

"NOW I HAVE SOMEONE TO BLAME" – THAT'S JUST THE BEGINNING

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayeitzei

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 702, The Marriage that Was Not a Joke. Good Shabbos!

The Matriarch Leah had one son after another and the Matriarch Rochel remained barren. Finally, G-d remembered Rochel, He listened to her prayers and she gave birth to a son. We read "She conceived and bore a son, and she said, 'G-d has gathered in my disgrace' (Asaf Elokim es cherpasi)." [Bereshis 30:23] Based on the root of the word Asaf [gathered in], she calls her son Yosef.

Rashi first states that the simple interpretation of Rochel's reference to "disgrace" is the fact that she was barren. Rashi cites a Medrash that a married woman without children suffers disgrace because she has no one to blame if something is broken or eaten in the house. When she has a child and something breaks or is eaten, she can hang the blame on the child and tell her husband that it was the fault of his child.

This medrash is difficult to comprehend. How could this be Rochel's reaction to having a baby? Rochel earlier said to her husband, "Give me children - if not, I am dead!" [Bereshis 30:1] Her state of barrenness was so painful to her that she felt it would not be worth living if she remained in that state. So what should her reaction be upon finally having a son? Certainly, it should be something far less trivial than "Now I have someone to blame for the messy house and the eaten leftovers!" What is the meaning of "G-d has gathered in my disgrace"?

There is an interesting insight from the "Alter of Slabodka on the first of our morning blessings: 'Blessed are You Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe who has given the rooster the understanding to distinguish between day and night.' One might indeed wonder how this blessing merited such a distinguished place in the sequence of daily blessings. Is it more significant that "He Opens the eyes of the blind"? We could understand if the leadoff blessing would be one that thanked G-d for allowing us to walk, to be clothed, to stand up straight. Thanking G-d for the wisdom of a rooster

would not seem to deserve such a high ranking in terms of the order of the morning blessings.

The Alter quotes a Gemara [Berachos 59b] that the proper blessing for rain is "concerning each and every drop that You brought down for us". Recognition of G-d's favors towards us (hakaras haTov) does not require us to be thankful for an abundance of rain, but we are required to be thankful for even the minutest of favors. The Alter points out that we as human beings have unbelievable intelligence. We are thinking creatures who can communicate and accomplish wondrous things with our intelligence. However, conceptually, the first "drop of intelligence" in this world is a rooster who knows how to distinguish between day and night. Just like we do not thank G-d for 35 inches of annual rainfall - or whatever amount we need to grow our crops - but rather we thank Him for each and every drop, so too we don't thank G-d for having a 130 IQ or the fact that we might be a successful brain surgeon. We thank Him for the minutest amount of intelligence that we perceive in the world - the instinctual knowledge possessed by a rooster that the morning has arrived. All of the intelligence that He showered on the world begins with the rooster who has a brain the size of a nail, but can distinguish between day and night.

This too is the interpretation of Rochel's expression of gratitude for now having someone to blame her household misdeeds when her first son was born. Certainly, she was overwhelmed with gratitude that she was no longer barren and was now able to have a child. However, her very first expression of gratitude was for even the minutest derivative benefit of this blessed event. "Now having someone to blame" was only the beginning of her thanks, it was not the full extent of her gratitude.

The Term Brothers In The Torah Represents Yachas Not Yichus

At the end of the parsha, when Lavan ran after Yaakov and they eventually made a peace covenant with one another, the Torah records: "Yaakov instructed his brethren: "Gather stones!" So they took stones and made a mound, and they ate there on the mound." [Bereshis 31:46]. Rashi is bothered by the fact that the Torah says Yaakov instructed his brethren (echav). Rashi explains it to mean his sons and says they are called 'brothers' for they were like brothers to him, who would come to the fore in trouble and in case of war against him.

The Medrash Rabbah on which Rashi's comment is based is a bit more explicit. The term "echav" in the lexicon of the Chumash is not strictly defined by blood relationship but on commonality. Individuals who mutually admire one another, share values, and come to each other's aid even if it involves risking their lives are called brethren, whether or not in actuality they are truly brothers.

When Yaakov anticipates trouble from Lavan, he called his "brothers" - meaning those who loved him and shared the same goals in life as he did and who were willing to risk their lives for him. Rav Matisyahu Solomon in paraphrasing this Medrash says "Ben" (son) is a "yichus" (blood relation), "Ach" (brother) is a "yachas" (relationship).

We find the same idea in Parshas Lech Lecha. When Avraham heard that Lot was captured, the

pasuk states he heard "that his brother was captured" [Bereshis 14:14]. Of course, Lot was not really his brother - he was a nephew, but since Avraham was prepared to risk his life to rescue Lot, he is called in Biblical lexicon "achiv" (his brother).

This idea sheds new light on a Torah section in Parshas Ki Seizeh: "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his lamb cast off and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother. And if your brother is not near you and you do not know him, then you shall bring it inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother's inquiring about it, then you shall return it to him. So shall you do for his donkey, and so shall you do for his garment, and so shall you do for any lost article of your brother that may become lost from him and you find it, you cannot hide yourself." [Devorim 22:1-3] In these 3 pasukim [verses] The word "achicha" (your brother) is mentioned no less than 5 times.

The Torah is teaching us how to relate to another Jew. We need to view him and treat him like a brother. The Torah concludes with a warning, "Lo tuchal l'hisalem." [You cannot hide yourself.] We would have expected this prohibition to be written as "Al tisalem" (do not turn away). The expression "Lo suchal" is much stronger than a mere prohibition. It is stating "You CANNOT turn away". What does that mean "You CANNOT"? We know that it is very easy to walk right past the object and turn away from it!

The answer is that if one appreciates the fact that the object truly belongs to his BROTHER (achicha) with all that this relationship implies in the Torah in terms of closeness and kinship, then he in fact will not be able to turn away from the lost property any more than he would be able to turn away from his own lost property.

This is what Yaakov meant in our parsha. The relationship that he had with his sons was a relationship of "ach", meaning he knew that he was able to count on them for self sacrifice and that they were totally committed to a common agenda and common goals.

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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