

JUST DOING MY JOB!

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

"In conjunction with G-d's protection we must be unfailingly vigilant in overseeing our children's spiritual development."

What does it take to raise a religious family in America? Considering the enormous pressures exerted on each of us to assimilate, how does a family retain its commitment to Torah values and traditions?

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, Yakov promised G-d (28:20) that if He would protect him from the evils of Lavan and return him to his father's home whole and intact (in peace), then Yakov would fully serve G-d. At first glance it seemed as if Yakov was making a deal with G-d. "You do for me and I'll do for you."

The Maharal explains that Yakov was not setting conditions on his relationship with G-d. Yakov's relationship with G-d was stronger than any one else who had preceded him. Yakov was the one whom G-d trusted to enter the lion's den of Lavan's machinations and extract from the Lavan's devices the purity of Rachel and Leah. A person such as Yakov would not have made deals with G-d or placed conditions on his devotion.

Yakov's promise was his acceptance of the responsibility for raising the Chosen People. He promised G-d that he would do whatever was humanly possible to protect and nurture the embryonic nucleus of the Bnai Yisroel. Yakov's vow was his plea for G-d's ongoing protection and the strength in protecting his children from the influences of Lavan.

G-d's promises only guarantee success if we do as He commands. We are still required to make the most of the opportunities He orchestrates and avoid the dangers that challenge us at all times. Every morning we pray to Hashem, "Do not cause us to be tested." It is as if we say, "Please Hashem, protect us from ourselves by orchestrating the events and circumstances of my day. Please do not test my resolve and commitment to avoid sin! I don't trust myself not to sin!" Regardless of G-d's promises, we have the free will not to do as we are commanded. Therefore, we must still study His Torah so that we best understand His expectations for us. We must still take full responsibility for our decisions and actions.

The same is true for raising our children. Even if we feel secure in our own devotion and performances in relation to G-d, we can never feel as certain when it comes to our children. Yakov

was 84 years old when he married Leah and Rachel. For the better time a normal lifetime, Yakov immersed himself in the teachings of his father Yitzchak, and his Great-Great-Grandfather, Ever. Yakov's spiritual fortitude was more than equal to the task of surviving the evil Lavan's deceit. Yakov knew with absolute certainty that he could best Lavan at his own game of intrigue and trickery. However, when it came to his future children, the future 12 tribes of Israel, Yakov was not as confident and secure. Yakov had every reason to feel frightened and concerned for their spiritual safety. Therefore, Yakov prayed for G-d's continued protection that he be able to return "B'Shlom - whole" with all his children spiritually intact. In return, Yakov promised G-d his vigilance in protecting and overseeing his children's education and development.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the first part of the Priestly Blessing in a similar manner. "G-d should bless you and protect you." G-d should first bless you with the talents and abilities necessary to accomplish your mission in life. Then, G-d should watch over you and orchestrate the circumstances that will allow you the opportunities to use your talents and abilities. Just as G-d must protect us so that we can realize our potential, so too, Yakov promised to watch over his own children and give them every chance to grow and attain their individual potentials. However, he could not do it alone. He needed G-d's constant protection. "The Guardian of Israel never slumbers or sleeps." This is true for G-d in relation to the Jewish nation and it was true for Yakov in relation to his own children.

There are three steps to surviving the pressures of assimilation and raising our children to be G-d fearing. 1) Be aware that there are dangers. 2) We must not ever trust ourselves to be able to withstand the challenges to our faith. We must pray for G-d's protection and intervention in surviving or avoiding the challenges. 3) In conjunction with G-d's protection, we must be unfailingly vigilant in overseeing our children's spiritual development.

At the end of the Parsha, Yakov had his final confrontation with Lavan. On Mt. Gilad, Lavan verbally assaulted Yakov for "deceiving him and stealing away his daughters." (31:25) Yakov was angry at Lavan and expressed his outrage at Lavan's 20 years of deception. (31:36) Lavan responded, "...but the daughters are my daughters and the children are my children..." (31:43) Yakov understood that Lavan would not give up in his attempt to destroy the spiritual, and if need be, the physical being of the embryonic Bnai Yisroel. It was therefore essential for Yakov to protect his family and sever future ties with Lavan. As we will see, His concern and vigilance extended itself to include every nuance and expression.

My father-in law Shlit'a, Rabbi Chaim Shapiro, pointed out to me that even when it came time to name the symbol of their peace treaty, Yakov insisted on using the Hebrew name rather than the Aramaic. "And Lavan called it Yigar Sahadusa - the Pile of Stones, and Yakov called it Gal Aid - the Pile of Stones." (31:47) It was the exact same name! Yet, Yakov insisted that it be called by its Hebrew name. Why?

Yakov wanted nothing to do with Lavan! Yakov's vigilance in protecting his children from the

influences of Lavan was all encompassing and absolute. Therefore, even the memory of Lavan would be framed in the language of G-d, rather than that of the evil Lavan.

In the end, at the age of 99, Yakov returned to Canaan, B'Shalom - whole and intact, with all of his children committed to Torah values and traditions. G-d had done His part and Yakov had kept his promise.

Good Shabbos.

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