WARMTH & WISDOM

Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת and חדוותא דזעיר אנפין collections of maamarim given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

Melave Malka Parshas Vayeitzei 5771

One detail in our *Parsha* contains a lesson that applies to each and every one of us.

On one hand, Rochel and Leah describe the disgraceful way that they have been treated by their father.

וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וַתֹּאמַרְנָה לוֹ הַעוֹד לָנוּ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ. הֲלוֹא נָכְרִיּוֹת נֶחְשַׁבְנוּ לוֹ כִּי מְכָרָנוּ וַיֹּאכַל גַּם אָכוֹל אֶת כַּסְפֵּנוּ (בראשית ל"א:י"ד – ט"ו) .

And Rochel and Leah answered and they said to him, 'Do we still have a portion and inheritance in the house of our father? Has he not treated us as outsiders, for he sold us and has consumed our money?

From these *pesukim*, it seems clear that they felt no love and affection for their wicked father who treated them as outsiders.

However, later in the *Parsha*, Lavan declares:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב מֶה עָשִׂיתָ וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת לְבָבִי וַתְּנַהֵג אֶת בְּנֹתַי כִּשְׁבֻיוֹת חָרֶב לָמָּה נָחְבֵאתָ לִבְרֹחַ וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי וְלֹא הִגַּדְתָּ לִי וָאֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ בְשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׁרִים בְּתֹף וּבְכִנּוֹר וְלֹא נְטַשְׁתַּנִי לְנַשֵּׁק לְבָנַי וְלִבְנֹתָי עַתָּה הִסְכַּלְתָּ עָשׂוֹ (בראשית ל"א כ"ו – כ"ה)

And Lavan said to Yaakov 'What have you done? You have duped me and led away my daughters like prisoners of war. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me? I would have sent you off joyfully with songs, drums and harps? You didn't allow me to kiss my sons and daughters. You have acted foolishly.'

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In these *pesukim*, Lavan seems to express the heartfelt love of a father for his daughters and their sons. His feelings seem to have been so sincere that he felt compelled to pursue Yaakov, and to publicly declare his love and concern for his daughters.

Later in the *Parsha*, Lavan continues to demonstrate his care and concern for his daughters.

וַיַּעַן לָבָן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל יַעֲקֹב הַבָּנוֹת בְּנֹתַי וְהַבָּנִים בָּנַי וְהַצֹּאן צֹאנִי וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה רֹאֶה לִי הוּא וְלִבְנֹתַי מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָאֵלֶּה הַיּוֹם אוֹ לִבְנֵיהֶן אֲשֶׁר יָלָדוּ .(שם מ"ג)

Lavan answered and said to Yaakov, 'The daughters are my daughters! The sons are my sons! The flocks are my flocks! And regarding my daughters what would I do to harm them or the children whom they have borne.'

אִם תְּעַנֶּה אֶת בְּנֹתַי וְאִם תִּקַּח נָשִׁים עַל בְּנֹתַי אֵין אִישׁ עִמָּנוּ רְאֵה אֱלֹקִים עֵד בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ. (שם מ"ו)

If you neglect my daughters and if you take other wives in addition to my daughters when no one is with us, see that *Hashem* is a witness between us.

The discrepancy between Rochel and Leah's description of how Lavan treated them, and Lavan's declarations of love and concern, is baffling. In Rochel and Leah's eyes, their father treated them cruelly, sold them for profit, and cared only about himself. The absence of paternal love led them to yearn for the opportunity that would enable them to escape him forever.

I believe that the solution to this conundrum contains a vital lesson that we all must internalize. Sometimes a person is convinced that he is truly a caring parent focused exclusively on the good of his children. He will point to the time and effort he invested in finding them excellent *shidduchim*, even to the extent of travelling great distances.

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However, in many cases, it is clear to his children that he wasn't really focused on what is best for them. In their eyes, his efforts were motivated by selfish desire for the *kavod*, position, or monetary gain that he imagines will result from those *shidduchim*.

Sometimes a parent is convinced that he is loved and respected by his children, because he showers them with love as he understands it. Nonetheless, it may be that his children don't feel that he loves them or appreciates them. It is a frightening phenomenon that requires our constant attention.

Now, after having read this *Parsha*, we must take time for introspection and self- examination. Are the efforts we put into caring for our children truly focused on what is best for them? Isn't it possible that our own self-interest and desire for *kavod*, or our need to maintain a certain status influences our decisions?

The answer to those questions won't be obvious. We must search deep inside ourselves if we hope to discover the truth.

Then, if we will be wise enough to truly focus on what is truly best for each child…
נִזְכֶּה בְּעֶזְרַת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְגַדְּלָם לְתוֹרָה וְלַחֻפָּה וּלְמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים בְּנַחַת וְהַרְחָבָה, אָמֵן כֵּן יְהִי רָצוֹן

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