



PERCEPTION IS REALITY

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayitzei 5782

Sibling rivalry has plagued mankind from the very first set of siblings, Kayin and Hevel. The situation has improved somewhat since their poisoned relationship, most siblings aren't murdering each other, but jealousy and envy about the other's standing in the eyes of parents and teachers, has remained a constant challenge.

Rav Avraham HaKohein Pam, zt'l, told over a story to a gathering of Mechanchim (Echoes of the Maggid, by Rabbi Pesach Krohn, pps. 271-2), about an incident from his days as a young teacher. A mother came in to complain that her son felt that "the Rebbe hates him." Rav Pam was taken aback, and gently explained that he doesn't hate anyone, certainly not a Talmid. The mother softened her words and explained that the boy feels that Rav Pam doesn't call on her son as much as other classmates. Rav Pam promised to be more sensitive to the boy.

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In explaining this boy's feelings to the educators, Rav Pam quoted from this week's Parsha: The Pasuk says (29:31)

וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי שָׂנְאָהּ לְאֵה...
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And Hashem saw that Leah was hated... Rav Pam asked: How could it be that Yaakov Avinu could hate any Jew, let alone his wife, the Tzadekes Leah?! Even more difficult is the fact that in the previous Pasuk the Torah says that Yaakov loved Rochel more than Leah – so it's obvious that he did love Leah, and not hate her. It seems from an objective point of view, that Leah was overstating and exaggerating her feelings.

The point to be learned from here, says Rav Pam, is that a person's perception is what counts. Even though to us it looks like relative levels of love, to Leah, the recipient of those feelings, it came across as real hatred. In fact, this can be seen from a careful reading of the Pasuk. It says Hashem saw Leah was hated, no one else saw or could pick up on Leah's feelings – not Yaakov or anyone else – it was revealed only to Hashem – because that was what was truly in her heart. And perhaps you might think that even so, the feeling is not justified. On the contrary, the Pasuk continues and tells us that Hashem caused Leah to conceive a child, to compensate in a way, for feeling hated. This shows us Hashem validated those feelings.

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All too often we judge a child or adult's feelings through the prism of our own 'objective' perspective, and invalidate and maybe even belittle the feelings and perceptions of the other person. In the area of sibling rivalry, this is especially damaging. We need to validate the child's feeling, who may express those feelings in very strong and harsh terms, as the Torah describes Leah's feelings. We can empathize with their pain and hurt, let them know we feel for them, while at the same time setting limits on what they can and cannot do with those feelings. To deny their feelings is to cut off communication with our children. As preposterous as their reactions may sound – we would do well to think of Leah Imeinu's perceptions and how Hashem Himself validated those feelings and acted accordingly.

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Let's make sure to appreciate and nurture the bracha of multiple children in one family, and to appreciate the bracha of large numbers of Yiddishe Kinderlach in our Yeshiva and to keep that bracha continuously flowing with goodness. Let's understand rivalry, show children we feel for their pain. Let's demonstrate how to channel those feelings properly, to enhance their Ahavas Yisroel and peace of mind.

Best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann