

# YOUR BFF

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

And Yaakov saw the face of Lavan, and suddenly he was not with him as before. And HASHEM told Yaakov, "Return to the land of your fathers and of your birthplace and I will be with you!" Yaakov sent and he called for Rachel and for Leah to the field of sheep. And he said to them, "I see that your father's face is not towards me as before and the G-d of my fathers is with me. And you know that with all of my abilities I worked for your father. And your father has switched my salary ten times (100 times- Rashi), and G-d has not allowed him to afflict harm on me..." (Breishis 31:2-7)

It was a long conversation that Yaakov had with Rachel and Leah amongst the sheep. He goes on to explain how with help from heaven he amassed the wealth legitimately in spite of Lavan's best attempt to handicap him. He explained to them how dangerously uncomfortable the situation was getting. In the end he does tell them that G-d had told him it's time to get up and go back to the land of his birth.

That entire consultation could have been much shorter. All Yaakov had to explain to these great women was that HASHEM had told him that it was time to go and for sure they would have been compliant and obedient. Why does the Torah use all this extra ink to spell out the elaborate details of that private meeting and why does Yaakov himself not fast forward to the very end and tell them that G-d said this is the right move to make and the right time to make it? There is an important educational point to be advanced here.

Someone told me that years ago at the Torah U Mesorah convention Reb Shmuel Kaminetzky gave a profound and memorable answer to a question during the principals' Q and A. He was asked whether it was appropriate that a male principal should tell a female student that her skirt was not covering her knees. Reb Shmuel said, "Speak to the heart, not to the knee!" It seems this advice is not just for teenagers who might be at risk if dealt with too harshly.

This is a necessary approach for Yaakov when dealing with the mothers, the builders of Klal Yisrael. For sure they would be ready to jump into action if they were told by their holy and trusted husband that it was the will of The Almighty to do something. Would that be sufficient? It could very well be that they would go into action mode immediately, but something would be missing.

The Torah understands that we are not only logical creatures. We are psychological beings! The head and the heart both need to be engaged. Yaakov needed to explain to his wives why it was valuable to move now. He invited them out amongst the sheep and laid out the case for leaving

according to logic and experience. Then the word of G-d is not experienced as being at odds with what they already know to be true. The Dvar HASHEM is really for their benefit.

This is even more so now when introducing children to Torah and Mitzvos. The Torah is not just a rule book. Shabbos is not time of arbitrary restrictions. Just the opposite is true! The rules are there for us. Shabbos is called a delight by the prophets. Those rules should be experienced not just as our best friends but as our Best Friend Forever, and not as an unwelcome dictator. For that to happen we have to follow the council of Yaakov Avinu and appeal to the emotions, and senses before asserting Divine authority. When Shabbos is dressed up with pleasantries and delicious foods, family fun and friendship then the many boundaries are happily accepted and appreciated like protectors of goodness as the doors on an airplane.

There is a reason why a human child needs such a long time to develop. The Talmud tells us, "A one day ox is called an ox." He does not need to go to Oxford. Right away he is grown up. A human requires decades to develop the right habits and attitudes. It's not a time to control and train. A child will someday be an adult and that adult needs to appreciate that what seem like just rules are really our BFF.