

Deciphering Devorah's Demise: Parshat Vayishlach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

On his way back to his father's home, Yaakov stops at *Beth El* where he builds an altar to Hashem. Here the narrative interjects an event that seems unrelated. "Devorah, the wet-nurse of Rivkah died, and she was buried below *Beth El*... and he named it *Alon Bachut*/Plateau of Weepings." Why is Devorah and her death mentioned specifically at this juncture?

The Midrash explains that both Devorah and Rivkah died, hence the plural "weepings." Rivkah's death is not explicitly mentioned. Since Yitzchak was blind and Yaakov was away, the one burying her would be Esau. In these circumstances, Rivkah would have been the subject of curses for having born such an evil son, suggests Rashi. Alternately, Ramban suggests that Esau was still angry at his mother for facilitating his losing the blessing and would not even bury her. Only the Hittites would have been left to bury Rivkah, again not bestowing her proper respect. The Sam Derech writes, certainly, the death of his mother and her nurse were devastating to Yaakov, but the absence of honor and eulogies in her memory compounded the tears.

The Chatam Sofer offers a comforting insight into the juxtaposition of the deaths of these two great women. Yaakov could not eulogize his mother, for her greatest achievement was getting Yitzchak's blessing away from Esau and directed to Yaakov. However, any

mention of Esau would produce curses from the populace. Instead, he could eulogize Devorah as a reflection of Rivkah. That would grant his mother some of the honor she deserved while also painting a picture of both his mother and her saintly nursemaid.

According to Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Rivkah sent Devorah as far as Beit El. After Devorah delivered her message, Rivkah died, and there was no one for Devorah to deliver a return message to. Having completed her *mitzvah*, Devorah died, and Yaakov mourned them both.

Yaakov was not the only one to recognize the greatness of Devorah. It was from Devorah that Rivkah drank in not only physically nourishing milk, but also her spiritual values. Rabbi Zeichick notes that the Prophetess Devorah understood her namesake's value, and when she became a judge in Israel, she chose to hold court under this very tree in the plains of Beit El where Rivkah's nursemaid lay. Here the Judge Devorah would draw on the inspiration and wisdom of the earlier Devorah to render proper judgment.

Rabbi Schrage Grosbard sees Devorah as the model for all teachers. A successful teacher is one who transmits the lessons to each student as if she were feeding them. In this same context, Reb Chaim of Volozhin changed the term for students from *Talmidei Hayeshivah* - students of the *yeshivah* to *Bnei Hayeshi-*

vah/sons of the *yeshivah*. As a way of emulating Hashem, we can create children not only biologically but also through education, for a teacher or Rebbe infuses the soul with life.

Similarly, *Ruach Eliyahu* interprets the miracle Elisha performed in resuscitating the dead child. What was the purpose of Elisha's putting his eyes, hands, and feet on the child's? Rabbi Svei suggests that herein lies the key to revival of the soul, beyond physical life. A teacher must connect with the soul of the child, through a meeting of the eyes, the actions of the hands, and the path the legs will embark on. In this context, Devorah was the spiritual mother of Rivkah. And so, Prophetess Devorah can declare in her victory song that, "I arose a mother in Israel."

Rabbi Chazkel Levenstein cites the *Talmud* in saying that one who cries for the loss of a *tzadik*, his sins are forgiven, for the eulogies at the death of a *tzadik* inspire us to do *teshuvah*. Now Yaakov was returning to *Eretz Yisroel*, a vessel ready to absorb the blessings. But *Bnei Yisroel* needed to do *teshuvah* and receive atonement for killing the inhabitants of *Shechem*. These tears for the righteous Devorah achieved that atonement. This explains, why the death of Devorah is found after Yaakov makes an altar, and before Hashem actually conveys blessing upon him. *Teshuva* was necessary to receive these blessings, and crying for this righteous woman was the conduit to achieving this level.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 15

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In Chapter 15 in Tehilim, David Hamelech tells us the first rung to climb on the ladder of greatness, "*Holech tamim*." The Midrash asks, what does walking with *temimut* mean? When Hashem told Avraham to be *tamim* what did He mean? Rashi gives two explanations. The first is, be shalem- complete and fullhearted. When you are confronted with a test, rise to the occasion and pass it. If we look at the trials of Avraham, there's a common denominator. He was asked to do something that contradicted something he was told before. Hashem commanded him to go to the land of Israel and He would receive blessings. As

soon as Avraham arrived, a famine struck the land, and he was forced to go down to Egypt. Several times Hashem promised Avraham the land of Israel. But then after Sarah died, he had to pay a huge sum of money to *Bnei Cheit* to purchase *Mearat Hamachpela*. Yet Avraham didn't ask any questions. He went ahead and did what he had to do. The last and most difficult contradiction was *akeidat Yitzchak*. Hashem told Avraham that the Jewish nation would be built from Yitzchak. Then Hashem commanded him to sacrifice Yitzchak while he was single and did not yet have children. Avraham could have argued but he followed Hashem's command *b'temimut*-

full heartedly and with wholesome faith. Rashi gives another explanation. Three things happened before Hashem commanded Avraham to circumcise himself. Hashem told him to be *tamim*, He added a heh to his name, and commanded him to circumcise himself. Rashi connects these three points. The name of a person defines him. The numerical value of Avraham without the heh is 244, with the heh it is 248 which corresponds to the 248 organs of the human body. By changing his name, Hashem told Avraham that up till now he was almost *tamim*-perfect. Man has control over 243 limbs, but there are five parts of the

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body that he can't control. These are the two eyes, ears, and the male organ. A person's eyes and ears are open, and he cannot help but hear and see things. But now Hashem promised Avraham that being that he had gotten full control over his 243 organs by dint of his hard work, Hashem would now give him control over these five organs as well.

Through *siyata d'shmaya*, a *tzadik* can gain control over something which is not normally possible, and that's *temimut*, wholesomeness and perfection at its best.

There are two aspects here to Rashi's

explanation. The first was about how Avraham fulfilled the will of Hashem on a day-to-day basis. The second is that even when something seemingly presents as a contradiction to man, he still follows the will of Hashem. Not only does he overcome the contradiction, but he isn't bothered by it. He's *shalem* -whole- some with fulfilling Hashem's command. Sarah Imeinu is called in the *Midrash*, *Temima*. In *Tehilim* it says, "Yodeiah Hashem yemei *temim*- Hashem loves the days of those that are *temimim*." The Midrash says this refers to Avraham and Sarah. What made Sarah deserving of the name *Temima*? The *Torah* dedicates an entire chapter to the discussion

of Avraham purchasing *Mearat Hamachpeila*. The commentaries explain that this was the perfect eulogy for Sarah as burial is giving honor to the body. The body of Sarah deserved the utmost respect because it had no conflict with her soul. There was perfect wholesomeness. Many times we experience a dissonance between what our soul and body tell us to do. For example, our body might want to sleep late while our soul will tell us to get up and accomplish. With Sarah, body and soul worked in total harmony. Every aspect of her life was wholesome and dedicated to the will of Hashem.

Chanukah Parenting 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

In this class we will discuss parenting as it relates to children ages four to ten.

Four-year-olds already have verbal ability and can understand abstract ideas. This is the age when basic beliefs will be most easily absorbed, when everything that's part of our tradition takes hold. The goal is to teach them the depth and purity of *emunah*. *Emunah* is the recognition that everything comes from one source – Hashem and all that happens is compassionate and good. This doesn't mean training a child to deny his feelings. But he should know that although we might not see it at the moment, it's all good.

There are three ways to transmit these ideas. The first and most important way is personal example. How do you react when things don't turn out perfect? You buy a new set of dishes and it breaks. It doesn't mean you have to say *gam zu l'tova* right away. But looking to see who you can blame or treating it as irreplaceable or tragic is wrong. You could let yourself feel the loss and then switch to *gam zu l'tova* mode and say, "It's only dishes." Let them see where your values really are.

In the Vilna Gaon's ethical will, he writes about the chinuch of young children at the age when their verbal ability is still developing. This is the time to teach a child never to lie or hurt someone with words. People usually tend to live up to what you expect of them. If you treat a child like a liar, he'll feel like one. Instead, teach him honesty by being an example and always telling the truth. Secondly, when you catch him telling a lie, let him know you know the truth and make him own up to his misdeed.

Children lie all the time. They have very vivid fantasy lives. They also see it as a way to get off the hook. Don't call your child a liar. You can however introduce words like, *k'ilu* (as if) or wouldn't it be fun. The child relates a story you know couldn't have happened. You could say, "That would be so much fun if it would've happened." Allowing the child to see that fantasy isn't reality but it's ok, is the message they're getting. When a child lies to get himself off the hook, let him know you know it's not true. And make him own up to it.

Children this age can steal. You send your

child to the grocery and he comes back with potato chips he didn't pay for. Don't call him a thief but don't let him get away with it. Teach him empathy. You could say, "Mr. Cohen works very hard all day in the store. And if people take things without paying, he loses money. I'm going to call Mr. Cohen that we're coming back." Make the child go with you and have him return the chips. If the storekeeper is smart, he'll say something like, "What a *tzadik*, you did *teshuva*," and make your child feel like a million dollars. This is teaching values with words.

Storytelling is a powerful tool. This is the age of *tzadikim* stories. Tell a story halfway and then say, "What do you think happened next?" Then wait till the next day to continue so you have their attention. The most important thing at this age when their verbal skills are developing and they are defining themselves and their values, is to give them aspirations. Let them hear the stories of *tzadikim* and *tzidkoniot*. Let them wish they were more and let them aim for greatness.