



# TO-L'DOT

## Ask a Busy Person

I'm fairly certain that you have heard this saying before: "If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it." It is a popular saying and is attributed to all sorts of "wise people," ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Lucille Ball. Whatever its original source, I'm convinced that there is a great measure of truth to it.

Busy people are generally responsible and reliable people. It, therefore, makes good sense to entrust the tasks one wishes to accomplish to such individuals.

But I think it goes deeper than that. I think that busy people are always looking for new challenges, interesting options, and opportunities to use their intelligence and creativity, and that is what makes them so valuable.

There are all sorts of reasons why some individuals are not busy. Some simply lack opportunity. Others have been found to be incompetent and, therefore, are not busy.

But such individuals are not "opposites" of the busy person. The

busy person's "opposite" is the individual who shirks new tasks, who actively avoids new assignments, who is reluctant to risk novelty and uncertainty.

Where in the Torah can we find mention of archetypes, or models, of the busy person and of the one who is determined not to be busy? I like to suggest that we find such archetypes in the persons of this week's Torah portion, Toldot (B'reishit 25:19-28:9). I refer to Yaakov and Eisav, and specifically to the following passages:

Yaakov was cooking a lentil stew when Eisav came in from the field, exhausted.

Eisav said to Yaakov, "Pour some of this red stuff down my throat because I'm exhausted!" ...

Yaakov said, "Sell me your birthright (the privilege of performing the sacrificial services carried out by the firstborn)."

Eisav replied, "I am going to die, so why do I need this birthright?" ...

He sold his birthright to Yaakov.

Yaakov gave bread and lentil stew to Eisav, who ate and drank, and got up and left.

Eisav despised the birthright.

(B'reishit 25:29-34, adapted from the expanded translation of Rabbi Chaim Miller)

At this point, you might find yourself asking about the connection between Yaakov and Eisav in this narrative and the dichotomy I've drawn between the busy man and the man who shirks busyness. To address your very legitimate question, allow me to introduce you to a very interesting Torah scholar and his unique take on the personalities of Yaakov and Eisav.

I refer to a man whom I had heard about many years ago from my childhood tutor, Rabbi Yaakov Abramczyk. In his youth, Rabbi Abramczyk was a student at the Yeshiva of Novardik in pre-Holocaust Lithuania. He survived the Holocaust, but most of his fellow students did not. He often spoke to me of one of those fellow students, a man named Rabbi Yitzchak Valdshain.

I recently came across a book entitled *Torat Yitzchak*, which contains a biography of Rabbi Valdshain, along with a few of the Torah essays which he had published in his lifetime. One of those essays is devoted to this week's parsha. It is entitled, "The Devout Person Seeks Obligations". That title intrigued me, and his opening paragraphs intrigued me all the more.

He distinguishes between two types of religious personalities. One he calls the "Eagle". Just as the Eagle flies ever upward toward the sun, so

does the Eagle-personality seek every opportunity to get closer to the Almighty's service. He seeks to learn about religious obligations of which he was previously ignorant, and he seeks to become involved in new religious roles.

The other religious personality type he terms the "Bat", the person who not only does not fly toward the sun but flies in the opposite direction, away from the sun's rays, toward the darkness in which he is most comfortable. This person is satisfied with the religious obligations that are familiar to him and wants to remain oblivious to the other duties that might be out there. He is comfortable in his current role and does not wish to even hear of new possibilities, of new religious roles.

Rabbi Valdshain reminds us of a passage in the Talmud that illustrates these two opposite tendencies. It reads:

The later generations are different from the earlier ones. The earlier ones would bring their newly harvested crops through the wide front doors of their homes and courtyards, so that they could proudly perform the obligation to tithe their crops. Later generations brought their crops through rooftops, alleyways, and side entrances in order to exempt those crops from tithes. (Talmud Bavli, B'rachot 35b, loosely translated.)

The earlier generations were "Eagles", flying upward toward the sun and performing the good deeds far beyond the minimal standards. Later generations deteriorated to the level of "Bats", doing what they could to evade, albeit within the letter of the law, unwanted obligations.

Rabbi Valdshain elaborates upon the differences between the two personalities. As I understand it, his "Eagle" is like our busy man, who is ever alert to new responsibilities, who rises to every new occasion, and who constantly broadens the sphere of his experience.

Of course, Rabbi Valdshain is concerned with the man who is busy with religious affairs, but from a psychological perspective, his analysis can easily be applied to any area of human activity.

Rabbi Valdshain's "Bat" is not a bad person. He is a complacent person. One might even say that he is a self-satisfied person.

Taking the "Eagle/Bat" metaphor a bit further, one can say that the Eagle, because he is open to the sun's radiance, is open to personal growth. The Bat, however, hides from the sun and so denies himself personal growth opportunities.

For Rabbi Valdshain, this is the key

difference between the Yaakov and Eisav. Yaakov actively seeks to "purchase" the role of the firstborn. He greatly desires the role of sacrificial service, the challenges of leadership, the expansion of his spirituality, and the opportunities for reaching out to others.

Eisav, on the other hand, eschews new responsibilities and new obligations. He is satisfied with lentil stew, with the "red stuff", with his basic physical needs. Sacrificial service, the pressures of leadership, challenging spiritual opportunities - these are all mere burdens to him. They are to be "despised".

And so, "he eats and he drinks and he gets up and he leaves."

These two personality types, the "Eagle" and the "Bat", reside side by side within each of us. There are occasions when we fly upwards to the sun and become responsible busy people. There are also, regrettably, moments when we withdraw to the dark caverns of our souls, avoid all sorts of possibilities, and forfeit growth opportunities.

Rabbi Valdshain, may his memory be blessed, urges us to be aware of these tendencies within us all. He implores us to suppress our inner "Bat" and permit our inner "Eagle" to soar. 🕊️