

THERE TO SHARE

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Yaakov pledged an oath saying, "If You will protect me on the way that I am going and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear and return me to the house of my father and Hashem will be for me a G-d, then everything You give me I will tithe for You!" (Breishis 28:20)

Why does Yaakov ask for bread to eat and clothing to wear? What else does one do with bread and clothing? Does one wear bread and eat clothing? The infinitive form of the verb is entirely superfluous, or so it seems.

Secondly, if Yaakov is requesting a mere subsistence living, then what will there be left to tithe to fulfill the final condition of his personal pledge?

When my wife and I were engaged we went to visit a great person in our community to receive his blessing. As we approached his house, we noticed Rabbi Mordechai Schwabb ztl. had already stepped out and was walking quickly to Yeshiva. We went hastily to the corner where he would be crossing and met him there in full stride.

We greeted him and told him our special news. He lit up with enormous and genuine joy, and as he exulted, he repeated a phrase, a peculiar blessing, I later learned from close family was his own unique expression, "The simcha should be with simcha! Ah! Ah! Ah! The simcha should be with simcha!" He walked on excitedly.

We stood in stunned silence having experienced the personality of a real Tzadik. Afterwards, though, we were left with the riddle of that blessing, "The simcha should be with simcha!"

What did that mean? I was told as a kid not to define a word with the same word. Sure a rose is a rose is a rose. It had to mean something! As we walked and talked it became clear to the point that that phrase was our banner, our theme for the entire engagement and marriage process.

We realized that there is the noun, "the simcha", which includes a whole host of other nouns, such as the menu, the venue, the flowers, the gown, the booze, the band etc. Each one of those items has a price tag and requires some discussion as to how much one is willing to expend. Therefore each detail of the "simcha" is a trigger, a pressure point, potentially a pitfall for lasting pain and resentment too. Mazel Tov!

Then there is the attitude, the state of mind, called "simcha" that represents the inner world, the centerpiece of the experience. One need not be sacrificed at the expense of the other. Don't forget

to revel in the true inner beauty of the occasion and not to let any of the details weigh down and destroy the true joy of the day.

Maybe we can understand that when Yaakov asked for bread to eat and clothing to wear he was not wasting words or anything else. Clothing can be for the practicalities of warmth and dignity or one can dress to impress or even "dress to kill".

How many people have gone into debt and been pushed to the precipice of insanity for the sake of an extravagant wedding, Bar-Mitzva, you name it? How much food and hard earned money is wasted for the sake of a reputation? How much good health and personal happiness is undone by unnecessary intake and indulgence in food-stuff?

To know the difference between what we "want" and what we really "need" is a sign of budding maturity. How uncomplicated and uncluttered our lives become when those powers of discernment are properly exercised.

When a healthy self-discipline is employed one takes only what's necessary. The little gifts of life are then appropriated in a blessed way, for the good that was originally intended. Residual resources are made more readily available to develop an inner world of joy and that leaves more and more of us there to share.

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