

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

by Rabbi Naftali Reich

In this week's Parsha, the Torah outlines in great detail Yaakov Avinu's sojourn with his wicked uncle, Lavan Ha'arami. Yaakov toiled day and night for seven years to win the hand of Lavan's daughter, Rochel, in marriage. After the wedding feast, however, Lavan the charlatan tricked Yaakov by substituting his younger daughter, Leah, for Rochel.

Yaakov discovered the subterfuge only in the morning, and was forced to work for another seven years to earn the right to marry Rochel. The Talmud in Megillah (daf 13) tells us that Yaakov recognized Lavan's fraudulent nature; he anticipated that his crafty uncle might switch daughters on him and had therefore provided Rochel with a secret code that she would whisper to him in the dark, assuring him of her true identity.

When Rochel saw her sister being led to Yaakov, she realized the shame Leah would suffer at being rejected when she failed to exchange the agreed upon code with Yaakov. Her compassion for her sister overrode her own aspirations to marry Yaakov, and she divulged to Leah the secret signs.

The merit of Rochel's selfless deed, the Talmud says, elicited Divine mercy for her and all future Jewish generations. The Talmud relates that it was in that merit of her extraordinary selflessness that she was designated as the forbearer of King Shaul. In addition, it will be Rochel's entreaties to Hashem in the merit of her noble actions that will trigger the ultimate redemption.

The obvious question is that while Rochel did indeed demonstrate great nobility of character in sharing the secret code with Leah, how could she bring herself to deceive and disappoint Yaakov? He would now be forced to assume a lifetime marital responsibility for Leah against his will. Was it fair to impose this sacrifice on him?

The famed maggid of Jerusalem, Rav Sholom Schwadron, answers the question with a beautiful story.

Shortly after the war of independence, right before the festival of Passover, a young fellow was tragically killed in Jerusalem in an artillery barrage launched by Jordanians on the city of Jerusalem. His distraught widow was left to look after her three young children alone.

Rav Yehoshua Brim, a venerable scholar in Jerusalem, assumed responsibility for the family's welfare. He drafted a yeshiva student to come to the bereaved home on the night of Passover to conduct the seder for the widow and her young charges. After the evening service, Rabbi Brim went from the synagogue to the home of the family to ensure that the young fellow had arrived and that

their needs were well taken care of.

To his dismay, he saw that the yeshiva student had failed to show up. After waiting a short while, he stood up and made Kiddush for the family and proceeded to conduct a beautiful seder for them. To the widow's joy, he shared with the children the story of the Exodus and delighted them with a reenactment of the ten plagues.

It was late at night when the children finally fell asleep around the seder table, at which point he left the widow's home to take care of his own family.

He entered his home, greeted his family and began once again conducting the seder service and recounting the story of the exodus. His wife and children, however, were agitated over his long absence and the anxious and frustrating wait they had endured. After the meal, when emotions were calmer, he explained to them the reason for his extended delay.

His wife, still troubled, remarked, "It was very nice that you performed such a mitzvah, but what about the family waiting at home? Doesn't charity begin at home?"

Rabbi Brim responded by relating a story about a time, two years earlier, when he had visited the great sage, the Chazon Ish, who exhorted him to find a suitable mate for a friend of his, an older bochur who had still not found his bashert. Rabbi Brim introduced his friend to a wonderful young girl from Tel Aviv and the two scheduled their engagement party. To the delight of the young man, the Chazon Ish promised to attend the party.

When Rabbi Brim arrived at the Chazon Ish's home to bring him to the party, the Chazon Ish was sitting with a young couple engaged in earnest conversation. The sage continued to talk with this couple for over an hour while Rabbi Brim fidgeted and agitated outside the room.

Finally, the Chazon Ish concluded his discussion with the young couple and escorted them to the door. He explained to Rabbi Brim as they left for the engagement party that the young couple with whom he had spent so much time were Holocaust survivors who had married in a DP camp and just recently arrived in the Holy Land. They had very little money and needed advice on how to establish themselves in business. They were about to open a haberdashery store and detailed to the Chazon Ish each and every purchase that they were about to make to stock their new store.

The Chazon Ish told Rabbi Brim that he understood that he was keeping many people waiting by spending so much time with the couple. By the many individuals at the party were equally responsible for this young couple's welfare, he said. By waiting patiently, they too were sharing in the mitzvah of ensuring the financial security of these two battered survivors who were alone in the world.

Rabbi Brim explained to his family that upon entering the widow's house and grasping the situation, he knew that he had to take care of their needs by conducting their seder. It wasn't his responsibility alone, he said, but rather the shared responsibility of his family. By keeping their own seder on hold

until the bereaved woman and her orphans were taken care of, the entire family played an important role in bringing the joy of yom tov to the grieving family.

In this vein, Rabbi Schwadron explains, Rochel realized that Yaakov too, was responsible to ensure that Leah did not suffer mortal shame by being exposed as part of Lavan's bait-and-switch. He too, carried an obligation to enable her to share in weaving the destiny of the Jewish people by helping to build the twelve tribes.

This concept of shared responsibility is the central theme that established our nation as one. There are many tribes, streams of expression and shades of observance within the Jewish people, but ultimately the recognition that we are all responsible for one another is the source of our greatness, and with it we will ultimately merit the Divine redemption.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos,

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Rabbi Reich is on the faculty of [the Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum Education Center](#).