

HASHEM MUST PLAY THE ROLE OF OUR FIRST LOVE, NOT OUR SECOND FIDDLE

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 # 438, The Mitzvah of Mesameach Chasan V'Kallah. Good Shabbos!

Hashem Must Play The Role of Our First Love, Not Our Second Fiddle

The pasuk [verse] in this week's Parsha says that Yaakov "loved Rochel more than Leah" [Bereishis 29:30]. Subsequently, the pasuk says, "Hashem saw that Leah was hated [s'nuah] so He opened her womb." [29:31].

The Or HaChaim [1696-1743] says that only Hashem was able to perceive that Leah was "s'nuah". You should not imagine that Leah felt hated by her husband. Heaven forbid that Yaakov would treat Leah any differently than he treated Rochel. This was so subtle, so internalized within Yaakov's heart, that only Hashem could detect that Leah had an inferior relationship.

We should never suspect that Yaakov Avinu was guilty of mistreating or "hating" one of his wives. Our Sages admonish us to love our wives as we love our own person and to honor them more than we honor our own selves [Yevamos 62b]. The pasuk [verse] in this week's Parsha says that Yaakov "loved Rochel more than Leah" [Bereishis 29:30]. Subsequently, the pasuk says, "Hashem saw that Leah was hated [s'nuah] so He opened her womb." [29:31].

I saw an explanation of this matter from Rav Shimon Schwab [1908-1995]. The relationship between a man and wife is such that if the man loves any other woman in the world more than his wife, by definition his wife becomes a s'nuah [a "hated" (woman)]. Once the pasuk told us that in his heart of hearts, Yaakov Avinu emotionally loved Rochel more than Leah, that automatically rendered Leah a s'nuah. However, as the Or HaChaim explains, this was only a matter of emotion, not of action, and was only known by the Master of the World.

Rav Schwab states further that this principle may also be applied to the metaphorical marriage between the Jewish people and the Almighty. G-d speaks of his love for the Jewish people in the allegory of betrothal: "And I will betroth you to Me forever" [Hoshea 2:21].

If, in a marital relationship, one's greater love for a second wife will render the first mate "hated", then similarly, if there is something more important in a Jew's life than the Master of the World, then that relegates the Ribono shel Olam [Master of the World] into the role of the "s'nuah".

We ask ourselves "is anything in our lives more important to us than the Ribono shel Olam?" Unfortunately, all too many times the answer to that is "yes". Are our careers more important to us than Divine Service? We must ask ourselves, what makes us tick? What do we get up for in the morning? What drives us? What gives us our vitality? What do we enjoy? What do we live for? If the answer to these questions is that there is something more important to us than fulfilling our role as Jews, then we have relegated the Almighty to the position of the wife who is "s'nuah".

I recently spoke in New York at a forum for Jewish professionals. Now, you can't tell someone who is at the top of the professional world not to enjoy his or her job. You cannot say to a Doctor, "don't enjoy the practice of medicine." You cannot tell a lawyer who enjoys a tremendous sense of satisfaction from working on a case or saving a client money, "no, don't enjoy your work!"

The point that I did try to make to these professionals was that while it may be okay to get satisfaction and even exhilaration from one's profession, there has to also be at least an equally satisfying exhilaration from one's Avodas Hashem [Service to G-d]. It is not sufficient to just "learn up" the Daf Yomi [one folio of Talmud, daily] and say "Well, I've put my hour in - now let me enjoy myself and go to work!" If we do that, then we are making the Ribono shel Olam the "s'nuah". If He is merely "second-fiddle" in our lives and not our "first love" then He has the role of the "hated wife".

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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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