

# Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Yisro

“YOU SHALL NOT COVET.” (SHMOS 20:14)

IN THE BRAISA OF Kallah Rabasi (Chapter 3) it says “Remove your will in lieu of the will of your neighbor, for this is what Rachel did for Leah, and Dovid for Shaul.” The Gemara there explains: Rochel gave Leah the secret signal she had made with Yaakov so that Leah would not be discovered and disgraced, enabling Leah to marry Yaakov. So too, Dovid didn’t try to wrest the kingdom from Shaul early, even though Dovid knew he was destined to become king eventually.

The *Braisa* compares the cases of Rachel and Dovid as similar examples of surrendering one’s own wants and allowing another person to have the desired object. Upon further examination, these two cases do not seem comparable. Rachel did not know that Yaakov would take her as a second wife. She even thought that she would end up marrying Esav! This was indeed a total surrender of her life’s desire. She assumed that by giving the signals to Leah, her goal – marrying Yaakov – was now beyond her reach. Dovid’s situation, on the other hand, was quite different. He knew that he would eventually be coronated. Being king was not out of his reach, it was merely delayed. How can the *braisa* compare Rachel’s permanent sacrifice with Dovid’s temporary postponement?

We can answer this question by viewing this type of challenge through a useful perspective, suggested by the Ibn Ezra in his commentary on, “You shall not covet,” in this week’s *parasha*. Many ask: How is it possible to control ourselves from coveting an attractive item? Isn’t it a natural, instinctive feeling to desire something appealing? The Ibn Ezra answers with a parable. A poor farmer does not desire the king’s daughter because he understands that marrying a princess is totally beyond his reach. So too, we must understand that if Hashem decreed that an item or person is not for us, it is beyond our reach and we should – and can – have no interest in that item or person.

Our matriarch Rachel made a *halachic* decision that, due to the factors of her sister’s embarrassment and considerations of modesty, she should relinquish the privilege of marrying Yaakov. Our sages tell us she concluded that Yaakov was evidently not her destined mate. In that mindset, the Ibn Ezra’s perspective can be used: Yaakov was never intended for her, and it was inconceivable to desire marrying him. Dovid, on the other hand, could not simply use this technique. He knew that he was in fact worthy of the crown, and would shortly thereafter ascend the throne. In such a case, even a simple postponement of one’s desire becomes more difficult, because it is now within reach, and difficult to put out of the realm of reasonable wants. This is not a commoner desiring a princess, but a royal suitor being asked to step aside for a period of time, to allow his fellow competitor to go first. A temporary delay – true, but one that is all the more difficult because he knows the desire he waives is a real possibility. It took superhuman strength to view that throne right now as something he could never have – knowing full well that later it would be his.

Just as a child resents having to allow others to go first, we sometimes resent letting go so that others can partake before us. Learning about Dovid’s struggle shows us that it can take as much effort as a permanent surrender. Let us muster our spiritual strength and follow Dovid HaMelech’s example of selflessness. It will give us the genuine happiness that comes from giving to others, emulating our Creator and realizing the incredible potential that lies within us.

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