Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

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Majestic Maidservants: Parshat Vayetzeh

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Shira Smiles

Why are Bilhah and Zilpah not included in the traditional count of our Matriarchs?

The simplest answer may be that Bilhah and Zilpah married Yaakov and became mothers through the intercession of their mistresses, Rachel and Leah, who were each eager to have as great a share as possible in creating the Jewish nation. Let's probe a little deeper.

By the time Leah had already borne Yaakov four sons, Rachel, who was still childless, approached Yaakov and demanded, "Give me children. Otherwise I am dead." Yaakov replied, "Am I instead of God Who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Rachel then gave Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife, and Hashem blessed them with two sons. When Leah saw that she had stopped conceiving, she too gave her maidservant to Yaakov, and Zilpah bore Yaakov two sons. Leah then bears two more sons herself and Rachel bears one at this point.

Rachel's words echo the words of Sarah, who gave Hagar to Avraham. Sarah said, "Perhaps I will be built up through her." Rachel also said, "Perhaps I too will be built up through her." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that 'building' can refer to a physical edifice or to building in time when one action forms the basis for another. A son (*ben*) is a brick (*levena*) in the structure of generations. Rachel learned from Sarah's action that one can place a brick, a child, in the building of generations. Future generation can then further be built on that. Rachel hoped to be "built up" to have her own child in the merit of raising her maidservant's son as her own. She also understood, as Chana would understand generations later, that she could not rely on the merit of her husband, writes Rav Dovid Hofstedter in *Derash Dovid*, but would have to put in her own effort and prayer.

Rachel names Bilhah's son Dan, explaining that "God had judged me." She added, "He has also heard my voice and has given me a son." Dan was the result of Rachel's prayers on Bilhah's behalf, points out the *Daas Shraga*. When Rachel and Leah prayed for their maidservants to have children both they and their maidservants were answered.

The *Siftei Chaim* points out that one must pray, but one must also invest effort to achieve results. When Yaakov told Rachel, Am I instead of God?" he was urging her to do something. In response, Rachel gave her maidservant to Yaakov. When Rachel conceived, Hashem remembered both her efforts and her prayers. Similarly, our faith too must strike a balance between effort and prayer. We must not get so caught up in our own efforts that we forget to pray and ask Hashem to make our efforts successful. Rabbi Solomon explains that the purpose of our efforts is to make us worthy to receive God's blessings. Nevertheless, our faith must lie staunchly in Hashem and not in our own efforts. Our efforts must be viewed as our obligation rather than as a condition for success. This was the greatness of our matriarchs, writes the *Bein Hamishpatayim*. They did their *hishtadlus* and gave their maidservants to Yaakov but they focused on prayer.

Rabbi Adari writes that the name Bilhah is derived from *behalah*, alarm and panic, which she felt at her mistress's childlessness. Zilpah, too, is derived from *zolof*, for her eyes were wet from tears she shed at the prospect that her mistress would be married to the evil Esau. When we speak of Rachel and Leah as our Matriarchs, Bilhah and Zilpah are automatically subsumed within those names. Likewise Rav Yedid points out that the maidservants represent the more hidden aspects of the Matriarchs' personalities.

When Rachel approached Yaakov demanding children as *akeret habayit* (the mainstay of the household), on her exalted level there was a touch of arrogance. Yaakov's response, then, was, "Look within yourself, not to me, for the merit of having children." Rachel realized that while Sarah treated Hagar with respect, she had been treating Leah somewhat haughtily. She vowed to change her attitude. To reinforce this resolve, she put an additional wife into the household and determined to treat both Leah and Bilhah with the utmost respect. This change in behavior, writes the *Yalkut Lekach Tov,* gave wings to her prayers and allowed them to enter heaven.

Just as the world was built on loving kindness, so too is the House of Israel. Rabbi Dov Yaffe points out the Medrash that when Leah conceived her seventh child, she prayed that it be a girl so that Rachel would not be humiliated by having fewer sons than the maidservants. She followed in the footsteps of Rachel who divulged the secret signs to Leah so that she would not be humiliated under the bridal canopy. Both Rachel and Leah set very high standards for their family. Through their actions they displayed mutual respect, sensitivity to others, and loving kindness.

Good character was also a hallmark of the maidservants, who exemplified humility. Even after they married Yaakov, they remained in their own eyes maidservants, writes *Ktav V'Hakabalah*. They did not want personal recognition; they were content to be the reflected glory of their mistresses. Just as they subjected themselves to the will of their mistresses, they taught Bnei Yisroel to subject themselves to the will of Hashem. As proof of the importance and greatness of the maidservants, the *Zohar* writes that after the death of Rachel and Leah, the cloud representing God's Presence moved and hovered over the tent of Bilhah. Certainly she and Zilpah were great women to merit such an honor.

The gifts of the maidservants remain with us. All of our Matriarchs were worthy models for us to emulate, the four that we remember and the two that bask in their reflected glory.

Parshat Vayeitzei: Surviving Darkness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Parshat Vayeitzei tells how Yaakov dreamed of a ladder that touched the heavens, while angels ascended and descended. The Midrash says that two angels were going up and two were going down. This symbolized the four exiles, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Edom. The Shem Mishmuel asks, Avraham was already told about the four kingdoms at *brit bein habetarim*. Why did Yaakov now have a separate prophetic vision about them?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that the Jewish

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people were meant to be the spokesmen, the *kohanim* of Hashem to the world, as mentioned many times throughout the Prophets. When Mashiach comes this will be our role. Yitzchak knew Esav had failings. He thought if he would give Esav the blessings and the mission to create the kingdom of priests, Esav would grow into his role. The mantle of responsibility would inspire him to repent. It would bring out his hidden potential and overwhelm the weaknesses of his character. And precisely because he was a man of the field, he'd be the perfect leader to bring the message of Hashem to the world. How could righteous Yaakov lead the four kingdoms back to *teshuva*, growing up as he did in the pure world of Torah? How could he fix the evil of the world? Only Esav, by uprooting the wickedness in his heart and supplanting it with goodness, could lead the nations to repentance.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that the four kingdoms represent the four cardinal sins. Bavel symbolizes idolatry, Persia corresponds to licentiousness, Greece represents murder, and Edom signifies evil talk. Esav, by fixing these four vices, could bring the world to perfection. That is why Yitzchak wanted to bless him. But he did not know, as Rivkah did, that Esav didn't want to change. The blessings would have led him to further corruption. While Esav had a formidable *yetzer hara,* he also had a great *yetzer tov*. He could have gone through a titanic struggle and transformed his evil inclination for the good. But instead he chose not to fight. His *yetzer tov* would live in the house of Yitzchak and his *yetzer hara* would live in the fields. Esav could have been greater than Yaakov. Chazal say, "In the place that a *baal teshuva* stands, a *tzaddik* cannot stand." Turning evil to goodness is a greater achievement than growing up with righteousness. Yet he did not to repent. Therefore, Yitzchak gave the *brachot* to Yaakov. The Torah says, "*Vayarei'ach begadav."* Yaakov may have been an *ish tam*, but some of his descendants rebelled. He needed the blessings so that every Jew till the end of time could have the capacity to return. The Jewish people will be the *mamlechet kohanim.* The evil nations will be defeated and Mashiach will lead the world to perfection.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that Yaakov vicariously lived through the four exiles through his experiences with Lavan, Esav, Yosef and the tragedy of Dina. In Lavan's home surrounded by sorcery and idolatry, he experienced the exile of Bavel.

Esav sometimes will act openly anti-Semitic. Yet at other times he may masquerade as a friend. This was the Persian exile. King Achashveirosh invited the Jews to feast with him so that they would sin. Unfortunately, many more Jews were lost to brotherhood and assimilation then to persecution.

The tragedy of Dina is similar to the Greek exile. The Greeks attempted to convince the Jews to give up their faith by assuring them they would then receive everything. Shechem told the same to Dina.

The suffering of Yosef came about because of *sinat chinam* (internal strife), which in turn brought the 400 years of exile in Egypt. Likewise, *Sinat chinam* is the root of our current long exile. Yaakov faced these four exiles, yet in the end he survived, thrived and overcame them. The Jewish nation will also survive, return to Israel, and fulfill the mission Yitzchak gave Yaakov. We'll become the *mamlechet kohanim.* We will be redeemed through *teshuva* and thereby bring the four kingdoms and all of humanity back to perfec-

Tehilim: Analysis of Perek 1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

The first chapter in *Tehilim* mentions three categories of sinners: *reshaim*, *chataim*, and *leitzim*. Each is paired up with a corresponding verb, *lo halach*, *lo amad, lo yashav.* What do these three phrases mean?

Rashi explains that the expressions go from least severe to most wicked. *Halicha*, walking, depicts a state of unsteadiness. *Amida*, standing, is a more rooted situation, and *yeshiva*, sitting, depicts a stable, static position. Angels are described as standing because they cannot grow or ascend to higher levels. Man is called a *holech*. He moves. With his free choice he can elevate himself to progressively higher levels. He can eventually reach higher than angels.

Rav Moshe HaCohen interprets the verse in a different way. He notes that it goes from most wicked to least wicked, with sitting being the most passive position. The verse depicts the tactics of the *yetzer hara*. Initially it comes as a wandering, uninvited guest offering advice. Once the person permits him to enter he becomes a frequent visitor until he becomes ensconced in the person's heart. Chazal say one word of mockery can deflate one hundred words of reproof. *Leitzanut,* mockery, is the lowest level because it creates an cynical atmosphere, which can lead a person down the slippery slope to oblivion.

"*Ki im b'torat Hashem cheftzo u'vetoroto yehge*." The *tzadik* wants Hashem's Torah and works on his Torah. Why the double language? Rashi comments that initially the Torah is Hashem's. But when a person works on Torah, it becomes *torato*, his Torah. Tosfot in Brachot notes that we say the blessings on the Torah only once a day because a Jew is expected to be constantly involved in Torah.

The Gemara comments on the verse in Mishlei, "Drink water from your pit and flowing water from your well." A pit or a cistern is a gathering of water, consisting primarily of rain or melted snow. A well is fed by underground streams. First a person must be like a pit, absorbing Torah learning by surrendering himself and sitting at the feet of his Torah teachers. Then, after many years of study, he can become like a life-giving well, spreading the teachings of Hashem.

"*Ki yodea Hashem derech tzadikim*." The relationship of *tzadikim* and Hashem is one of *yedia*, love. The greatest reward one can have is joy in being in the presence of Hashem. The Rambam explains that *tzadikim* merit unusual Divine Providence. "*V'derech reshaim toveid*." But the *reshaim* will be abandoned and left to their own resources.

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