

Growing from One's Failures

What is your salary? We do not ask this question as salary is considered to be private. Many people erroneously consider how much we make to be equal to how much we are worth as a person. However, others realize there is something more important than money. The reading *The Crown of a Good Name* that I do at the end of a shiva minyan reads “Wealth like health will pass away, but a good name can live on forever.”¹

Discussions about wages and monetary worth are nothing new: they go back to this week's Torah portion. As Lavan and Jacob parted, Lavan asked, “What are the wages due you?”² Jacob replied, “Pay me nothing!”³ Why does Jacob not want to be paid for the 20 years he worked for Lavan? Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, said, “Nothing from all the sheep that you now have, since I have been serving you for your daughters.”⁴

¹ “The Crown of a Good Name” found in *A Minyan of Comfort* p. 136

² Genesis 30:31

³ Genesis 30:31

⁴ Rashbam on Genesis 30:31

Often we think money sells. We look for the jobs that pay the most money. We care about our salaries and benefits; after all maybe it will lead us to retire at a younger age. Jacob, however, **couldn't care less**. What he realized is that there are some things that money can't buy, and one of them is love. He worked 7 years expecting to marry Rachel yet was tricked by Lavan into marrying Leah. He had to work another 7 years for Rachel and then worked 6 years more for Lavan's flocks.

One might interject and say, 'Rabbi, look at what follows'; context is everything. Jacob said to Lavan that his wages would be determined by goats which are streaked, speckled or spotted and sheep which are dark-colored. Lavan agreed, and Jacob used mating rods to ensure that the stronger young goats and sheep that would be born would go to him. This appears to be another example of Jacob as trickster, using the mating rods to acquire the better quality goats and sheep. I choose, however, to view it differently: Jacob knew animal husbandry so well from his time tending Lavan's flocks that he knew what to ask for and

was thus able to acquire it. He was so talented as a shepherd that he won the wager with Lavan.

The lesson to take from this is the importance of continually honing one's skills and not letting failure get you down but rather learning from it and using it to propel you forward. Jacob could have been bitter at having been tricked by Lavan into marrying Leah, and yet he learned from this trickery. He had more time to shepherd Lavan's flocks and became an even better shepherd. The acquisition of the strong sheep and goats came about because Jacob honed his skills and bested his uncle.

In life we learn more from our failures than from the times we don't put ourselves out there. Jacob grew greatly from his failure to marry the right woman. He also learned that one might want to peek under the veil to make sure he is really marrying his intended ☺.

Perhaps most importantly, Jacob recognized that in life **there are always strings attached to everything**. If he had said to Lavan "Pay me the wages you owe me from the past 6 years," he might have felt

beholden to his uncle despite being entitled to the payment. Instead, Jacob creates a clever way to get the wealth he needed in terms of livestock by outsmarting Uncle Lavan. In so, let us recognize that life's a long time and there is always the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and grow into the people we want to become each and every day.