



Leah Imeinu's Lesson In Gratitude



Rabbi Avi Lazarus | CEO, Federation

”ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את ד’”

“She conceived again, and bore a son and declared, “This time let me gratefully praise Hashem.” (BEREISHIS, 29: 35)

Leah had already been blessed with three sons yet she had not named any of those first three with a reference in their names to gratitude to Hashem. Her fourth son is born and only then does Leah deem it appropriate to declare her thanks to Hashem and indeed, to give her son a name that expresses and records this praise and gratitude to the Master of the World.

Why is this?

Rashi in the previous verse tells us that the Matriarchs were prophetesses and knew that Yaakov Avinu was destined to have twelve tribes descended from him, to be borne from his four wives. On this verse, Rashi explains the reason why Leah thanks Hashem is because she had assumed that the twelve sons would be born equally between Yaakov's four wives, three sons to each wife. After the birth of Yehuda, her fourth son, she reasoned that she has now given birth to more than her 'portion' and it is therefore incumbent upon her to announce her thanks to Hashem.

What does Rashi mean? Are we to derive from Leah's experience that gratitude must

only be offered once a recipient has received more than he or she was expecting to receive?

This question, I believe, is strengthened when one considers the Gemora in *Brochos* (7B) that says as follows:

אמר ר"י משום ר"ש בן יוחי מיום שברא הקב"ה את עולמו לא היה אדם שהודה להקב"ה עד שבאתה לאה והודתו שנאמר הפעם אודה את ה':

R' Yochanan in the name of R' Shimon ben Yochai said: From the day G-d created his world, nobody had thanked Him until the arrival of Leah who did so, as it says "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem".

Are we really to understand that no single individual who preceded Leah - including Avrohom, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Soroh and Rivka - had thanked Hashem?

Surely something deeper lies in Rashi's explanation to our verse as well as the above *gemora* and I would like to suggest as follows:

It is not conceivable that Leah had not thanked Hashem for her first three sons, nor that she was the first person in mankind to thank Hashem. However, there is a lesson that

she had understood from the gift of Yehuda which demanded a new perspective on gratitude and her pronouncement that followed.

Leah had previously made a simple and logical calculation: 4 (wives) x 3 (sons) = twelve. It would be expected for her, Rochel, Bilhah and Zilpah each to give birth to their 'fair share' of the bounty of Yaakov's tribes, three per mother. When she gave birth to Yehuda, her fourth son, it destroyed her assumption that life's blessings are distributed on a 'fair' and equal basis. Once digested, Leah was forced to re-evaluate her own and indeed mankind's understanding of when and why communication of appreciation is due.

With Yehuda's birth, Leah had learnt the lesson that 'life isn't fair'; anything we receive is not because it is coming to us, neither for good nor bad. It is not for us to decide or dictate what is to be considered basics and what is a bonus. Everything is meted out by Hashem according to his Divine plan, of which we are not aware. Hence, Leah's declaration of gratitude upon the birth of her fourth son was not merely in recognition of this *simcha*; rather now that she was aware that what she had received until now was regardless of human calculation, she realised that she had never **properly** thanked Hashem. Leah then taught this lesson to the world by naming Yehuda so.

Living with Mitzvos ANSWERS

- Perhaps it is like the Gemora in Sukka (53A) that Yaakov never tasted a **full** sleep going to bed but rather only **dozed off** for short time periods. Perhaps this is also like the sleep of Dovid described as "shisin nishmin".
- There are three reasons why Rochel stole the terfoim: 1) Rashi brings to stop her father worshipping idols. 2) To stop him being able to find out where they were fleeing to and stop giving him advice. 3) Rabbeinu Bechai in the name of Rabbeinu Chananel that when Lavan realized his "god" was powerless to stop being stolen he would do teshuva.
- Perhaps the idea is since this dream refers to the spiritual realm and something so deep that it cannot be adequately described in words!
- Lavan at that time did not have any sons. It was only later in the merit of Yaakov did he have (SEE RASHI, 30:27). We find that Leah was very sad and presumably she was sick and not very well and therefore Rochel was chosen for the job. Rabbeinu Bechai (29:11) says that since a shepherd was in danger of being attacked by people therefore the shepherd was Rochel since she was still a minor not fit for marriage.
- Rabbeinu Bechai (29:11) says that either she was very young (five years old) so therefore such a kiss was to be interpreted as friendship as opposed to love, or he kissed her on the head or shoulder.
- Rabbeinu Bechai (29:15) answers that at that time Rochel was five years old. Yaakov only wanted to marry her when she was twelve years and old, from the time she was able to have children (even though he could have married her from three years old like Rivka).

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