

BORN TO LOSE

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 # 527, Matzeivah Questions. Good Shabbos!

Born To Lose

This week's parsha contains the famous battle between Yaakov Avinu and Eisav's Guardian Angel (Saro shel Eisav). Eisav's Angel requests that Yaakov release him "because the dawn had come" [Bereishis 32:27]. Chazal elaborate on this request: "I am an Angel and from the day I was created, my turn to recite Shirah [Song] in Heaven never came until today."

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explained this as follows: An Angel is not allowed to say Shirah in Heaven until it fulfills its "tachlis" - the purpose for which it was created. When an Angel fulfills its "tachlis," the Angel can approach the Almighty and say "I have done that which I was sent to do" and at that point, the Angel is allowed to say Shirah.

Our Sages equate the "Saro shel Eisav" with the Satan, with the Yetzer HaRa [evil inclination] and with the Malach HaMaves [Angel of Death]. Why, then, did he only fulfill his purpose of creation NOW? Rav Chaim explains that he fulfilled his "tachlis" NOW because he was defeated by Yaakov Avinu NOW.

The "tachlis" of the Evil Inclination, contrary to what we would think, is not to trip us up. The opposite is so -- its "tachlis" is to present temptation before us, but allow us to strengthen ourselves in order to overcome that temptation.

The victory -- the fulfillment of the "Yetzer HaRa" in the Master Plan occurs when the "Yetzer HaRa" is defeated. He reaches his spiritual completion when he fails. Thus in this epic battle between Yaakov Avinu and the Saro shel Eisav, the Angel - upon having lost - can tell Yaakov "Now is my time to say 'Shirah' - precisely because you were able to beat me."

Sensitivity Goreres (Leads to More) Sensitivity

The parsha contains the pasuk [verse] "Now Dinah - the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Yaakov - went out to look over the daughters of the land." [Bereishis 34:1] This is one of the more

disturbing incidents in the tumultuous life of Yaakov Avinu. Both the fact that his own daughter was violated and the subsequent ramifications of this incident are indeed troubling.

Chazal wonder why Dinah is called "the daughter of Leah". They ask "Is she then only the daughter of Leah, not the daughter of Yaakov?" This is analogous to a father coming home after one of his children has misbehaved. His wife tells him, "You will never guess what YOUR son did today!" The traditional answer to such a statement is "Is he then MY son, but not YOUR son?"

Chazal explain that Dinah's lineage is traced to her mother based on the fact that "she went out," since Leah also had a history of "going out," as is written "And Leah went out to meet him" [Bereishis 30:16]. This is a difficult teaching. In past years, we have explained this but for some reason Chazal are faulting Leah's behavior in that incident and referring to Dinah as "one who goes out, the daughter of one who goes out."

When Leah "went out," she went out for the best of reasons, to greet her husband. One of the Tribes was conceived that night, as a result of that encounter. Therefore, this is a difficult Chazal to understand. How can they fault Leah? Chazal explain that this was a minute shortcoming in Leah. However in the next generation (Dinah) this "character blemish" manifested itself in a greater form.

Notwithstanding this teaching of Chazal, the Kedushas Levi has a different approach to the expression "And Dinah daughter of Leah went out". [It was the life's mission of Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, author of the Kedushas Levi, to be "melamed zechus" (find spiritual justification) for Klal Yisrael.]

The Kedushas Levi writes that Dinah is called "daughter of Leah" because her whole existence was due solely to an act of Leah. What does that mean? The pasuk states in Parshas Vayetzei "And afterwards she gave birth to a daughter and she called her name Dinah." [Bereishis 30:21]

Rashi quotes a famous Gemara: "Our Rabbis explained she is called Dinah because Leah made a judgment (Din) about herself: "If this one is a male, my sister Rachel will not even be like one of the maidservants. She prayed over her fetus and it was transformed into a female." [Berachos 60a]

Leah was pregnant again after already having six sons. Indeed, she was pregnant, according to this Gemara, with Yosef. She made a simple calculation: "I already have six sons. Each of the handmaidens have two sons. If I have a seventh son, Yaakov will already have 11 of the 12 sons that he is destined to have. That would leave my sister Rachel at best providing one tribe, less than even the handmaidens." At this time, Rachel was pregnant with a girl who would have been Dinah. Leah worried about the embarrassment of her sister and prayed to G-d that a miraculous switch take place and that the female child become hers and the male child become her sister's.

This is what happened. The babies were miraculously switched. Rachel became pregnant with Yosef and Leah became pregnant with Dinah. This is the intent of the expression "and afterwards (after she made this calculation) she gave birth to a daughter and called her Dinah (based on the 'Din' she

made upon herself)"

The Kedushas Levi uses this Midrash to explain the attribution of Dinah as "the daughter of Leah" in our parsha. Dinah was only born through Leah's intervention -- her pleading with the Almighty on behalf of her sister.

The Shemen HaTov takes the premise of the Kedushas Levi -- the great self-sacrifice of Leah on behalf of her sister - and turns it into a question: Why, in fact, is there not greater recognition in Chazal for this magnanimous act of Leah? Why do we not find more explicit mention of the tremendous merit of Leah for this heroic act in classical Rabbinic teachings?

The Shemen HaTov answers that the reason this merit does not accrue directly to Leah is because it is really Rachel's merit. That which influenced Leah to do this was an incident that happened years earlier. If there was anyone who was really very sensitive about her sister's embarrassment, it was Rachel.

Rachel was supposed to marry Yaakov. Lavan performed a big switch. One daughter was supposed to marry Yaakov and the other daughter was supposed to marry Eisav. Rachel -- in order to save her sister embarrassment -- risked the possibility of becoming the wife of the wicked Eisav!

Years later, this great act of self-sacrifice on Rachel's part inspired Leah, to repay the favor, and in a sense, give up a seventh son for the sake of her sister not feeling that she contributed less to the future Klal Yisrael than the hand-maidens. Relatively speaking, Leah's sacrifice showed less sensitivity and was only a result of Rachel's initial sacrifice. Consequently, the Shemen HaTov states, the Rabbis do not make the same mention of it as they do with Rachel's sacrifice. The primary merit therefore accrues to Rachel.

The lesson is one in sensitivity. I will relate another incident - not with Biblical personalities but with a contemporary - who also had the sensitivity to protect his fellow man from embarrassment.

There were two Ba'alei Keriah [Torah readers] in a shul. For the sake of anonymity we will call them Reuven and Shimon. They read on alternate weeks. It was Reuvain's week to read. However, on Friday night Reuvain came into shul and told the Gabbai "I am hoarse. I cannot lein tomorrow. Please ask Shimon to pinch hit for me this Shabbos." The Gabbai went to Shimon and relayed Reuvain's message. Shimon said there would be no problem, he would prepare during the long Friday night and be ready to lein the next morning.

The next morning when they took out the Sefer Torah Reuvain went up to lein! However, he was obviously hoarse and at the end of the first aliyah he announced loudly, "I can't go any further. My voice is hoarse. Let Shimon lein." Shimon approached the bimah and took over the Torah reading from that point forward.

After services, the Gabbai approached Reuvain and asked for an explanation. "I don't understand. What was the whole act over here? We discussed this last night. Everything was a done deal. Why

did you start reading this morning and make a whole act as if this was something sudden?"

Reuvain explained that he was concerned that he did not give Shimon enough time to prepare properly. He was afraid that Shimon would have to lein on short notice and since he was not properly prepared, he might make many mistakes and embarrass himself. "Many people would not remember that this was not Shimon's week to lein. They would think that he was making mistakes because he is not a good Ba'al Koreh. I wanted to make clear to everyone that it was really my week and that Shimon was pinch-hitting for me on short notice."

May we all learn to apply the sensitivity demonstrated by our Biblical heroes and heroines to our own lives as did this "regular Jew."

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 Vayishlach are provided below:

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