

# EVERY LAST DROP

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

*G-d remembered Rachel; G-d listened to her, and He opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son, and she said: "G-d has gathered in [assaf] my disgrace." So she called his name Yosef... (30:22-23)*

Which disgrace was Rachel referring to when she said, "G-d has gathered in my disgrace?" Rashi cites two possible explanations: 1) I had been disgraced by my barrenness, in the face of all of Yaakov's other wives having already conceived. 2) As long as a woman has no son, she has no one to take the blame for her mistakes. Once she has a son, she can blame [everything] on him. [For instance, if her husband asks,] "Who broke this?" - "Your son!" "Who ate these figs?" - "Your son!" (Midrash [Bereishis Rabbah 73:5])

To take care of an obvious difficulty, let us assume that explanation 2) does not mean she actually lies, claiming that the figs she ate were actually eaten by her son. [And if the figs were indeed eaten by her son, then what has she really gained - he deserves to take the blame!] Perhaps, however, what it means is that once she has a child, the housewife is no longer expected to be perfect. "Who broke these plates?" - "I did - after being up all night taking care of your crying son!" "Who ate these figs?" - "I did - I was completely drained after spending my whole day caring for your son and I needed some time to relax!"

But how is it possible that these were Rachel Imeinu's feelings about childbirth: "Great - now I've got someone to blame. I don't have to be so perfect anymore!" May we not assume that all of Rachel's prayers to bear Yaakov's children were inspired solely by her desire to be one of the mothers of our nation? When she, in great anguish, told Yaakov (30:1), "Give me children - if not, I am dead!" was she merely seeking a son who could bear the blame of her imperfections?

The very first blessing of the Birchos ha-Shachar, the morning blessings, is "Blessed are you, Hashem... Who has given the brain understanding, to discern between day and night." Why, asked the Alter of Slabodka zt"l, did our Sages choose to begin our day in praise of such a seemingly simple faculty - the ability to discern between night and day?

The Gemara asks (Berachos 59a), "What blessing does one make over rainfall? Rav Yehuda said: We give praise to You for every single drop [of rain] that You have given us." Why is it necessary to praise Hashem for every single drop of rain? Would it not suffice to simply give praise for rainfall in general, without mentioning every single drop? Evidently not. It seems that Chazal, our Sages, wanted us to realize that "rainfall" is in fact a combination of thousands and millions of tiny drops of water, each

drop a kindness of its own. To praise the rainfall without mentioning the drops, would be to ignore the fact that every last drop is worthy of our appreciation and recognition.

The human brain is perhaps the most complex and least understood segment of the human body. Speech, movement, visual perception, spacial awareness... the network of the brain's faculties is seemingly endless and "mind-boggling." Of all the brain's functions, its ability to discern between night and day is seemingly one of the most simple and basic. And, explains the Alter of Slabodka, it is precisely because of this that our daily prayers must begin with this praise, to remind us that, "Were our mouths full of song, and our tongues full of joyous song like the waves of the sea, and our lips as full of praise as the heavens, and our eyes as brilliant as the sun and the moon, and our hands outspread as the eagles, and our feet as swift as deer - we still could not thank You sufficiently, Hashem, for even one of the thousands and myriads of favours, miracles, and wonders... (Nishmas prayer)"

No doubt bearing a "scapegoat" was the furthest thing from Rachel's mind when she prayed for a son. But when her request was granted, she did not overlook even the smallest kindness that it entailed. She had the wisdom to perceive and appreciate even the most minute fringe-benefits, things such as the now-diminished expectations of her ba'alebusta prowess. [Shai La-Torah]

I once heard of a man whose body was flawless, save for one minor problem. The muscle in his eye-lids, which serves the function of keeping them open, was not receiving its messages properly from the brain. In order to see, he had to prop his eye-lids open with his finger.

It never ceases to amaze me how, even after having just visited the mechanic, and having spent an inordinate amount of money overhauling what I thought was surely every-last one of my car's parts and pieces, something can still malfunction the very next day! Once, while driving, a nut became loose. When it fell off, my transmission fell right through the floor of the car! A simple nut. When one begins to consider the countless and endless factors and components that come together to make our day just-so, one is indeed humbled and filled with gladness and appreciation.

It is so common to see the forest but completely overlook the trees (not to mention the grass, the leaves, the flowers and the fresh air, etc.). If we focus on only the most major and life-changing events in our lives, we lose sight of the countless daily kindnesses we constantly depend on, each of which is in its own right deserving of infinite praise and appreciation.

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