troughs so the flock would see these patterns and transmit the patterns to their offspring's phenotype. Thereby, Jacob produced a flock that he would own according to his terms with Lavan.

It's notable that no sage questioned the efficacy of this method of genetic alteration. Perhaps, Jacob—having studied with Noah's son Shem for 14 years—learned about the various animal species on the Ark, including their unique natures. We know that certain species like the chameleon and octopus can mimic their surroundings, proving that vision affects bodily characteristics. Shem was with all the animals for a year on the Ark and he could have transferred that knowledge to Jacob. (Questioning Daas Zikanim, Torah does not openly say the angels taught Jacob about adaptation, camouflage or evolution.)

Rabbi Yochanan apparently possessed this information. Obviously he valued mothers having beautiful children, as he felt this would generate in the mother a greater affection for the child, which is the role of the mother. The child in turn would be raised with a healthier psyche due to the stronger emotional bond with its mother.

Both Jacob and Rabbi Yochanan expressed the view that immediately prior to conception, visual stimuli can affect a phenotype.

We now see how genetic alteration through environment taught in Torah complies with science. God created the natural world and Torah. They must comply with each other. ■



LOSS OF MERIT

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student

The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esav; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." Jacob was greatly frightened; this vexed him, and he divided the people with him and the flocks and herds and camels into two camps, thinking, "If Esav comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape." Then Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, God, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal goodly with you!' I am unworthy of all the kindness and all the truth that You have shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav; lest he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count'" (Gen. 32:8-13).

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Rashi comments:

My merits are diminished in consequence of all the kindness and truth which You have already shown me. For this reason I am afraid: perhaps, since You made these promises to me, I have become defiled by sin, and this may cause me to be delivered unto Esav's power (Shabbat 32a).

Rashi says that Jacob felt, "Maybe my merit decreased," and "Maybe I was defiled with sin." According to Rashi, what is the uniformity of these two ideas?

Gemara Shabbos 32a warns one from risking danger and relying on a miracle to be saved, citing this case regarding Jacob. However, as Jacob didn't place himself in danger, how does the gemara cite Jacob as an example?

This idea that one loses his merit because God changes natural law to save him, is questionable. How does providence decrease one's merit? And in general, why should one lose his merit, he should retain it.

The principle is that when a miracle occurs for a person, he can't help but feel a certain egotistical pride that hashgacha (God's providence) is with

him. His feeling of being "close to God" is egotistical, and actually removes him from God. This is why he loses his merits. The gemara says that an egotistical person can't live in the same world with God: God says, "He and I can't live in one world." [Human life has but one focus, and that is God. With focussing on oneself, one lives not in God's world.]

God promised Jacob kindness, and then fulfilled His word—God's "truth." Thereby, Jacob feared that he was "defiled by sin" through his view of God being close to him. This can happen to one who is completely blinded to true reality; he is convinced by a false notion in his mind: a notion that he is close to God. But in fact, he has deviated and fallen prey to a blind spot in his mind which is brought about when God promised him kindness, and He came through. That's like experiencing a miracle [both are divine benefits] and why the gemara cites this case. Once one feels that God is with him, one doesn't introspect, and he is not careful about his decisions. He can blindly commit the worst sins. Rashi learns "katonti" ("my merit decreased") means that as God came through on His promises, Jacob grew small. Through his assuredness of "being with God," Jacob could be blinded from sin and he

worried that this had occurred.

This answers our 3 questions: 1) Why should one forfeit his merit through God's kindness? 2) What is the uniformity in Rashi's two parts? 3) How does the gemara in Shabbos correlate Jacob to relying on a miracle?

Ramban raises a strong question on Rashi: If Jacob felt unworthy of God's kindness, how could Jacob then ask God to save him, saying, "Yet You have said, 'I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea'?" (Ibid. 32:13)

We answer as follows. Here, Jacob asked for God's kindness, but not due to his own merit. Citing these words "hatave aytiv; I will deal bountifully," Jacob invoked God's kindness on account of Abraham. Rashi comments, "I will also do good to thee on account of your father's merits." Jacob asked not for God to do good for his sake, but for what He promised to Abraham. The promise Jacob cites here "and make your offspring as the sands of the sea" was a promise to Abraham, not to Jacob. Thereby, Ramban's question is answered: Jacob pleaded with God not due to his merit which he might have lost, but due to God's promise to Abraham. ■

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Life with Lavan

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And he commanded them saying: Thus you will say to my master Esav, “Thus says your servant Yaakov, ‘I have lived with Lavan and I have been delayed until now.’” (Sefer Beresheit 32:5)

I. Yaakov crafts a message

Yaakov returns with his family to the Land of Cana’an. He fled his father’s home to escape the anger of his brother Esav. Esav had declared his intent to kill Yaakov. Yaakov expects that he will encounter Esav. He sends messengers to Esav. These messengers are told to announce to Esav his brother’s return. The messengers are also will tell Esav that Yaakov seeks his friendship.

In the above passage, Yaakov communicates to his messengers the greeting they are to deliver to Esav. They are to tell Esav that during the many years of his absence, Yaakov lived with Lavan. Lavan was Yaakov and Esav’s uncle.

Yaakov lived with Lavan for twenty years. Surprisingly, he used the term *garti* to describe living with Lavan. This term communicates a lack of permanence. Instead, he might have used the term *yashavti*. This term communicates settling in a place. Yaakov was telling Esav that Lavan’s community never was his home. He was a

sojourner or foreigner there, not fully a resident.

Why did Yaakov direct his messengers to share this with Esav? Why did Yaakov want Esav to know that he was a stranger and alien in Lavan’s home and community? Rashi cites an explanation from the midrash. Before considering his explanation, some background is necessary.

II. Addressing Esav’s hatred

Esav resented Yaakov because he believed that he had stolen the blessings that should have been bestowed upon him. Yaakov had disguised himself as Esav and Yitzchak blessed Yaakov believing he was Esav. One of these blessings was that Yaakov will be the master of his brother.

Rashi comments:

“I was not made into a minister or an important person. Rather [I was] a foreigner. It is not fitting for you to hate me over the blessings of your father. He bestowed upon me the blessing: You will be a master to your brother. It has not been fulfilled in me.” (Rashi, Sefer Beresheit 32:5)

Yaakov understood that his return would provoke Esav. Esav would be reminded of the blessings he believed Yaakov had stolen. Part of

Yaakov’s strategy was to minimize Esav’s resentment. When he fled his father’s home, he was alone and without resources. He is returning with a large family, flocks, and possessions. Esav might interpret this as a fulfillment of the blessings that Yitzchak bestowed upon him. This conclusion would further enflame Esav’s anger and hatred. Yaakov needed to “spin” a story and alter Esav’s perceptions. He told Esav that his many years with Lavan had been frustrating or even humiliating. He had not become an important and influential leader, as implied by the blessings. He never was accepted. He was treated as a foreigner and outsider. He left home and he is returning as a simple person.

III. Yaakov was faithful to his values

Rashi adds another interpretation of Yaakov’s message:

“Another interpretation [of the use of the term garti is that] the numerical value of the word garti is 613. [It is] like saying I dwelled with Lavan and observed the 613 commandments. I did not learn from his wicked behaviors.” (Rashi, Sefer Beresheit 32:5)

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This is another explanation of Yaakov's use of the term garti to describe his years in Lavan's home and community. Yaakov is using this word because of its numerical value. Its value is 613, corresponding with the number of mitzvot. Yaakov used this word to communicate an additional message. "I have been true to my values and lived a moral life, devoted to Hashem."

This is a strange message to share with Esav. Esav rejected his father's values. Would it not have been wiser for Yaakov to not draw Esav's attention to their differences? If Esav believed that Yaakov had adopted some of Lavan's values, then it would be easier for him to identify with Yaakov. They would be more similar. Also, wouldn't Esav prefer to learn that Yaakov was not righteous and that he was undeserving of the blessings? Why did Yaakov feel that this message would impact Esav? What does this message reveal about Yaakov's understanding of Esav?

IV. Yaakov's understanding of Esav

Yaakov perceived in Esav underlying respect for the values of his father and grandfather – Yitzchak and Avraham. Esav proclaimed his rejection of these values. But at a deeper level, he recognized them as an exalted and sacred way of life. Yaakov did not assess Esav based solely on his external attitudes and behaviors. His assessment penetrated beyond the externals. At a deeper level, his brother retained intense respect for the values of Yitzchak and Avraham.

V. Earning Esav's respect

This perception shaped Yaakov's message. What would be Esav's reaction if he concluded that his brother's character had been compromised by living in Lavan's community? Yaakov had left home embodying the values of Avraham and Yitzchak. He was completely committed to them. If Yaakov was returning less committed or compromised by his years in Lavan's community, Esav would have less respect for him. He would view Yaakov as a charlatan. He would perceive him as someone who pretends righteousness when convenient but is quick to abandon it when circumstances are less favorable.

VI. Lessons from Yaakov

The parallel between this encounter and the experience of the Jewish people in exile are obvious. In every generation we must consider how we can best survive in exile. Do we try to be more like our neighbors? Should we moderate our practices and beliefs that make us different? Is it better to fit in? Yaakov warns us that this may be a very dangerous strategy. He tells us that we should not assume that we will earn the friendship of our neighbors by being more like them. We may discover that our compromises completely undermine their respect for us. ■



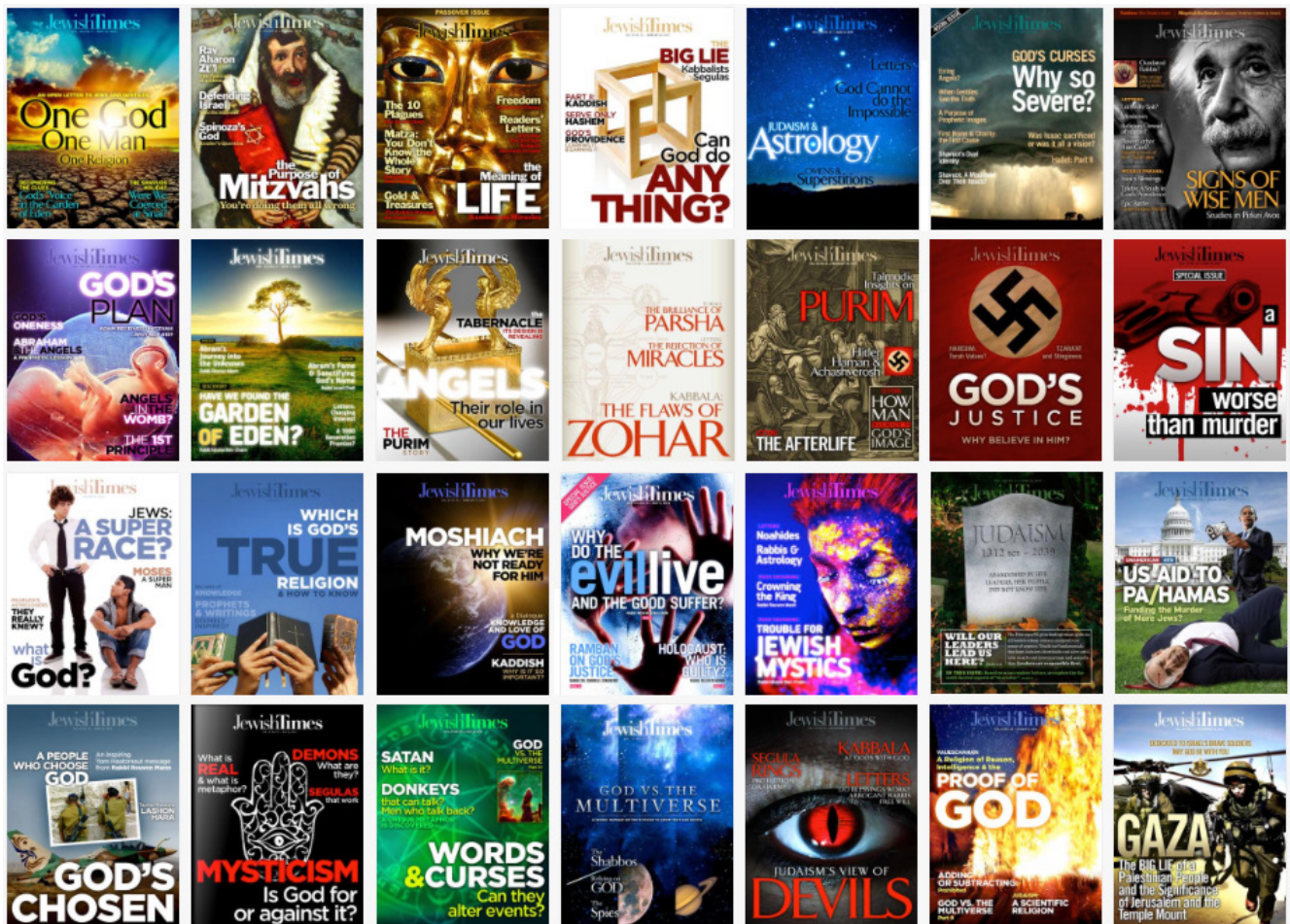
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Can Hate Be Conquered?

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Vayishlach, depicts the long-awaited confrontation between Yaakov and Eisav. Their relationship had been seriously jeopardized by Yaakov's actions concerning the blessings Yitzchak had intended to give Eisav.

Eisav could not absorb the wound inflicted on his ego and silently vowed to exact revenge on his younger brother once their father was gone. In response, Yaakov had escaped to the house of his uncle Lavan. It was now 20 years later, and he needed to escape from this relative who had also become his enemy.

Hashem intervened to thwart Lavan's intentions, but Yaakov was now on a collision course with his brother, and he could not relax and await a miracle. In keeping with the example of his grandfather Avraham, he seized the initiative and divided his camp, designed a diplomatic initiative, and, of course, prayed.

Yaakov was prepared to offer a substantial tribute to his brother. However, the monetary value of the gift alone would not save the day, as Eisav was very wealthy and, as he would soon attest, had no need for his brother's largesse. Rather, the offering was intended as a display of kavod (honor) to express Yaakov's desire to find favor with and to display honor to his older brother.

There is an important lesson here. Human dignity is of crucial importance. Violation of a person's self-esteem can trigger terrible consequences. When a person is insulted, he can spiral into uncontrollable rage and turn violent.

Need we look any further than Lavan? Rachel had taken his terafim (religious icons) in the hope that he could wean himself away from idolatrous practices. This insult to his religious sensibilities almost produced catastrophic results. He chased after Yaakov and, were it not for divine intervention, would have wreaked fearsome retaliation. Indeed, the Passover Haggadah, in the section called "Go and Learn," makes this incredible assertion: "Go and learn what Lavan the Aramite sought to do to our father Yaakov. For Pharaoh only



decreed against the firstborn, but Lavan sought to uproot everything..." in his rage he might have destroyed his own daughters and grandchildren.

Yaakov approached Eisav with careful deliberation. He prepared a very substantial gift of choice animals and divided them into separate groupings. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains the importance of not presenting the gift all at once. A powerful emotion must be undone gradually, one piece at a time. Every time Eisav encountered a new gift, his anger would dissipate more, until his soul was appeased. [This is in line with the Rabbinic teaching that if one wants to overcome a stingy disposition he must tilt to the extreme of generous giving. The Rambam teaches that in this endeavor he should perform many charitable acts with lesser amounts rather than one massive donation.]

In addition, Yaakov marched in front of his family, and at seven intervals, stopped and bowed to his brother. This display of kavod (honor) expressed through the carefully arranged gift and Yaakov's genuflections had a powerful impact. "Eisav ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; then they wept."

The Rabbis disagree among themselves whether Eisav's tears were genuine. Some

hold that they were not, but Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said that "although it is an immutable rule that Eisav hates Yaakov, at that moment his mercy was aroused, and he kissed Yaakov with all his heart" (Rashi). How can we understand the nature of this rabbinic disagreement?

It seems to me that Eisav's display of emotion was not faked. He was genuinely moved and wanted to embrace his brother. But that response was rooted in his self-love. Yaakov had catered to his elevated opinion of himself, and his need for approval and Eisav felt gratitude for that. But is that a basis for a permanent rapprochement?

For that to happen, Eisav would have to look into his soul and recognize that his evaluation of Yaakov had been wrong. It is not clear that Eisav was capable of reorienting the attitudes and values that would enable him to become a true brother to Yaakov. One Rabbi holds that Eisav's tears were essentially an emotional and momentary knee-jerk reaction to the honor being offered him, a feeling that would soon dissipate.

But Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai held that it was more than that and contained a feeling of genuine affection for Yaakov. It was therefore a true basis for developing and cultivating a lasting friendship based on genuine mutual understanding. Indeed, after accepting Yaakov's gifts, Eisav said, "Travel on and let us go; I will proceed alongside of you." He did not want to part from Yaakov.

At that point in history, however, Yaakov had to be exclusively involved with developing his own family and could not be diverted by accompanying Eisav to Seir. Notwithstanding, the Rabbis assert (in accordance with the prophecy of Obadiah 1:21) that in the messianic era, Yaakov's children will come to Mount Seir to render judgment against Eisav's descendants.

May the day soon come when Eisav's blatant and irrational hatred of Yaakov will be eliminated from the world.

Shabbat shalom. ■

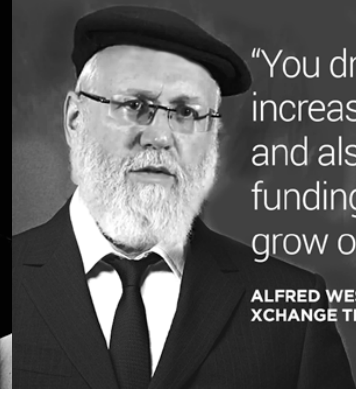
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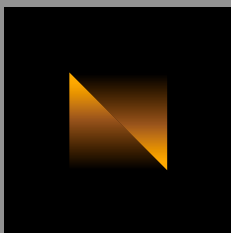
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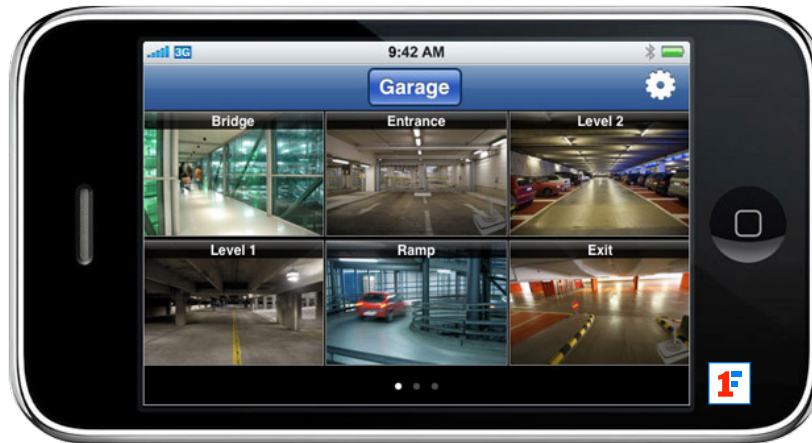
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