

"MORE THAN I DESERVE"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 216, Maariv. Good Shabbos!

Leah Was Commended For Recognizing "I Have Received More Than I Deserve"

Upon the birth of her fourth son, Yehudah, Leah said, "This time I will thank Hashem" [Bereishis 29:35]. Rashi quotes the Rabbinic explanation that she expressed special gratitude because she had now given birth to more than her share of Tribes. "Now that I have received more than my portion, it's time to express my gratitude to G-d".

What is the meaning of the statement that Leah received more than her share? Our Rabbis explain that Leah made a simple mathematical calculation. She divided twelve future tribes by 4 wives, and arrived at the result of 3 tribes per wife. Now that she had her fourth son, she offered praise to G-d. The Rabbis praise Leah for her recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude to the Almighty.

Although Leah's recognition that she owed a debt of gratitude is certainly praiseworthy, this teaching of our Rabbis doesn't seem to make sense. Who deserves more praise -- the person who receives his or her proper share and feels indebted to G-d, or the person who receives more than his or her fair share and feels indebted to G-d? Obviously, the first person is more deserving of praise.

I saw a very interesting observation from Rav Dovid Kviat (Maggid Shiur in the Mir Yeshiva, New York): The praiseworthy aspect of Leah's behavior here was that she viewed what she received as "more than her fair share".

It is the nature of human beings to view that which they receive in life as something that they had coming to them. "This is what I deserve." If my friend is earning \$30,000 a year and I am earning half a million dollars a year, it may not be so easy to recognize my great fortune. It is easy to think "I'm smarter than him, I'm more clever than him, I earned this on my own -- it was coming to me!"

The novelty of Leah's comment is that we see that a person has the ability to step back, look at a situation objectively and come to the conclusion that "I am getting more than I deserve". This is not our normal tendency. The normal tendency is to view life as either "I am getting less than I deserve"

or "I am getting my fair share."

The rare person, who lives their life with the attitude that "I have gotten more than I deserve," is indeed a praiseworthy person.

Convince, Cajole, And Persuade Your Family, But Do Not Impose

Towards the end of the parsha, the Torah tells us that "Yaakov saw the face of Lavan, and it was not like it was yesterday and the day before" [31:2]. Yaakov saw the way in which Lavan was treating him and recognized that things were not the same. G-d appeared to Yaakov and told him that it is time to pick up his family and return to the land of his fathers [31:3].

Yaakov then called his family out into the field and began an extensive monologue with his wives explaining why it was important for them to leave. After the long list of explanations of why they should go, the wives agreed that they should leave.

But the question must be asked: If G-d appeared to any one of us and told us "It is time to leave your city," "it is time to change your job," or whatever -- we would gather our families, tell them of our message from G-d, and act upon it. We would not start a whole series of explanations: "Things are not the way they used to be, times are tough, we have to think about making changes." G-d gave us an order? That settles it.

The Shaloh HaKodesh provides an interesting insight. "When a person wants something from his family -- spouse or children -- it is not proper to compel them to do it, even if he has the ability to force them." In other words, even if one has the means to dictate in absolute terms that "this is the way it is going to be," the Shaloh says this is not the way to run a household.

"Rather, a person should try to convince them of the logic of what he wants in order that they be motivated to come to the same conclusion themselves. This is far better than compelling them to do something against their will."

This means that a person can feel very strongly about a certain household decision. He may have no doubt in his mind at all. And, he can be capable of enforcing that decision. "This is the way it's going to be." The Shaloh teaches us: Do not do it that way. Convince, cajole, persuade, but do not impose.

The proof, says the Shaloh, is Yaakov's lengthy discussion with his wives. Yaakov justified the need to leave Lavan (despite the fact that this was also G-d's command) -- in order that they agree willingly with this plan of action.

If there was ever a justifiable case to compel one's family to do something, it would be right here in this situation. G-d said that it was time to leave. Did anything more need to be said? Is there any room for discussion? Why does Yaakov need to give a whole speech?

If in this situation Yaakov felt compelled to gently persuade his wives, what can we say? Is there

ever a situation where we can feel as certain as Yaakov must have felt?

If it is good enough for our patriarch, Yaakov, it is good enough for us.

Sources and Personalities

Shalo"h -- Acronym for Shnei Luchos Habris, by Rav Yeshayah Hurwitz (1560-1630); Poland, Frankfurt, Prague, Jerusalem.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayeitzei are provided below:

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