

THE BLESSING EMERGES FROM LOWLINESS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayeitzei

The Blessing Emerges From Lowliness

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayeitzei

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #614, The Tefilah of Baruch Hashem L'Olam Omein V'Omein. Good Shabbos!

In Yaakov's famous dream of a ladder at the beginning of Parshas Vayeitzei, Hashem appears to him and tells him - among other things - "Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth and you shall spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward..." [Bereshis 28:14]. The Sforno wonders about the nature of this blessing. It seems to be expressed in imagery that is perhaps not especially complimentary. After all, the dust of the earth is something that people trample on! The imagery used elsewhere of "descendants as numerous as stars in the heaven" is much more noble and uplifting than "descendants that shall be as the dust of the earth."

The Sforno writes that this language in fact foreshadows Jewish history. Our history has been that just when Klal Yisrael finds themselves to be at their lowest point (represented by the dust of the earth), that is precisely when they will merit receiving the blessing "you will spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward." The two sections of the pasuk [verse] that at first seem to be incongruously combined are, in fact, dependent upon each other. It is exactly the state of lowliness that precedes the state of dynamic growth and expansion. This is comparable to the common saying "night is always at its darkest immediately before dawn."

The Kli Yakar quotes a similar idea from a Medrash Shochar Tov: "Salvation only comes to Israel at a time when they have reached the ultimate in lowness (tachlis haShiflus), as it is written 'For prostrated to the dust is our soul, stuck to the earth is our belly' [Tehillim 44:26] and immediately thereafter we find 'Arise! Assist us And redeem us for the sake of Your kindness!' [Tehillim 44:27]."

The reason for this phenomenon, the Kli Yakar writes, is that as long as the Jews are mired in the

depths of lowliness, they place all their trust in G-d. When things are going better, they make plans for human schemes and intervention to rescue themselves and do not place their hope in Hashem. However, when they see that there is no hope and no value in relying on human intervention, then they turn to Hashem as their only hope. When they sincerely call out to Him, recognizing that He is their only hope, then, in fact, salvation will dramatically follow.

This is the meaning of our pasuk in Parshas Vayeitzei as well. When it will be that your children are like the dust of the earth -- meaning they have reached the lowest of points with no hope for self-preservation -- and out of hopelessness, they turn to Hashem for salvation, that is precisely when salvation will come and it will be dramatic and expansive. "You will spread out powerfully westward, eastward, northward, and southward."

The Almighty Rewards Every Act of Kindness

Following the enumeration of the birth of Leah's six sons the Torah states: "Afterwards, she bore a daughter and she called her name Dinah." [Bereshis 30:21] The Talmud [Brachos 40a] says that the name Dinah comes from the fact that Leah judged herself (dana Din b'atzmah). She calculated that she already had six of the twelve sons her husband Yaakov was destined to father. Since Bilhah and Zilpah each already had two sons, if the child she was now carrying would be another son, that would cause her sister Rochel to be the mother of fewer tribes than even Bilhah or Zilpah, the handmaidens. Leah therefore pronounced judgment on herself and prayed that the child she was carrying (who Chazal say was a male) be changed to a female! In fact, Chazal say that Rochel at this time was pregnant with a girl and the two fetuses were miraculously switched, such that Rochel gave birth to Yosef and Leah gave birth to Dinah.

G-d does not deny any creature their due reward. The wheels of Divine Providence may turn very slowly but they turn with great precision. What happened to Dinah? She was raped by Shechem and became pregnant with a girl. The daughter of Dinah and Shechem was Osnas. Yosef wound up in Egypt and was given Osnas as a wife. From Yosef and Osnas were born Menashe and Ephraim. Yaakov promised that he would consider Ephraim and Menashe to be like Reuven and Shimon [Bereshis 48:5]. In other words, G-d paid Leah back. She gave up one potential Tribe (by praying that her seventh pregnancy not be a male child) and in return, became the great grandmother of two more tribes in Israel, through that daughter!

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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