

פרשת ויצא

I imagine that you have seen a similar scene many times as well. We have a generous 'candy man' in our shul and all the kids below the age of Bar and Bas Mitzvah make sure to see him during davening. In fact, some of the kids who don't make it to shul line up outside hoping to enjoy his largesse – which they do.

Sometimes their fathers bring them to get candy; sometimes they go on their own, and the real little ones, 2-4 year olds are always accompanied by their father or older sibling. The more sensitive of the post-toddler children already know to say 'thank-you'. The less sensitive ones and the toddlers don't know are often prodded to say the required expression of gratitude. Some do and some don't.

Why do we encourage the 3 year old to say 'thank you'? Does she know what she is saying? I imagine the purpose is to habituate good *middos*. By reciting the appropriate formula, it is hoped, the awareness of appreciation and giving thanks will be internalized. Similarly, we train children to recited *Torah Tzivo Lonu* and *She'ma*¹ when they begin to speak so that the first words that they utter should have sanctity and that after time that sanctity will be internalized.

Sadly enough, we know that many adults have learned to say 'thank you' but only in a perfunctory manner; it remains as a habit only, without any true sense of gratitude. Those whose responses are such follow appropriate social protocol but lack the true sense that such protocol is expected to imbue.

While we may find it hard to excuse those whose lack of appreciation is profound, we may find it easier to excuse those whose life circumstances are challenging and painful.

¹ The Tosefta to Massechet Chagiga (Perek 1/Halachah 2) writes:

קטן... יודע לנענע חייב בלולב יודע להתעטף חייב בציצית יודע לדבר אביו מלמדו שמע ותורה ולשון קודש ואם לאו ראוי לו שלא בא לעולם...

A child who knows how to shake them, is obligated in the Mitzvah of Lulav. If he knows how to wrap his clothes around him, he is obligated in Tzitzis. When he know how to speak, his father teaches him 'Shema' and 'Torah' and *Lshon HaKodesh*; if not –why did he come to this world?

As it is explained in Halachah, the obligation is not that of the child per se, but one of the father's. It is the Mitzvah of *Chinuch* that is his responsibility.

We may know individuals whose personal history is fraught with unfortunate or even tragic circumstances, who see life as a replete with bitterness. We should be able to find place within ourselves so as not to be judgmental, rather sadly acknowledging the calamitous events that are so much of the lives of people who have had many misfortunes.

Is it possible for an individual to retrieve him or herself from such malaise? Can a person who time and time again suffers from situations that we all pray with utmost sincerity and *kavanah* that such should not to befall us, to extricate themselves from a most justified sense that there is nothing for which to be thankful?

Parshas Vayetze presents us with a lesson on this matter; a lesson to which behooves us all to attend.

The third of our Matriarchs was Leah *l'meinu*. From our first introduction to this young woman who was destined to be the person who would shape our people in so many ways, we understood that there were issues that beset her.

Leah *l'meinu* would shape our people as the mother of one-half of all the Shevatim. She would shape our people in holiness and Torah as she was the mother of Levi – the grandfather of Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon HaKohen, as well as Sh'muel HaNovi.

She would shape our nation as the mother of Yehuda, to whom the monarchy was given and from whom the everlasting dynasty of *Dovid HaMelech* stemmed.

However, when we first encounter her we know nothing of the above. Leah, the girl, possessed *bechira chofshis*, free-will just like the rest of us and if she wished, she could have thwarted G-d's plans but making herself unworthy of the future that awaited her.

When we consider the meaning of her name, Leah, the message is already one of concern.

Let us remember what Rashi taught us in Parshas Yisro when Moshe Rabbenu informed his father-in-law regarding the history of Israel. We read there (Sh'mos Perek 18/Posuk 8):

וַיְסַפֵּר מֹשֶׁה לְחֹתְנוֹ אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' לְפָרְעֹה וּלְמִצְרַיִם עַל אֹדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל
הַתְּלָאָה אֲשֶׁר מָצְאתֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיִּצְלַם ה':

Moshe told his father-in-law all that Hashem did to Par'o and to Egypt regarding Israel; all of the *travail* that found Israel on the way and that Hashem saved them.

Rashi understood that we may not be familiar with the word תלאה which we rendered as 'travail' and thus he comes to teach us its meaning. We read there:

הַתְּלָאָה - לַמ"ד אֵל"ף מִן הַיְסוּד שֶׁל הַתִּיבָה וְהַתִּי"ו הוּא תִיקוּן וַיְסוּד הַנוֹפֵל מִמֶּנּוּ
לְפָרְקִים, וְכֵן תְּרוּמָה, תְּנוּפָה, תְּקוּמָה, תְּנוּאָה:

The *shoresh* of the word is לא, the letter *tof*, is a prefix that enhances the root and sometimes does not appear with the shoresh. We find similar uses of root words that have a *tof* added to the shoresh to give it a particular meaning: *teruma, tenufa, tekuma, tenuah*.

It is obvious that the word לאה shares the basic letters of the root word לא.

In fact, we have encountered that root word in Parshas Vayera. When the inhabitants of Sedom wished to attack the guests of Lot, they were struck with blindness. What was the result of that affliction? The Torah writes (B'reishis Perek 19/Posuk 11):

וְאֵת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר פָּתַח הַבַּיִת הֵכּוּ בַסְּנוּרִים מִקָּטָן וְעַד גְּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ לְמַצָּא הַפֶּתַח:

They smote the men who were at the opening of the house with blindness, from the young to the old; they wearied to find the opening.

In this context, the translation of 'wearied' is more fitting, but the message is the same. The people of Sedom wanted to break into Lot's home and they had only travail since they could not find their way in.

And then, in addition to her name which hints at travail, we find a brief description of her which would be unflattering in any case, and in the context here, is particularly non-complimentary.

We read in our Parsha (B'reishis Perek 29/P'sukim 16-17):

וַיִּלְבֵּן שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת שָׁם הַגְּדֹלָה יָאָה וְשֵׁם הַקְּטָנָה רַחֵל: וְעַיְנֵי יָאָה רַכּוֹת וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יִפְתָּ
תֹּאֵר וַיִּפְתַּ מִרְאָה:

Lovon had two daughters: the name of the oldest was Leah and the name of the youngest was Rochel. Leah's eyes were soft; Rochel was pretty in her appearance and pretty in her looks.

What is the meaning of 'soft eyes'? Rashi write there:

ועיני לאה רכות - שהיתה סבורה לעלות בגורלו של עשו ובוכה שהיו הכל אומרים שני בנים לרבקה ושתי בנות ללבן, הגדולה לגדול והקטנה לקטן:

Leah's eyes were soft – Leah thought that it was her fate to be married to Eisav and she cried because everyone said, 'Rivka has two sons and Lovon has two daughters – the older ones will marry each other and the younger ones will marry each other.'

Perhaps we would dare to call our grandmother² 'Sad Leah'. We certainly praise her for her sincerity and her ability to identify the evil of Eisav even if she grew up in the House of Lovon³. Nonetheless, her appearance was sorrowful.

² If we are not Kohanim or Levi'im, we should assume that we are from Shevet Yehuda which was the largest tribe that remained after the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdosh.

Whether Kohanim, Levi'im or *B'nei Yehuda*, Leah was our direct ancestor.

³ Leah I'meinu was not singular in her ability to recognize the evil of Eisav, despite being born in the House of Lovon. Rochel I'meinu shared that very same trait.

Later in our Parsha (Perek 30/Posuk 22), regarding the birth of Yosef, we read:

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים לְרַחֵל אֶת רַחֵל וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת לְרַחֵל וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רַחֲמָהּ:

G-d remembered Rochel and G-d listened to her and He opened her womb.

What did He remember? Rashi writes:

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים לְרַחֵל אֶת רַחֵל - שהיתה מצירה שלא תעלה בגורלו של עשו שמא יגרשנה יעקב לפי שאין לה בנים, ואף עשו הרשע כך עלה בלבו כששמע שאין לה בנים. הוא שייסד הפייט (קרובות דראש השנה שחרית) האדמון כבט שלא חלה, צבה לקחתה לו ונתבהלה:

G-d remembered Rochel – She was distressed that she should not be fated for Eisav – perhaps Yaakov would divorce her because she had no children.

The evil Eisav also thought as much when he heard that she did not have children. That is what the poet wrote in Shacharis of Rosh Hashanah:

The Red One saw that she had no birth pains; he wanted to take her and she was stunned.

And even though Lovon thwarted that possibility by giving her to Yaakov, Leah's woes were far from over.

Despite the heroism of Rachel l'meinu⁴ that prevented Yaakov's very immediate discovery of Leah's identity, the morrow of the wedding and the weeks that followed could not have been pleasant for Leah.

Yaakov confronted Lovon (Perek 29/Posuk 25):

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה הוּא לֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל לֵבָן מַה זֹאת עָשִׂיתְ לִי הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלֵמָּה רָמִיתָנִי:

It was the morning and behold it was Leah and Yaakov said to Lovon, 'what is this that you did to me? I worked for Rochel for you; why did you cheat me?'

What ensued? We read the following verses (ibid. P'sukim 27-28, 30):

מִלֵּא שִׁבְעַת זֹאת וְנִתְּנָה לְךָ גַם אֵת זֹאת בְּעַבְדָּה אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲבֹד עִמָּדִי עוֹד שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת: וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיְמַלֵּא שִׁבְעַת זֹאת וַיִּתֵּן לוֹ אֶת רַחֵל בִּתּוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיָּבֵא גַם אֶל רַחֵל וַיֵּאָהֵב גַם אֶת רַחֵל מִלֵּאָה וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמָּו עוֹד שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים אַחֲרוֹת:

Lovon said, 'Complete this week and this one also will be given to you with the work that you will do for me during the following seven years. Yaakov did so; the week was completed and Lovon gave Rochel his daughter to Yaakov as a wife.

Yaakov lived with Rochel and he loved Rochel more than Leah and he worked with Lovon and additional seven years.

⁴ We read in the Parsha (Perek 29/Posuk 25):

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה הוּא לֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל לֵבָן מַה זֹאת עָשִׂיתְ לִי הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלֵמָּה רָמִיתָנִי:

It was the morning and behold it was Leah and Yaakov said to Lovon, 'what is this that you did to me? I worked for Rochel for you; why did you cheat me?'

Rashi writes:

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה הוּא לֵאָה - אבל בלילה לא היתה לאה, לפי שמסר יעקב לרחל סימנים, וכשראתה רחל שמכניסין לו לאה אמרה עכשיו תכלם אחותי, עמדה ומסרה לה אותן סימנים:

It was the morning and behold it was Leah – but in the night it wasn't Leah? This is because that Yaakov gave Rochel a code [so that Lovon could not cheat him] and when Rochel saw that Lovon was marrying off Leah, Rochel said, 'Now, my sister will be shamed.' Rochel took a stance and gave the code to Leah.

We do not hear from Leah at this point but HaKodosh Boruch Hu knows her plight and thus we read in the continuation (P'sukim 31-32):

וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי שְׂנוֹאָה לְאָה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ וַיְרַחֵל עֶקְרָהּ: וַתְּהַר לְאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא
שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאָה ה' בְּעֵינַי כִּי עָתָה יֶאֱהָבֵנִי אִישִׁי:

Hashem saw that Leah was hated⁵ and He opened her womb; Rochel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son and she called his name Reuven because she said, 'Because Hashem saw my affliction and now my man will love me'.

Leah was well aware of the aspirations of Yaakov Ovinu who knew that he would be the father of the twelve *Shevatim*. Rashi makes that clear in his commentary (Posuk 21) when he writes:

...הרי אני בן שמונים וארבע שנה ואימתי אעמיד שנים עשר שבטים...אלא להוליד
תולדות אמר כן:

Yaakov said, 'I am already 84 years old – when will I establish the twelve tribes?' He spoke for the purpose of giving birth to his future generations⁶.

Therefore it was most reasonable that Leah I'meinu would expect a sea-change in Yaakov's attitude towards her. She expected Yaakov to love her, and that her status from 'hated' would be erased, because she, Leah, enabled Yaakov to become a Patriarch, not just a father.

⁵ See the commentary of Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch who writes that the 'hate' was not objective, but rather relative. That is the Torah is describing Yaakov's relationship with Leah relative to his relationship with Rochel.

Nonetheless, since the Torah chose to use the word 'hate', its message regarding the plight of Leah, or at least how she saw it, is most clear.

⁶ Leah I'meinu, as well, sought to make her contribution to the twelve *Shivtei Yisroel*, in addition to her own personal needs. Rashi teaches us that when he writes (B'reishis Perek 30/Posuk 17):

שהיתה מתאוה ומחזרת להרבות שבטים:

Leah desired and sought to increase the number of the tribes.

However, the Torah intimates that there was no transformation. Thus we find that at the birth of her second son the name that Leah bestows upon him indicates that her plight remains the same. We read (ibid. Posuk 33):

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי שָׁמַע ה' כִּי שְׂנוֹאָה אֲנִי וַיֵּתֶן לִי גַם אֶת זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן:

Leah conceived again and she gave birth to a son and she said, 'Because Hashem heard that I am hated and He gave me this son also and she called his name Shimon.'

It is worthwhile to note at this juncture that which may be unexpected.

Prior to the birth of her first son, *Hashem* saw that Leah was hated, as we read above. When she named that first son, Leah mentioned her *affliction* but did not mention being hated.

Now, at the birth of her second son she says that she is hated? Why does she mention this now and not earlier?

It may be that we are able to surmise that Leah did not immediately feel or understand the brunt of Yaakov's feelings in the aftermath of her wedding which was followed so soon by Yaakov's marriage to Rachel.

She certainly felt 'afflicted', as she said, but perhaps 'hated' was too strong of a term. Perhaps she felt, as she herself said, that when she would bring the desired progeny to her husband her affliction would cease.

Reuven was born and the affliction did not cease. At that time her perspective changed and she viewed herself as being hated!

Nonetheless, despite the strong emotions that Leah I'meinu expressed, her hope was not crushed. Thus we read at the birth of her third son (Posuk 34):

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר עֵתָּה הִפְעֵם יְלֹוּהָ אִישֵׁי אֵלָי כִּי יִלְדֹתִי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי:

She conceived again and gave birth to a son and she said, 'This time my man will be accompanied to me because I bore him three sons; therefore he⁷ called his name Levi.'

We understand that Leah I'meinu still wanted Yaakov as her husband, but what did she mean by 'this time'?

Rashi explains:

הפעם ילוה אשי - לפי שהאמהות נביאות היו ויודעות ששנים עשר שבטים יוצאים מיעקב וארבע נשים ישא, אמרה מעתה אין לו פתחון פה עלי, שהרי נטלתי כל חלקי בבנים:

This time my man will be accompanied to me – because the Matriarchs were prophets and knew that twelve tribes would go out from Yaakov and that he would marry four wives. Leah said, 'Now he has no complaints against me because I have taken my share of sons.'

And, still, we have no indication of Leah sensing a change of heart regarding Yaakov's attitude towards her.

We know that Leah will bear more children. What do we expect from her as her hopes keep getting dashed?

We read (Posuk 35):

וַתֵּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר הַפֶּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת ה' עַל כֵּן קָרָאתָ שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה וַתֵּעַמַּד מִלֵּדֹת:

She conceived again and bore a son and she said, 'this time I will thank Hashem'; therefore she called his name Yehuda and she ceased giving birth.

What was the reason for this name? Rashi writes:

⁷ The implication that he, Yaakov, gave Levi such a name. It is implausible that he would give such a name with the symbolism that Leah assigned to it. And thus, we learn Rashi:

קרא שמו לוי - תמהתי שבכולם כתיב ותקרא, וזה כתב בו קרא, ויש מדרש אגדה באלה הדברים רבה ששלח הקדוש ברוך הוא גבריאל והביאו לפניו וקרא לו שם זה

He called his name – It is questionable. For all of the other sons it is written 'she called his name' and here it says 'he called his name'?

The Midrash Rabbah in Sefer D'vorim writes that Hashem sent the Angel Gavriel who brought Levi before G-d and He gave him that name.

הפעם אודה - שנטלתי יותר מחלקי, מעתה יש לי להודות:

This time I will give thanks – I have taken more than my share⁸; from this I must give thanks.

Certainly this expression of thanks is worthy of appreciation and admiration. Amidst her sorrow, Leah does not forget that she must express her gratitude to HaKodosh Boruch Hu and names this new son, the one who makes her more than 'average', Yehuda as an expression of that gratitude.

What now follows becomes the test that we are privy to observe. Was the thanks that Leah gave now, as sincere as it certainly was, a momentary respite from her woes or did it signal a new pattern in her outlook?

When we see the names of the sons that her maidservant will bear and the names of the final two sons that she herself bore we will have a pathway to answer that question.

As we read, Leah ceased to bear children. Following the example of Sarah l'meinu and Leah's sister Rochel, Leah also gave her maidservant to Yaakov Ovinu. We read (Perek 30/P'sukim 9-13):

וַתֵּרֶא יְלָאָה כִּי עָמְדָה מִלְדֹת וַתִּקַּח אֶת זְלִפְהָ שִׁפְחָתָהּ וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְיַעֲקֹב לְאִשָּׁה: וַתֵּלֶד זְלִפְהָ שִׁפְחַת יְלָאָה לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן: וַתֹּאמֶר יְלָאָה בָּא גָד וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ גָד: וַתֵּלֶד זְלִפְהָ שִׁפְחַת יְלָאָה בֶּן שֵׁנִי לְיַעֲקֹב: וַתֹּאמֶר יְלָאָה בְּאִשְׁרֵי כִּי אֲשֵׁרוּנִי בְּנוֹת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ אֲשֵׁר:
אָשֵׁר:

Leah saw that she ceased to give birth and she took her maidservant Zilpoh and she gave her to Yaakov as a wife. Zilpoh, the maidservant of Yaakov, bore a son for Yaakov. Leah said, 'Good fortune has come' and she called his name *Gad*. Zilpoh, the maidservant of Yaakov, bore a second son for Yaakov. Leah said, 'With my happiness, because Hashem made me the happy one of the women'; she called his name Osher.

How truly positive are these names that Leah l'meinu gave to these children. Certainly they are in consonance with the thanks that was inherent in her naming of Yehuda.

⁸ An equal distribution of children would give three sons to each of the four wives. Leah now has four sons, more than her expected share.

Does this mean, though, that there was a significant change in the attitude that Leah possessed? Is she now past the grief and suffering that she felt, even if the objective situation has not changed?

It would seem precipitous to come to such a conclusion at this point. After all, it would make no sense for Leah to utter a prayer at the naming of these children for her husband to become closer to her. She did not bear these children. Perhaps she was a catalyst in some sense for their birth, but there was no logical reason to assume that the spousal relationship of Yaakov and Leah would be repaired because some other woman gave birth to his children.

Therefore, the gratitude and happiness that Leah expresses in the naming of *Gad* and *Osher*, as praiseworthy as it is, does not conclusively teach that her attitude has changed.

But, there remains room for our continued investigation. Leah was yet to give birth to two more sons.

We read (ibid. P'sukim 17-20):

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים... לְקִים אֶל לְאָה וַתְּהַר וַתֵּלֶד לְיַעֲקֹב בֶּן חַמִּישִׁי: וַתֹּאמֶר לְאָה נָתַן אֱלֹהִים... לְקִים
שְׂכָרִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי שְׂפָחָתִי לְאִישִׁי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁשׁוֹכָר: וַתְּהַר עוֹד לְאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן שְׁשִׁי
לְיַעֲקֹב: וַתֹּאמֶר לְאָה זָבַדְנִי אֱלֹהִים... לְקִים אֶתִּי זָבַד טוֹב הַפְּעַם יְזַבְּלֵנִי אִישִׁי כִּי יִלְדֵתִי לוֹ
שֵׁשָׁה בָּנִים וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ זְבֻלוֹן:

G-d heard Leah and conceived and she bore a fifth son to Yaakov. Leah said, 'G-d gave my reward that I gave my handmaiden to my man. She called his name Yissochor.

Leah conceived again and she bore a sixth son for Yaakov. Leah said, 'G-d has provided for me a good provision, this time my man will make his abode with me because I bore him six sons'; she called his name *Zevulun*.

If we would have had only the name of Yissochor we might have concluded that Leah had totally emerged from her sense of grief and suffering and her focus had changed.

However, the birth of her final son, Zevulun, returns us to the phenomena we witnessed with the birth of her first three children – a longing for her husband to establish the relationship she desired with her.

And we know that was not to be.

When Yaakov was ready to leave the House of Lovon, he consulted with both of his wives.

We read later in our Parsha (Perek 31/Posuk 4) the summons that Yaakov sent:

וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב וַיִּקְרָא לְרַחֵל וּלְלֵאָה הַשְּׂדֵה אֶל צֹאנוֹ:

Yaakov sent and he called Rochel and Leah to him to the field, to his sheep.

Rashi writes:

ויקרא לרחל וללאה - לרחל תחלה ואחר כך ללאה שהיא היתה עיקר הבית, שבשבילה נזדווג יעקב עם לבן, ואף בניה של לאה מודים בדבר, שהרי בועז ובית דינו משבט יהודה אומרים (רות ד/יא⁹) כרחל וכלאה אשר בנו שתיהם וגו', הקדימו רחל ללאה:

He called to Rochel and to Leah – He called to Rochel first and afterwards to Leah because Rochel was the more fundamental part of Yaakov's household because it was because of her that he became connected to Lovon.

Even Leah's children agreed to this formulation because Boaz and his court were from *Shevet Yehuda* and they said, 'like Rochel and Leah who both built' – [even] *they* named Rochel before Leah.

Let us now analyze the situation. How are we to view the thanks that Leah gave to Hashem at the birth of Yehuda? Was that thanks an exception to her overall attitude, an attitude that we was given expression with the birth of her first three sons and then again with the birth of her sixth and final son?

Was the thanks that she offered with Yehuda's birth and that of Yissochor momentary diversions from her overall outlook on life?

⁹ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּשַּׁעַר וְהַזְקֵנִים עֲדִים יִתְּנָה אֶת הָאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל בֵּיתְךָ כְּרַחֵל וְכִלְאָה אֲשֶׁר בְּנוֹ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעָשָׂה חַיִּל בְּאִפְרַתָּה וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם בְּבֵית לֶחֶם:

All the people who were at the gate and the elders said, 'Witnesses!' May Hashem give this woman who is coming into your home like Rochel and Leah who both built the House of Israel; do valiantly in Efros and call out a name in Beis Lechem.

Let us see one more episode in the life of Leah and bring that into our awareness before attempting to have a grasp of an entire picture of that Matriarch.

The Posuk (21) immediately following the birth of Zevulun reads:

וְאַחַר יְלֵדָה בֵּת וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמָהּ דִּינָה:

And afterwards Leah gave birth to a daughter and she called her name Dina.

Rashi writes:

דינה - פירשו רבותינו שדנה לאה דין בעצמה אם זה זכר לא תהא רחל אחותי כאחת השפחות, והתפללה עליו ונהפך לנקבה:

Dina – [The name Dina is related to *dan*, meaning ‘judging.’] Our Rabbis explained that Leah had a personal and internal debate. She thought to herself, ‘If this baby will be a male, my sister Rochel will be even less than the maidservants [who already had two sons each and thus it would be possible for Rochel to have only one son at the most]. She prayed and the fetus turned to a female¹⁰.

Leah is heroic. With the birth of four of her six sons, at least, she continued to hope and strive to intensify her relationship with her husband Yaakov. It does not appear that that hope and those efforts diminished at all throughout the years, as we saw at the birth of Zevulun.

Evidently, now, Leah was pregnant with a son. Her legacy could have been even greater, placing Rochel on the lowest rung of the wives of Yaakov.

What did she say? She said, ‘my *sister* Rochel’. Leah’s sense of sisterhood was the decisive factor in her internal debate and dialogue and that sense overcame her most evident sense of being treated unfairly.

And that allows us to reach a conclusion about Leah I’meinu.

If all of her concerns would have been behind her, out of her consciousness, after the birth of Yehuda, we would have still admired Leah greatly. She was a great person.

¹⁰ There is ample discussion about this phenomenon in earlier and contemporary writings.

But now that we have seen that she had to have an inner debate because she still felt the side of the argument that would tell her to give birth to this male child that the Ribbono Shel Olom made male. All she had to do was to let nature take its course and after nine months she could legitimately and honestly claim that the birth of whom would be her seventh son was an Act of G-d. She could have truthfully claimed that it was the Divine Will.

But she didn't.

In any case her action would have been one of immeasurable heroism.

But now that we know that the conflict remained real and palpable and its vitality had not lessened, her act of heroism looms so much larger.

In fact, the pregnancy with Dina was a *nisayon* – a test that G-d presented Leah. Ramban (B'reishis Perek 22/Posuk 1) teaches that at the ultimate *nisayon*, that of Akeidas Yitzchak, the Divine test is given so that the one who is being tested can know his or her strengths and not be afraid to exercise them when the need arises.

We read (Tehillim Perek 11/Posuk 5):

ה' צִדִּיק יִבְחֵן וְרָשָׁע וְאַהֲבַחֵם חֲמָס שְׂנֵאָה נִפְשׁוֹ:

Hashem gives a test to the righteous person; His Soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

At times, we may push back when we are told to emulate the great people of our nation.

Who has not heard the true stories that regale the unmatched holiness and goodness of our contemporary righteous individuals?

So often do their accomplishments seem out of reach to us, beyond our grasp and their stories are resigned to just that – stories that we may feel have little relevance to us.

When we have now learned *Parshas Leah* and have identified with her and her feelings of rejection, loneliness and even hatred; that empathy is not difficult to reach. We can now begin to appreciate her courage and integrity at the time of the conception of Dina and relate to her internal struggle because, undoubtedly, we have the very same ones.

Because our Parshas Vayetze is replete with 'action and adventure', it may be easy to overlook the internal strength that our I'mahos and Ovos exhibited.

Leah I'meinu is inspirational precisely because we can have a sense of how she felt and can learn from her that feelings, no matter how intense, do not have to lead us when we are called upon to make judgments of the most serious kind.

Leah I'meinu is an example with whom we can all identify.

The personal and internal dialogue that we must conduct is to ask if that identification will lead us to the epic conclusions that she showed us.

We have learned Parshas Vayetze. Will we truly take its message to heart?

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock