

“This time I will gratefully praise Hashem”; therefore she called his name Yehudah.” (29:35)

Leah gave birth to her fourth son, an event that evoked a tremendous sense of gratitude within her. She understood that Hashem was giving her more than her share. As *Rashi* explains, Leah saw *b’Ruach HaKodesh*, with Divine Inspiration, that Yaakov *Avinu* would father twelve sons. Since he had four wives, she conjectured that each would be blessed with three sons. Upon giving birth to her fourth son, she was overjoyed with the realization that she had received more than her share. In the *Talmud Berachos 7b*, *Chazal* declare that, “From the time of Creation, there was no one who praised Hashem until Leah praised Him with the naming of Yehudah.” This statement is enigmatic, for surely Leah was not the first to praise the Almighty. Certainly, the *Avos ha’kedoshim*, holy Patriarchs, expressed their gratitude to Him for the countless favors they received. Apparently, something was unique about Leah’s expression of gratitude which renders it unprecedented. What is it?

Horav Avraham Pam, z.l., cited in *The Pleasant Way*, teaches us a penetrating insight with regard to *hakoras hatov*, the expression of gratitude/appreciation. Human nature dictates that upon each joyous occasion, each happy milestone, a person express his joy and gratitude. With the passage of time, this joy becomes expected, so the ensuing gratitude becomes complacent. *Rav Pam* uses marriage as an example. A person looks for and finds his *bashert*, designated mate. For some, it is a simple, easy process. For others, regrettably, it is a long, grueling burden which can be denigrating and humiliating. The long awaited day finally arrives, and the elusive mate has been found. One’s joy is great, and, of course, his appreciation to Hashem is similarly great. Only after the passage of time, do we begin to notice a slight waning of the “gratitude factor.” First, it is the wedding preparations, responsibilities that yesterday were only a hopeful dream, today become a nightmare of calls and meetings to discuss matters which seem to be trivial and inconsequential. The feelings of overwhelming joy that reigned during the *vort*, engagement ceremony, slowly begin to dispel.

Another area in which a person seems to develop a sudden memory lapse is when one who heretofore could not make ends meet is suddenly catapulted into great wealth. The joy is incredible; the excitement is boundless – for a short period of time. Soon, he becomes accustomed to being wealthy. The fancy car becomes something he takes for granted; the house is something in which he seems to have lived all his life. In short, complacency sets in; joy becomes something of the past, followed by decreasing gratitude.

Then there are the children with whom we are blessed. Who does not remember the overwhelming joy of having his first child? For how long did the joy and the appreciation last? While it is true that with every milestone the parents “remember” the joy they “had,” but how long does it really last? Some people are blessed with a child in the first year of marriage. For others, the wait is much more extended. Consequently, the joy is much greater – initially. Does it endure, or do the

joys of parenthood give way to the exhaustion, frustration and duress of caring for a child?

When Leah named her fourth child, she took all of this into consideration. As a happy mother of a fourth child, she sought to concretize and imbue this feeling of joy permanently in her psyche in such a manner that with the passage of time it would not dissipate. She built her gratitude into the child's name, so that whenever she would mention his name, her original feelings of gratitude would be aroused. Thus, the joy would not be diminished with the passage of time. The excitement that permeated her life at the birth of Yehudah would never wane. This is how Leah's gratitude distinguished itself from that of her predecessors.

Rav Pam goes on to discuss a practical aspect of gratitude – wedding pictures. What do wedding pictures have to do with gratitude? Let me explain. Years ago, a Jewish wedding was no less a joyous occasion than it is today. It was far from the extravagant affairs many of our weddings have become. Then our people had far less money, and the value system that prevailed was much more spiritual. When we have less, we tend to view life from a much more conservative perspective. Memories of the weddings of “those days” were relegated to the minds of the participants. For some, there was that rare wedding picture that was taken, a simple portrait that – although quite expensive – attempted to capture everything in one shot. Today, we are blessed with a slew of photographers at each wedding, taking pictures of every moment of the wedding from the food until the goodbyes, in black and white and every color imaginable. The bill can amount to a small fortune. These pictures are viewed for up to a year after the wedding – and sometimes even longer. After awhile, like all good things, they find their way to the coffee table to be dusted off, or to the closet, to be taken out when the young couple become bored or their children are in the mood of looking at the wedding that took place “so long ago.”

“Is there a purpose for the wedding pictures?” *Rav Pam* queries. He explains that, indeed, in light of the above, they can play a vital role. There are moments in a marriage when life does not follow the storybook pattern of “all roses.” Earning a livelihood is always a factor, together with raising children, and there is always the issue of keeping up with the Joneses. Quite often, these moments evoke feelings of anger, unhappiness and even depression. This is the prime time for pulling out one's wedding album. Look at the joy that was a primary component in the marriage. Remember how you felt then and the gratitude that was part and parcel of that feeling, and transfer it to the “here and now.” Try to recall the dreams and aspirations that the two of you manifested when you started out on the road of life – together. Look at the joy that is reflected in the eyes and smiles of parents and grandparents. Look at the many friends and relations who joined with you on that auspicious day. Relive the joy; make it a part of your life and then give thanks where it is due. Now ask yourself the question: Is it worth throwing it all away because of some petty, foolish issues?

This is Leah's lesson for the future: Remember the initial joy and never forget to appreciate it. Make gratitude a part of your life; this idea will transform your life.

