

Leah's eyes were tender. (29:17)

Leah *Imeinu* had good reason for her excessive weeping. She feared that she would be relegated to marry the wicked Eisav. After all, it made sense. Rivkah had two sons; her brother Lavan had two daughters. It was only "right" that the older daughter Leah would marry the older son, Eisav. For this reason, she cried. When we think about it, especially through the spectacles of contemporary society, what really was so bad about marrying Eisav? As an *ish sadeh*, man of the field, he was out there making money. Eisav would not settle for a mediocre paycheck. He certainly did well for himself. The woman that would marry Eisav would have it "good." Her material needs would be taken care of. She would live a life of comfort, surrounded with luxury, never having to worry from where the next check will come. Marrying Yaakov, however, meant a life of struggle, hardship and material need. Was that what she really wanted for herself and her future children?

I have painted the picture which those who are foreign to the world of Torah like to present. They view a life of materialism as the epitome of living; in contrast, they saw its counterpart, a life of Torah, which by its very nature eschews many material pursuits, as a life of settling for less, even one of misery. How wrong they are! The Matriarch Leah shows us the way. **Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita**, observes that, despite Leah's exposure to the pervasive, evil influence of her environment, her home and especially to her brother, she still wanted to share her life with Yaakov *Avinu*. Not only was this her wish; it became her obsession. She wept incessantly at the mere thought of marrying Eisav. She cried so much that her facial features, especially her eyes, were negatively altered.

Due to Leah's incredible devotion to the Torah way of life, she was rewarded with becoming the progenitress of the three crowns with which *Klal Yisrael* is crowned: *Kesser Torah*, the Crown of Torah, through her son Yissachar; *Kesser Kehunah*, the Crown of Priesthood, through her son Levi; and *Kesser Malchus*, the Crown of Monarchy, through her son Yehudah. This is a significant achievement for Lavan's daughter, who grew up in an environment which renounced all of these attributes. When a person demonstrates their undying devotion to Torah; when he displays his overwhelming desire and love for Torah, he succeeds in its procurement.

There is a well-known story of Reb Beinish Dennis a wealthy Russian businessman, who was privileged to be the father-in-law of two *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah luminaries, of the previous generation: *Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe*, Lithuania; and his brother, *Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Telshe*, America. After the Bolshevik Revolution, which devalued the Russian currency, his money became worthless. He was now a poor man. One would have expected him to be broken-hearted. He comforted himself, saying that he still had left in his possession two precious diamonds, his two sons-in-law. These were jewels which no one could take from him.

Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Baranovitz, related that he was once on a fundraising trip on behalf of his *yeshivah*. He journeyed to Russia to meet with this noted

philanthropist, hoping to obtain a large donation on behalf of his *yeshivah*. It was a cold, wintry day; a heavy snow had just fallen, and the unpaved streets were slushy with snow and mud. The *Rosh Yeshivah*'s shoes were filthy; there was no way that he could enter the palatial home of *Reb Beinish* with the grime on his shoes. He went to the back door which opened up to the kitchen, figuring that it would be much more appropriate to enter this way, rather than soil the fancy carpeting in the foyer. *Reb Beinish*'s daughters came to the door, and, after greeting their distinguished guest, they immediately went to inform their father that the *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Baranovitz* was in the kitchen. *Rav Elchanan* refused to walk any further into the house with his soiled shoes. When *Reb Beinish* came to the kitchen he asked the *Rosh Yeshivah* why he had come through the back door. *Rav Elchanan* explained that his shoes were filthy, and he had no desire to soil the rugs.

Reb Beinish became visibly upset and said, "*Rebbe*, you are impugning the education that I have given my daughters. I have taught them that Torah takes precedence over everything. Nothing is greater than Torah. You, however, are showing them that carpeting takes precedence over Torah. I do not want to cause you any trouble, but can you please exit the kitchen and enter once again through the front door? I want my daughters to see the carpet becoming soiled. Let them learn the importance of honoring a Torah giant!"

While this is clearly the proper attitude to manifest toward those who study and disseminate Torah, the flipside to this must be avoided. One must exert the greatest care to see to it that the respect given to the Torah one possesses does not go to his head. It is unfortunately quite easy to develop an elitist attitude that fosters an overactive ego. This leads to his becoming unapproachable and condescending. I recently came across a story related by Rabbi Yisrael Besser in his book: *Warmed by Their Fire*.

The story concerns the **Pnei Menachem**, the previous *Gerrer Rebbe*. A young girl, daughter of prominent *Gerrer Chassidim*, woke up one night and was frightened when she realized that she was alone in the house. Apparently, her parents had a medical emergency which had required immediate attention. They asked a neighbor to look in on their daughter until they returned. The child, however, was unaware of this. She just knew that she was all alone in the middle of the night.

The panicked girl did the only thing that came to her mind. She went to her family's phonebook and looked up the *Gerrer Rebbe*'s number and called him. The *Pnei Menachem* himself answered the phone. The young girl identified herself, and explained that her parents were not home and that she was scared.

This great man, who was mentor and spiritual guide to thousands, spoke softly to the child, reassuring her that her parents would be home soon. He asked her about school, her friends, and he even told her a story. All of this was done to calm down a frightened child.

The parents returned home shortly thereafter and were mortified upon hearing what their daughter

had done. The next day, the father entered the *Rebbe's* study to apologize for his daughter's "insolence." The *Rebbe* smiled and said, *Es is a gitte chinuch*. "You have taught your child well. It is important for a child to know that when a problem occurs, one calls the *Rebbe*."

Children often teach us valuable lessons.