

## And she (Leah) declared, “This time let me greatly praise Hashem.” (29:35)

Now, as a mother of one-third of Yaakov *Avinu's* twelve sons, Leah paid gratitude to Hashem, because He granted her more than her rightful share. Much has been written about gratitude per se, specifically in interpreting and explaining Leah *Imeinu's* gratitude. This is especially critical in light of *Chazal's* statement (*Berachos 7B*), “From the day the world was created, there was no one who paid gratitude to Hashem, until Leah came and thanked Him.” The questions are obvious: How can *Chazal* suggest that the *Avos Hakedoshim*, holy Patriarchs, did not thank Hashem? This question is especially pressing when we take into consideration the *halacha* that one must recite the *brachah*, *HaTov v’Ha’meitiv*,” “Who is good and bestows good,” upon having a son. Avraham *Avinu* fulfilled the entire *Torah*; he certainly made the *brachah*. This is gratitude. Why is it ignored? Furthermore, *Chazal* (*Tanchuma, Bereishis 25*) teach that Adam *haRishon* recited *Mizmor Shir l’Yom ha’Shabbos, Tov l’hodos l’Hashem*; “A song for the day of *Shabbos*; It is good to thank Hashem” (*Tehillim 92:2*). Apparently, Leah was not the first to pay gratitude. Last, if Leah’s gratitude was so innovative, why did she not bless Hashem when she had her first three sons?

The commentators, each in his own manner, have offered their explanations for the words of *Chazal*. *Harav Yisroel Yaakov Fisher, zl*, has an original and noteworthy perspective concerning Leah’s *hakoras ha’tov*, gratitude. He observes that the *Torah* divides Leah’s life into contrasting epochs. Her early life was spent in copious weeping concerning her impending prospects of marrying *Esav*. (People claimed that *Rivkah* had two sons and her brother, *Lavan*, had two daughters. In all likelihood, the older son [*Esav*] would marry the older daughter [Leah], and the younger daughter [Rachel] would marry the younger son [Yaakov]. Imagine, growing up with such a notion going through your mind. It is no wonder that she wept so much that her eyebrows fell off.)

In the end, *Lavan* made a switch and cheated Yaakov *Avinu* out of the woman he loved and planned to marry. When Yaakov discovered that he had become another victim of *Lavan's* treachery, he was quite upset. He did not divorce Leah. She remained Yaakov’s wife and, above all, did not fall prey to *Eisav*. Yaakov eventually also married Rachel, and they set up family life.

Understandably, Leah was filled with an element of tension. She constantly wept during her youth, always. When she finally escaped the clutches of *Eisav*, she was subjected to a life in which, for all intents and purposes, she was the “other wife”. This is to be noted from the names she gave her first three sons: *Reuven*, “Because Hashem has discerned my humiliation”; *Shimon*, “Because Hashem has heard that I am unloved”; *Levi*, “This time my husband will become attached to me.” When Leah had *Yehudah*, she realized that she was the beneficiary of an extraordinary blessing. After all that she had endured, finally, she had an achievement that went over the top. She had produced one-third of the *Shivtei Kah!*

*Rav Fisher* explains that Leah certainly thanked Hashem each time she had a son. *Reuven*,

*Shimon*, and *Levi* were no less significant gifts to her than *Yehudah*. The difference was that now she was able to say to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam!* Until this moment, I thought that I was second-class, inferior, because I was originally destined to marry *Eisav*. My marriage to Yaakov was the result of my father's defrauding him. Indeed, Yaakov gave the *simanim*, special signs, to Rachel, because he did not trust my father. My sister was a *tzadekes*, a righteous woman, and she gave them to me. Thus, I came into the marriage through the back door. Now that I have been blessed with a fourth son, I realize that everything I endured until this moment was to my benefit!" This was Leah's expression of *hodaah*, gratitude. She had reached the level of acknowledging that what she had thought was to her detriment was actually the springboard for her deliverance.

It happens more often than we are inclined to admit, that what we thought were challenges and obstacles were actually springboards for our benefit. The following story (one of many) demonstrates this verity. *Shachar* was the name of the first public transport service in *Eretz Yisroel*. As a bequest from the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, our hero Mr. Donat, who had recently arrived in the Holy Land, received one share in the fledgling company as part of his immigrant privileges. One share in a company whose profits were soon multiplying exponentially could generate a healthy profit. This was especially vital during a time when the country was experiencing a period of extreme austerity. A few extra shekalim would make a large difference in a family's economic status. The dividends that this one share could produce could alter their status.

Shortly thereafter, *Shachar* merged with *Hamekasher*, another transport service, and the two become the iconic Egged bus service. The price of Egged shares went through the roof. Indeed, the dividends earned from Egged shares could sustain an entire family for a reasonable amount of time. While all this was great news for investors, the *Torah*-abiding Jew was conflicted with a *halachic* question. When the newly-formed Egged bus service began *Shabbos* service, it posed a problem for the observant shareholders. While the company never forced its drivers to drive on *Shabbos*, the bus lines were open, and buses were carrying passengers. Thus, anyone who owned shares in the company was basically profiting from *chillul Shabbos*.

Mr. Donat had not survived the Holocaust in order to come to *Eretz Yisreal* and be *mechallel Shabbos*. No amount of money could sway him to turn his back on *Yiddishkeit*. He asked the *Rav* of Haifa, *Harav Avraham Yitzchak Klein, zl*, for a ruling. The only basis for *heter*, permission, was the undeniable fact that, in those times, a loss of livelihood might create life and death issues. People were starving. They had little food and even less money. To give up his Egged income quite possibly placed his family's health in danger. *Rav Klein* was not comfortable with taking it upon his shoulders to issue the ruling. He suggested that Mr. Donat present his question to the *gadol hador*, the *Chazan Ish*. Only someone of his stature could rule on this question.

In those days, the journey from Haifa to Bnei Brak was not a hop, skip, and jump. It took over half a day, and it was an exhausting trip. He arrived at the home of the *Chazan Ish* to be told that the *Rav* had become ill and was not seeing anyone. Mr. Donat pleaded, until finally he was allowed into the room where the *Chazan Ish* lay weak and pale. He presented his question and immediately

received a two-word replay, *Ein efsharut*; "Impossible." Mr. Donat heard the reply and realized what this meant for him and his family. Nonetheless, despite his reservations, questions and fear for the future, he accepted the ruling and prepared to return home. He immediately proceeded to the Egged main office, requesting the deed for his share and tore it up. He forfeited his dividends, future profits-all because of *Shabbos*.

Overnight, Mr. Donat was reduced from a man of means to a pauper. To support his family, he carried a heavy sack of soap detergent and went from door to door selling to housewives. In the wet winter and brutally hot summer, he walked up and down the streets, trudging up the many flights of stairs to earn a few *prutos*, pennies. His family suffered, but they were happy in the knowledge that they had taken the right path. After a few years, he finally saved enough money to purchase an old dilapidated bus. He no longer carried the sack on his back, but he barely eked out a living.

He aged, sixty, seventy, and eighty. It was now too difficult to carry, to walk up a flight of stairs, and truthfully the women could just as well purchase detergent in the supermarket. Not ready to retire, he took a job as a maintenance man in a *yeshivah*. All of this has been a prelude to the conclusion which is the punchline, the decision not only for Mr. Donat but for every Jew who has made the choice to adhere to the *Torah* way, even if at first the decision seems to be fraught with ambiguity and challenge.

One day, Mr. Donat practically danced into the *yeshivah* building. He greeted every *bochur* with a big smile. While he was always congenial, this was unusual. One *bachur* asked him, "Mr. Donat, *Mah kara*, what happened that you are so happy?" (I must add that for a *bochur* who is fully immersed into *Torah* study, the only path to everyday happiness is *Torah* study. He cannot understand the mundane, temporal form of happiness. True, everlasting, meaningful joy can only be experienced when the source is spiritual in nature.)

Mr. Donat looked deep into the *bochur's* eyes and said, "This morning, I was walking in one of the upscale neighborhoods on Har Carmel, when I met an old friend, who worked with me for many years at Egged. He immediately recognized me and remarked, 'See all of these beautiful villas. They belong to the original shareholders of Egged. You realize what you lost out on? You could have been a millionaire, just like us. Instead, from the way you look, I wonder if you are making ends meet. Why should someone like you have to work so hard, when you could have had it all?'

"I did not respond, because he would not have understood that I am on my way to attend my son's *siyum Ha'shas*. My son has mastered *shas baal peh*! Tonight, I will be sitting at the head table with *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshivah*. The room will be filled with my children and grandchildren all of whom are replete with *Torah* and *yiras Shomayim*. My 'returns' on my investment in *Shabbos* paid off in ways that I never could have anticipated." We never know. Hashem has a plan. We are obligated to follow His choreography.