

## Take from yourselves a portion for Hashem; everyone whose heart motivates him shall bring it, as a gift for Hashem: gold, silver, copper. (35:5)

*Chazal (Shemos Rabbah 49:2)* teach that *zahav*, gold, *kesef*, silver; and *nechoshes*, copper – all allude to the *Avos*, three Patriarchs. The connotation of the *pasuk* (based upon *Chazal's* interpretation) is that the *Shechinah* rests His Divine Presence in the *Mishkan* in the merit of the three *Avos*. Gold alludes to Avraham, whose faith was put to a test when he was flung into a furnace – a process which is used to refine gold. Silver represents Yitzchak, who was purified when he was bound upon the Altar. Unlike gold, which is heated in a furnace to test its quality, silver is heated in a furnace to remove its impurities. This is exactly what took place when Yitzchak prepared to give up his life. It was a spiritual refinement of the highest accord. *Nechoshes* invoked the merit of Yaakov because of what Lavan said to him, *Nichashti va'yivarcheini Hashem biglaleich*, “I have learned by divination (*nichashti – nechoshes*) that Hashem has blessed me because of you” (*Bereishis 30:27*).

It is understandable that the functions performed by gold and silver may allude in some way to defining moments in the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak. This seems enigmatic with regard to copper and its relationship with Yaakov. True, Lavan was addressing Yaakov with the word *nichashti* that shares the same root as *nechoshes*, copper, but this is hardly sufficient reason to connect copper with the Patriarch.

*Be'er Moshe* posits that Lavan's remark underscores the strength of Yaakov and his ability to remain unwavering in his commitment to *emes*, truth, despite his having spent over twenty years with Lavan. Lavan had two characteristics for which he earned his infamous reputation: his ability to deceive to the point that he probably began to believe his own lies; he was a master of sorcery and manipulation of the forces of evil (*kochos ha'tumah*). These are both insidious characteristics which, by their nature, deny Hashem as the only controlling force in this world.

When Lavan said *nichashti*; I learned through my divining that Hashem blessed me because of you, he was implying that he was completely committed to sorcery – even though he saw clearly that Hashem had blessed him because of Yaakov. *Nichashti*, *nechoshes*, copper is a tribute to our Patriarchs' extraordinary strength. He lived with the archetype deceiver/sorcerer, a man who blatantly denied Hashem's power to control everything in this world. Despite his exposure to evil incarnate, Yaakov remained strong and steadfast, his essential character deeply rooted in – and committed to – the truth.

I think an important lesson can be derived from here. Avraham and Yitzchak's willingness to self-sacrifice for their faith represents ultimate acts of submission to Hashem. They demonstrated an ability to transcend self-preservation in order to focus solely on carrying out the will of Hashem.

Yaakov's test placed him in a house steeped in deception and moral corruption. Remaining true to Hashem and upholding his values, while surrounded from all sides by falsehood, required a different sacrifice: constant vigilance and enduring inner-strength to resist the negative influence of Lavan. To adhere to the truth amidst pervasive falsehood is to embody the Divine *middah* of *emes* which is the seal of Hashem. Yaakov's commitment demonstrates that remaining steadfast in such a morally harsh environment can be as arduous and spiritually significant as acts of physical sacrifice.

In an alternative approach, *Horav Tzvi Meir Bergman, Shlita*, first cites *Maharil Diskin's* explanation of *nichashti va'yivarcheini Hashem biglaleich*. Lavan was putting down Yaakov, "You think that what I have and what you have are the result of your twenty years of hard labor. Absolutely not! I divined and became privy to an important revelation: It was not you or your work. It was all a Heavenly blessing. You claim to have worked hard. It was nothing! It was all G-d!"

Let us step back to absorb the gross chutzpah of such a ludicrous statement. The Torah describes Yaakov's painstaking labor, "by day, the heat consumed me, and frost by night" (*Bereishis* 31:40). Lavan had the gall to claim it was nothing. He did nothing. Not only did he not acknowledge Yaakov's labor, but he also repeatedly deceived and exploited him. Lavan changed Yaakov's wages ten times, as he sought to benefit at Yaakov's expense.

One can feel no greater pain than investing one's heart, body and soul into a task/project and not receiving a shred of gratitude or acknowledgement. Recognition validates effort and provides the person with a sense of worth. Without it, the laborer feels invisible; he is a non-entity.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* addresses the *Midrash*. Undoubtedly, when we compare *mesiras nefesh* to unrecognized labor for a deceiver, we are not comparing apples to apples. The most difficult labor does not hold a candle to the ultimate sacrifice. However, we must add the circumstances which were the backdrop for the labor: an environment of deception and moral turpitude. Nonetheless, this, too, could have been dealt with and the sacrifice diminished, if only there had been a display of recognition; even a feeble "thank you" would have made a difference. Not only was none of this forthcoming, but Yaakov was also forced to sustain the indignity of being told, "You did nothing!" This was not a one-time debasement, but an environment and an attitude that accompanied Yaakov for twenty years. Yaakov, however, was as strong as copper, and he not only survived, but he emerged a stronger, more resilient person.

Whether in the home, workplace or community, recognizing others is the cornerstone of meaningful human connection. A "thank you" has the power to transform: a word of praise can elevate a person's self-esteem. A bakery owner in a Jewish community employed a young man with a developmental disability to sweep floors and assist with deliveries. Every day, the owner made a point to thank the young man for his work, praising even the smallest accomplishment. One day, the young man's mother approached the owner and tearfully expressed her gratitude, "No one has ever treated my son with such respect. You have given him dignity and pride in what he does."

The owner replied, “Everyone deserves to feel appreciated. Acknowledgement costs nothing, but can change everything.”

I am sensitive to the story. A young boy whom I “taught” many years ago grew up and got married. The boy had cognitive challenges. He was very sweet, but he was unable to retain anything he learned. He now lives in a large Torah community where I hope people treat him with love and respect. I had lost track of him over the years, and I recently met him at the place where he works as a packer and sort of custodian. He recognized me before I recognized him, came over excitedly, embraced and kissed me. He showed off with pride that he had a respectable job – in fact – he would ring me up. I allowed him to help me. When we passed the section in which they kept bottled water, I said, “I would take a case, but I cannot lift it.” He immediately grabbed a case of water, flung it on his shoulder and walked me to the register to check out. He carried the water to my car and asked me if he should come to my house to unload the water. It was a good feeling making someone who needed it feel good about himself. The only problem is that, every time I visit that store, he insists that I buy a case of water!