

## **Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojournings in the land of Canaan. (37:1)**

*Chazal* teach that Yaakov *Avinu* sought to settle, to relax from the many struggles that had heretofore been a part of his life. Hashem responded with the *mechiras Yosef*. The message is clear: *Tzaddikim* are not on this world for a tranquil walk in the park. Their tranquility will be their reward in *Olam Habba*, which they earn in this world. Clearly, Yaakov's idea of *shalvah*, serenity, was on a spiritual plane, during which he could spend every waking moment immersed in Torah.

Life is about overcoming and living with challenge. Everything that we receive from Hashem comes with a price. Either we pay, or someone else pays or has paid for us, but no one receives a free ride. I had occasion to meet a former student of mine, a young man who has reached middle age. Growing up, he had incredible potential, but he did not always find it easy to navigate the system. In other words, he did not have *mazel*, and he was incapable of "making his own *mazel*." Nothing is handed to a person on a silver platter – except perhaps for the platter, but what goes on it, is up to us. He had left *kollel* with grandiose plans to become everything from a *Rav*, *Dayan*, to a *Rosh Yeshivah*. For a number of reasons (as in most cases) it did not work out to his satisfaction. So presently, he is balancing tutoring and some teaching together with a bruised ego.

I was unaware of all that happened (or perhaps did not happen) in his life, so I asked, "How is your *avodas ha'kodesh*?" His response was at best tepid, "*Avodas ha'kodesh* is when one is twenty or thirty. At forty, one must earn *parnassah*." This was his way of intimating that not all of his hopes/plans had materialized. I then asked him about his family. First of all, I wanted to know if everyone was enjoying good health. He replied, "*Baruch Hashem*, yes. We are blessed." I then asked if he had *nachas* from his children. He then went into a litany of his children's many achievements – both his sons and daughters – in all areas of *Yiddishkeit*. True pride; true *nachas*.

When I heard this, I countered with, "Do you think all of this is for free? Do you know how many students in your class would give their eye-teeth to have such glowing remarks concerning their children? It does not just happen. You must make it happen through *tefillah*, patience and perseverance. You have no idea how fortunate you are!"

While that was the end of that conversation, the truth is that some people require much more than *nachas* and good health. They need to assuage their ego with achievements. This is understandable; but this too comes with a price. *Chazal* (*Shemos Rabbah* 52:3) relate that Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was beyond poor. He lived in such abject poverty that five days before *Pesach*, when he heard an announcement outside the *bais ha'medrash* reminding everyone that *Pesach* was in five days, he broke down in bitter weeping. *Yom Tov* would arrive and he did not have a penny to his name. He left the *bais ha'medrash* a depressed person. He walked to a cave where he sat down to pray with extraordinary intensity. He prayed and wept, wept and prayed. "Hashem, why should everyone have the means to celebrate *Yom Tov* – everyone, but me?"

Suddenly a hand came out from Heaven and handed him a large diamond.

Having spent his entire life ensconced in the *bais ha'medrash*, Rabbi Shimon had never before seen a diamond and was clueless as to its worth. He went to his *Rebbe*, Rabbi Yehudah *Ha'Nasi*, who remarked that he had never seen such a beautiful stone. However, if Rabbi Shimon would go to the market to sell it, he would receive a fraction of its value. *Rebbe* offered to hold onto the diamond until he felt it prudent to sell. Meanwhile, he encouraged Rabbi Shimon to purchase all of the *Pesach* necessities on credit. He had the diamond as collateral.

Rabbi Shimon went to the market, purchased all of his *Pesach* provisions and brought them home amid great joy. His wife was of course, suspicious, since she was aware of their financial straits. "Where did you obtain the money to purchase all of this?" she asked. He told her the truth, "I prayed with all my heart, Hashem listened and responded positively," he replied. His wife immediately countered, "If you received this stone from *Olam Habba*, this means that now something is missing from our *Olam Habba*. I will not give up one iota of *Olam Habba* for all the diamonds in the world. Return the stone."

Rabbi Shimon returned to *Rebbe* and related his wife's stubborn position. *Rebbe* summoned the wife to his home. She explained her position, to which he responded, "You have nothing to worry about. You will not lose out." She found this hard to accept. He added, "If they deduct even the slightest bit from your Heavenly portion, I will make it up to you from my portion of *Olam Habba*." Her response is frightening. "Are you certain that we will meet in *Olam Habba*?"

End of story. She took the stone and "returned" it to Heaven. This is, in and of itself, incredible. Heaven gives. It does not take back. What was it about this woman's reply that catalyzed such change? *Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl*, (cited by *Horav Yechiel Tzuker, Shlita*) said that Rabbi Shimon's wife's position was that *Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi*, despite being the *gadol ha'dor*, had one drawback (so to speak) vis-à-vis his learning and entire *avodas ha'kodesh*: he did so amid extreme wealth. He never had to worry about "too much month at the end of his paycheck;" he never went to bed hungry or walk around in tattered clothes. In contrast, Rabbi Shimon, his student, learned Torah and served Hashem amid extremely challenging conditions. *Rebbe* acquiesced to her position.

Let us not ignore that despite all of *Rebbe*'s wealth, he had declared that he did not enjoy or take for himself anything of this world. Yet, at the end of the day, he was not challenged with financial worries.