

To Whom Belong the Children?

ויען לבן ויאמר אל יעקב הבנות בנתי והבנים בני – And *Lavan* responded and said to *Yaakov*, “The daughters are mine, the sons are mine.” This statement was *Lavan*’s response to a litany of accusations which *Yaakov Avinu* gave to him about his treachery and crooked dealings. *Yaakov* complained that *Lavan* had made him work long and hard for everything that he received from him. *Lavan* was unmoved and his response was unapologetic and dismissive. *Lavan*’s sons also gave their perspective when they were overheard saying, “*Yaakov* has taken everything that our father has and he became wealthy on our father’s account.”

It seems odd that *Lavan* continues on to offer a covenant right after his response. Clearly, *Yaakov* and *Lavan* had a very different position about *Yaakov*’s wealth and wives so how would a treaty bridge that chasm?

A possible explanation is that *Lavan* understood fully what the legal basis of *Yaakov*’s wealth was and he didn’t contest it. He was after the spiritual ownership of *Yaakov*’s family. He was offering *Yaakov* to set aside their differences and to simply acknowledge that the children would grow and be trained in his ways. After all, it all came from him. Isn’t he entitled to raise his *aineklach*?! Why run away like a thief if we can be on friendly terms? However, *Yaakov* made it clear that this couldn’t happen. He had not only acquired the legal ownership of his possessions through honest and faithful work, he intended to raise his children according to his principles and only his world outlook.

In our times, the world beckons and winks at our children and says, “You are mine.” As parents, we must strive hard to educate our children according to our values and our outlook of G-dliness, *middos tovos* and a rejection of the narcissism and hedonism that surrounds us.