

Parshas Vayaitzay 5768 The Parsha's Many Lessons

Today, I want to speak about Rachel. Please bear with me, for we have limited time and a lot of ground to cover until we reach our final destination.

It is a sad irony that when the threats from the WGA (Writers Guild of America) first exploded in the news, and pollsters came out with surveys which reported that about 75% of the country will use their newly found free time to actually read books, and then, when the strike turned into a reality, the one man who has been raucously decrying America's "*Couch-Potatoism*" in the last century (or two) and hoping for *the novel, the book*, to be rediscovered, Norman Mailer, dies.

But that is far from the only ironic death this week. Let us slowly build up to the other one;

This Parsha is, to use the words of Rabbi Uzeal Milevsky Z"l, where heaven and earth touch.

Perhaps we can expand on this further;

Dreams, G-d's whispering to man, is found in three separate occasions in this week's Parsha, 1-To Yaakov in revealing his being the final leg of the tripod that supports Klal Yisroel, 2-again to Yaakov, when he is explained how to defeat Lavan through the manipulation of the flocks, 3- to Lavan himself, when he is told not to cause any harm to Yaakov.

Parallel to this we find rocks/stones - the essence of the physical world, raw carbon - appearing in no less than three separate incidents 1-uniting under Yaakov head while protecting him from wild beasts, 2- being used as a (reserved) Matzeiva, 3-as the symbol of the peace treaty finally made between Lavan and Yaakov.

Yaakov and Lavan were playing the roles of con artist and charlatan (at least for Yaakov it was only a temporary and permitted role), one for good and one for bad; one vindicated and one dejected. Indeed, Yaakov, as the Talmud teaches, calmed Rachel's fears of Lavan tricking him into marrying anyone but her by exclaiming, "Ani Achai B'Ramoess/I am his brother in shrewdness".

How ironic, that when these two, at last, let trickery rest and have a sincere dialogue, Yaakov utters a truth to his father-in-law, a certainty that turns out to be false,- Nobody stole your Teraphim...- and, after all of Yaakov's *permissible* and *unpunished* lies, it is *this mistaken* deception that kills his beloved wife Rachel, for she never revealed this to him.

It would appear that a lack of dialogue is a *common* problem in Sefer Bereishis, whether it is between Rivka and Yitzchak (see Emek Davar, end of Chayay Sarah, see also Ramban 27:7 where he proves that Rivka never told Yitzchak about the sale of the first born thus causing a need for the operation that was then planned); Yoseph and his brothers; or, here, in Rachel not disclosing to her husband what she had stolen.

Indeed, this is not the only occurrence of Rachel keeping things private in this week's Parsha:

In a surprising exchange, Leah, frustrated that Rachel was trying to get the Dudaim, exclaimed, "Is it not enough that you took my husband...!" Clearly¹ Leah was not fully aware of how Rachel gave Yaakov over to her, apparently performing the eternal Chesed of disclosing the *Simanim*/signs in a surreptitious manner that would not belittle her sister, like the rich man who gives charity without the pauper realizing that it was charity. This would also explain how Leah could make, what appears to be, such an audacious argument after all Rachel had done for her.

Yet, all these underlying patterns, ironies and brilliant acts of kindness pale in comparison to one statement made by the Torah in this week's Parsha, that not only reminds us of the importance of dialogue, but also teaches us how *honesty of self* in that said conversation is most crucial.

¹ This elucidation in the giving of the Simanim is not my own, however I am unsure who revealed it to me, perhaps R. Baruch Danzinger.

Let us begin with a social experiment:

Imagine a Rabbi begins a Drasha by requesting a show of hands of anyone in the room who has said Loshon Hara about friends and family in the past month. We would have to assume many hands would go up, and those who refrain are only protecting their image, acknowledging to themselves that they too are guilty. The same would go for anger and a myriad of other character flaws.

There is, however, on exception, one Midda/character trait that nobody dares to admit, even to themselves, that they are guilty of;

The same Rabbi begins his talk, "Please raise your hands if you are guilty of being jealous of friends or loved ones this past month". The smart money is on the outcome being that *no* hands are raised. This, although jealousy is the only Midda mentioned in the Torah as a prohibition, indeed it is one of the Ten Commandments! No doubt, whether we like to admit it or not, jealousy plays a powerful role over not just *our* lives but world events. Is it a stretch to suggest that envy is behind so much of this global war we are now in? That Kinna/jealousy is what drives such hatred for the State of Israel, a nation, which in 60 years has created an oasis in the Middle East, where universities, hospitals and entrepreneurship flourish-where Israel is now the 3rd most traded home to businesses on the NASDAQ?

What made Rachel so great was, in the middle of all that was transpiring in this week's Parsha, not to mention the drive to build Shevatim, was her admission² of jealousy (30:1), the first time this term was even used regarding our nation. It was only when G-d saw that this covetousness subsided- 30:14-22- by seeing Rachel giving over Yaakov, once again, to Leah, and watching even more Shevatim be born to others (Dan, Naftoli, Gad, Asher, Yissachar and Zevulan) yet not approaching (reproaching?) Yaakov again – that G-d finally remembered her (30: 22).

Once in a while I will mistakenly pick up a Nussach Sefard Siddur and use the occasion to say their Nussach of the Tephila found there at the end of Shemona Esrah, which includes the troubling words, "...may nobody be jealous of me nor I be jealous of anyone..." I say troubling because after we complete all the Tephilos in Shemona Esreh that are B'Loshin Rabim/plural, Elokeiy N'Tzor is the the one prayer that is *only* about, and written in, the Yachid/individual, and, if so,

² This can clearly be inferred from Rashi, 30:1. Although some may suggest that the Torah was only telling us what Rachel was feeling, whether she knew it or not, to me, and considering Rashi above, such an interpretation seems somewhat forced.

why would the request that I not be jealous not be enough here, for, to illustrate, we don't also say "...all evil plans against me (...וכל החושבין עלי) should be foiled and all plans against others as well"³?

What I believe to be the answer is critical; asking G-d that no-one be jealous of us is a personal Tephilla, for, as we briefly lay out above, there is nothing more precarious or lethal to our very being then to have envy look us in the eye.

Perhaps, it is for this reason, in G-d's great wisdom, that it is precisely at the moment of our *exile's commencement* – where the pathological cycle begins of the Jewish people being thrown out from a country, due, mainly, to an overpowering, and historically repetitious, Envy - that we stop to pray at the grave site of Rachel (see Rashi 49:8), she who was the first to vanquish that Koach/power.

It is our hope that through our awakening to our *internal* pandemic of Kinna, the world as well will be awakened to their *eternal* D.N.A., and we shall be granted peace in our time, stopping by the grave of Rachel, only this time to greet her in song.

³ The simple answer would be that it would seem disingenuous to ask for this while still trying to get others to feel that way toward us, however, that can be said, as will be shown, by other parts of Elokei N'Tzor as well.