

# THANKS A LOT!

*by Rabbi Raymond Beyda*

*"Again she [Leah] conceived and bore a son and declared, 'This time I will thankfully praise Hashem'."  
Beresheet 29:35*

Yaakob Abinu a'h followed his father's instructions and traveled to the home of Laban, his mother's brother, in order to marry. After working 7 years for the hand of Rahel, his unscrupulous uncle substituted Leah for her sister and Yaakob, after agreeing to work an additional seven years for the rights to marry Rahel, then wed his first choice. With each bride he also married another [a maidservant], giving him a total of 4 spouses. Yaakob and his wives knew that the foundations of the Jewish people were in their hands and that they were destined to give birth to a total of 12 tribes.

The first to conceive was Leah. In fact, she gave birth to four children before Rahel had even born one child. The names given were symbolic expressions of her feelings. Reuben, Hashem saw [re-u means to see] my suffering; Shimon, Hashem heard [shema means to hear] my cries; Levi, my husband will now accompany [levaya means to escort] me. The fourth child was named Yehudah [hoda-ah is thanks] -- "This time I will gratefully praise Hashem."

The Talmud says: "From the time of creation there was no person who praised Hashem until Leah came and thanked him upon the birth of Yehudah. (Berakhot 7b)" Could it be that Leah did not express thanks for her first three children? Is it possible Abraham, Yitzhak, Sarah and Ribka never thanked Hashem for their good fortunes? Was there no human being before Leah who gratefully praised G-d?

Certainly there were others who expressed appreciation to the Master of the Universe; however, the thanks of Leah had a unique quality none other contained.

Leah knew that she was destined to participate in the nation building process. Knowing there were to be 12 tribes and that there were 4 wives she, like the others, assumed that each wife would have 3 children to raise. When Yehudah, her fourth was born, she felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude that she had gotten MORE than what was due. Many feel that they earn what they receive from G-d. "I do misvot, I help others and Hashem sends me His acknowledgment in the form of bounty." Leah felt what she had she did not deserve and even more so --an additional child was too good to be true. When a person thanks Hashem -- one should feel that ALL one has is a gift -- totally undeserved. This attitude can open the wells of the heart to an expression of true gratitude.

Rav Abraham Pam zt'l explained that when one achieves a happy milestone in life, marriage, a newborn child or a financial achievement, one's heart overflows with joy and gratitude. Yet, as time passes one gets used to the good fortune and the joy begins to dissipate. As happiness is burdened with responsibility to provide for a spouse, to raise the child, or to handle the new level of financial responsibility -- exhaustion and stress replace euphoria. Leah understood this psychological phenomenon. As the happy mother of a fourth child, she wanted to permanently ingrain her initial simha so that it would not diminish with time. Therefore, she put the root of the word for "thanks" in her son's name. In this way she would re-ignite her appreciation every time she called her son's name. This type of thanks -- no one before Leah had expressed.

Rabenu Yosef Hayim of Baghdad zt'l explains his approach with a parable. A king engaged two expert craftsmen to build an additional wing to his palace. The two arrived on the scene and began the project. One, unfortunately, became ill and was unable to work. The royal doctor's spent weeks administering medical care and by the time he had recovered the new wing was already completed. The king paid both craftsmen their full pay and sent them on their way. Upon arriving home both workers composed beautiful thank you letters to the sovereign. The king then sent to the worker who had performed his duties a bonus check and to the one who was ill throughout the project he sent nothing. The king's servants, puzzled by his behavior asked, "Your Majesty, was the craftsmen's letter lacking so much that you refused to send him a bonus check like you did to his counterpart?"

"No, on the contrary", replied the monarch, "the letter was just as beautiful, if not more so, than the one his friend sent. However, his thank was obligatory. After all I did pay him even though he did not work on the project. His friend, on the other hand, received pay for services rendered and yet he felt an urge to thank me for what was by right due to him This kind of thanks deserves special notice!"

Explains the Ben Ish Hai zt'l, Hashem sends His Heavenly aid to His people in two ways -- The natural and the miraculous. When we are witness to a miracle we are quick to praise the Lord for His kindness. It is, however, more commendable when we take notice of the daily kindnesses and protection that Hashem provides in un-dramatic, "natural" fashion. This behavior on our part, in itself, invokes more Divine Providence on our behalf.

We must all learn from Leah the right approach towards our blessings. We should feel they are undeserved. We must take notice that they are constant. We must remind ourselves of our obligation to thank every time we hear our name "YEHUDIM" -- the people who thank G-d.

Shabbat Shalom

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