

# INSPIRE



VAYETZEI 12TH KISLEV -28TH NOVEMBER

## LOVE OR CHILDREN?

One theme in Vayetzei is couplehood. Jacob's relationships with Rachel and Leah differ fundamentally from one another.

Rachel is Jacob's beloved; Leah the mother of his children. The tragedy of the story is that each wife wants what her sister has; Rachel yearns for children, while Leah pines for Jacob's love: "And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die'" (Genesis 30:1). But even when Rachel gives birth to a son, she does not feel fulfilled. Instead, as Joseph's name signifies, she can only gaze into the future, hoping for a second son: "And she called his name Joseph, saying, 'The L-rd add to me another son'" (Genesis 30:24). The fulfillment of that wish comes at the price of her life: "And it came to pass, as her soul was departing – for she died – that she called his name Ben-oni" (Genesis 35:18).

Leah's story is a mirror image of Rachel's, a fact evident in the names she gives her own children: And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the L-rd has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." ...And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time will my husband be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi... And Leah said, "G-d has endowed me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." And she called his name Zebulun. (Genesis 29:32, 34; 30:20)

Ultimately, Rachel and Leah attain only in death the things they yearn for in life: Leah is buried alongside Jacob in the Cave of the Patriarchs, while Rachel is considered the mother of Israel, buried on the way to Ephrath so that when her children go into exile she can pray for them (Genesis Rabbah 82:10): So says the L-rd: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not. So says the L-rd: Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the L-rd; and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, says the L-rd; and the children shall return to their own border. (Jeremiah 31:14-16)

### Self-Actualization Through Couplehood

The twin expressions of couplehood – the loving relationship and the child-rearing partnership – highlight two human aspects that relate to the essence of the connection between a man and a woman. The first Creation story describes a relationship whose purpose is procreation: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28), while the second portrays the intimate relationship as a value in itself: "It is not good that the man should be alone...and [he] shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:18, 24). The stories of Rachel and Leah are a testament to the tragedy inherent in relationships that only contain one of the two elements. This explains the blessing given to Ruth and Boaz by the crowd at their wedding: "May the Lord make the woman that is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). The community wishes upon the couple a relationship that combines both aspects. As my students have pointed out to me, the blessing is indeed fulfilled in Ruth: she is loved by Boaz and her offspring includes King David (her great-grandson). A relationship encompassing both elements generates a state of oneness, in which each element deepens the other and fuses with it: on one hand, the outward-facing, creative life partnership – birthing and raising children – generates a profound intimacy between the partners; on the other, just as children enrich the love between the partners, so the parents' love contributes to their children. There is no greater gift for a child than to grow up with parents who love each other.

### Couplehood: Traveling an Inner World

Aspirations for a life of meaning are challenged more than anything else by the difficulty of maintaining a loving, growing relationship. We all long for a relationship in which we can experience our love as a power that unites us as one flesh, as one vision. Love is the key to go beyond ourselves. The yearning, in a romantic relationship, is for two to become one. Physical intimacy fulfills one aspect of the yearning; a second is actualized through having and raising children. Yet, many couples are plagued by the feeling that they are emotionally incapable of attaining the significant intimacy that they aspire to. Hedy Schleifer, a couples' therapist and expert in the Imago method, highlights a misconception underlying the power struggles that prevent couples from deepening their relationships: both partners know that, as a couple, "we are one," but sometimes each partner mistakenly thinks, "that one is me." Just as ego can form a barrier between the individual and G-d, a false model of couplehood can drive a wedge between two partners in a relationship. The capacity to maintain a relationship that is supportive, respectful, and conducive to growth depends on recognition of the fact that, as a couple, "we are two." If I am to grow in the relationship, I must accept and learn my partner's language and visit their inner world, thus building our "one" out of the meeting of our two worlds. Schleifer teaches us that in order to create a common space that facilitates a true encounter, both partners must learn to diminish themselves and recognize the existence of the other: another whose purpose is not to serve or enlighten me; another who exists independently; another who is whole. A couple that experiences such a complete relationship, where ego does not come between the partners, can transpose that model to the relationship with G-d. When we make room, the focus is no longer on us alone or on G-d alone, but rather on the meeting between us; we open ourselves fully to the recognition that "surely the L-rd is in this place, and I knew."

# WHEN THE “I” IS SILENT

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

This week's parsha relates a powerful, primal vision of prayer: Jacob, alone and far from home, lies down for the night, with only stones for a pillow, and dreams of a ladder, with angels ascending and descending. This is the initial encounter with the “house of G-d” that would one day become the synagogue, the first dream of a “gate of heaven” that would allow access to a G-d that stands above, letting us know finally that “G-d is truly in this place.” There is, though, one nuance in the text that is lost in translation, and it took the Hassidic masters to remind us of it. Hebrew verbs carry with them, in their declensions, an indication of their subject. Thus the word yadati means “I knew,” and lo yadati, “I did not know.” When Jacob wakes from his sleep, however, he says, “Surely the L-rd is in this place ve'anokhi lo yadati.” Anokhi means “I,” which in this sentence is superfluous. To translate it literally we would have to say, “And I, I knew it not.” Why the double “I”? To this, Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz (Panim Yafot) gave a magnificent answer. How, he asks, do we come to know that “G-d is in this place”? “By ve'anokhi lo yadati – not knowing the I.” We know G-d when we forget the self. We sense the “Thou” of the Divine Presence when we move beyond the “I” of egocentricity. Only when we stop thinking about ourselves do we become truly open to the world and the Creator. In this insight lies an answer to some of the great questions about prayer: What difference does it make? Does it really change G-d? Surely G-d does not change. Besides which, does not prayer contradict the most fundamental principle of faith, which is that we are called on to do G-d's will rather than ask G-d to do ours? What really happens when we pray? Prayer has two dimensions, one mysterious, the other not. There are simply too many cases of prayers being answered for us to deny that it makes a difference to our fate. It does. I once heard the following story. A man in a Nazi concentration camp lost the will to live – and in the death camps, if you lost the will to live, you died. That night he poured out his heart in prayer. The next morning, he was transferred to work in the camp kitchen. There he was able, when the guards were not looking, to steal some potato peelings. It was these peelings that kept him alive. I heard this story from his son. Perhaps each of us has some such story. In times of crisis we cry out from the depths of our soul, and something happens. Sometimes we only realize it later, looking back. Prayer makes a difference to the world – but how it does so is mysterious. There is, however, a second dimension which is non-mysterious. Less than prayer changes the world, it changes us. The Hebrew verb lehitpalel, meaning “to pray,” is reflexive, implying an action done to one- self. Literally, it means “to judge oneself.” It means, to escape from the prison of the self and see the world, including ourselves, from the outside. Prayer is where the relentless first person singular, the “I,” falls silent for a moment and we become aware that we are not the center of the universe. There is a reality outside. That is a moment of transformation. If we could only stop asking the question, “How does this affect me?” we would see that we are surrounded by miracles. There is the almost infinite complexity and beauty of the natural world. There is the divine word, our greatest legacy as Jews, the library of books we call the Bible. And there is the unparalleled drama, spreading over forty centuries, of the tragedies and triumphs that have befallen the Jewish people. Respectively, these represent the three dimensions of our knowledge of G-d: creation (G-d in nature), revelation (G-d in holy words) and redemption (G-d in history). Sometimes it takes a great crisis to make us realize how self-centered we have been. The only question strong enough to endow existence with meaning is not, “What do I need from life?” but “What does life need from me?” That is the question we hear when we truly pray. More than an act of speaking, prayer is an act of listening – to what G-d wants from us, here, now. What we discover – if we are able to create that silence in the soul – is that we are not alone. We are here because someone, the One, wanted us to be, and He has set us a task only we can do. We emerge strengthened, transformed. More than prayer changes G-d, it changes us. It lets us see, feel, know that “G-d is in this place.” How do we reach that awareness? By moving beyond the first person singular, so that for a moment, like Jacob, we can say, “I know not the I.” In the silence of the “I,” we meet the “Thou” of G-d.

## PARSHA SUMMARY

Jacob leaves his hometown of Beersheba and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters “the place” and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; G-d appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of G-d.

In Haran, Jacob stays with and works for his uncle Laban, tending Laban’s sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter, Rachel—whom Jacob loves—in marriage, in return for seven years’ labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead—a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.

Leah gives birth to six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun—and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel’s prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years, and wishes to return home. But Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers, despite Laban’s repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

## HAFTORAH SUMMARY

The Haftorah for Parshas Vayeitzei is from Hosea 12:13-14:10. Following the death of Shlomo Hamelech, the kingdom was divided between his son Rechavam, and Yiravam ben Nivat from the tribe of Ephrayim. Yiravam was a man of extraordinary potential who had it within his power to join with Rechavam, unite the two kingdoms, and bring Mashiach. Instead, he enacted legislature that earned him the title Chotay U'machate – one who sins and causes others to sin. This is why he Talmud relished him among those individuals who have lost their portion in Olam Habaah – the World To Come. His greatest sin was erecting two golden calves, one in the north of Israel and one in the south of Israel, where the people were encouraged to serve the idols rather than go to the Bais Hamikdash. The prophet cried out against this terrible defection from Hashem and prophesied the destruction and exile of the 10 Tribes that followed Yiravam and the tribe of Ephrayim. The relationship to our Parsha is obvious from the first Pasuk (verse) of the Haftorah that describes Yakov’s journey to Aram in search of a wife. However, the connection is much more profound. As free willed creations, our decisions force Hashem to adjust events so that destiny is best accomplished. The end result will always be as Hashem intended, but the events leading to that moment can be more circuitous and convoluted than necessary. In the case of Yakov vs. Eisav and Yiravam vs. Rechavam, the actions of men forced Hashem to make accommodations. In each instance, a partnership could have been forged that would have strengthened the leadership of the nation and ushered in the Messianic era. Instead, Eisav and Yiravam refused to serve Hashem and distanced themselves and their generation from redemption. The last Pasuk states clearly that there are many ways for destiny to be accomplished. Man’s way, devoid of G-d, leads to pain, sorrow, and destruction. Hashem’s way, which is righteous, proper, wise, and direct, leads to healing, love, and prosperity. The ways of Hashem are pleasant, loving, caring, and respectful. Imagine how different history would have been, and how wonderful the future should be!

## WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Lesser, Beatrice mother Knott, Rivka Leah -Sunday 29/11/2020 Kislev 13, 5781

Williams, Clive mother Chaya bas Mordecai- Sunday 29/11/2020 Kislev 13, 5781

Green, Shirley husband Green, Monty- Moshe ben Zaddick Monday 30/11/2020 Kislev 14, 5781

Scher, Russell mother, Jaquie -Yenta bas Meya Monday 30/11/2020 Kislev 14, 5781

Winter, Alan & Einat son in law, Hyams, Paul- Hershah Ben Haim Tuesday 01/12/2020 Kislev 15, 5781

Bishop, Ruth father, Bishop, Samuel - Shabsai ben Avraham Thursday 03/12/2020 Kislev 17, 5781

Laderman, Cheryl father Juggler, Harry, Aharon ben Shulum Thursday 03/12/2020 Kislev 17, 5781

## JEWISH HUMOUR

Did you hear about the mathematician who’s afraid of negative numbers? He’ll stop at nothing to avoid them.

Helvetica and Times New Roman walk into a bar “Get out of here!” shouts the bartender. “We don’t serve your type.”

Hear about the new restaurant called Karma? There’s no menu: You get what you deserve.

## RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

A cross-border agent who’s job is to make you thrilled

A solution for a fractured vase after it’s been spilled  
A union through which emotional voids are filled  
A micro attraction enabling substances to build

What am I?

Answer for last week  
water bottle

Line 1 refers to the water of Earth’s vast oceans  
which cover most of our planet.

Line 2 refers to a glass bottle, the glass being made  
from sand, which may come from a desert i.e. “an  
arid place”.

Line 3 means that it is good practice to stay well  
hydrated during physical exercise. Bringing along a  
water bottle helps you do this.

## STORY TIME

Reb Avraham Lampel, a textile businessman in pre-war Poland, was honest to a fault. He diligently recorded every transaction and kept his distance from anything that might entangle him with the local tax authorities. For many years, his business operated without the tiniest hitch. Then temptation arose: a bargain that would allow him to save a great deal of money by evading some red tape. He hesitated, but the promise of easy money won him over. Reb Avraham quickly realized his decision was a regretful mistake, but Polish authorities swept through the offices and arrested everyone involved before he could extricate himself from the situation. Set in official ink, a date was soon scheduled for his court hearing. As the court date drew nearer, an unrelated business opportunity arose. For decisions like these, Reb Avraham usually traveled to his Rebbe, Rabbi Yissachar Dov of Belz, to request a blessing for success. Though he desperately wanted to unburden his troubled mind and request a blessing for his pending court appearance, he was too ashamed to bring up the sordid topic. Reluctantly, he buried the legal woes in his heart and hoped the Rebbe's blessing for the new business venture would cover his ongoing challenges as well. Reb Avraham received the Rebbe's blessing and made his way to the door, suppressing a sigh. Suddenly, the Rebbe called out, "If you are presented with an opportunity to help someone, even if it's an ordinary stranger from the bazaar, don't hesitate to do so." And with those cryptic words ringing in his ears, he was dismissed. Reb Avraham had never heard the Rebbe speak that way. Eyes roving vigilantly for any needy passerby, he tried to make sense of what the Rebbe meant, but no satisfying explanation came to mind. Waiting for the train home, Reb Avraham noticed a woman nervously pacing the length of the platform. She didn't appear Jewish, and she was clearly troubled by something. Reb Avraham approached her and offered to help. "No, thank you," said the woman politely. The Rebbe's words echoing in his head compelled Reb Avraham to ask one more time, a bit more empathically. The woman sighed and shook her head. "My purse is gone, along with my personal documents and money. Either I lost it or it was stolen, and I don't have a clue how or when it disappeared. But that doesn't matter. As of now, I have no way to return home." "How much do you need for the trip?" Reb Avraham asked. "Twenty-five zloty. At least." Without a moment's hesitation, Reb Avraham whipped out his wallet, counted out 25 zlotys, added a few more, and placed the money in her open palm. "Have a safe journey," he wished her with a smile. The woman's eyes welled up with tears. As soon as she was able to speak, she pressed Reb Avraham for details so she could repay him, but he simply smiled kindly and wished her well. Refusing to leave the good soul empty-handed, the woman handed him her calling card, thanked him again, and left. Reb Avraham studied the card and discovered that the woman served as a judge in Lviv, then known to Jews as Lemberg and to Poles as Lwów. The information didn't mean anything to him, so when he tucked the card into his wallet, he forgot about it completely. Reb Avraham was sweating in his suit, lips moving ceaselessly with chapters of Tehillim. It was the day of his trial, and he was standing in the courtroom awaiting the judges. The heavy, wooden doors opened and the three judges—two men and a woman—strode down the aisle, their robes billowing in their wake. Reb Avraham's jaw went slack: that was the woman he had helped at the train station! The judges took their seats and the trial commenced. As though perfectly rehearsed, the prosecutors proceeded to paint a convincing case against Reb Avraham, describing his crimes in painful detail, and, lastly, recommending that he be treated according to the full extent of Polish law. Reb Avraham felt numb when he noticed two judges bobbing their heads in agreement with prosecution's pronouncements. And when his own attorneys did nothing to mitigate his guilt, he could already taste the prison gruel he'd be eating for a long time. But a familiar voice interrupted the trial. "I unequivocally object," pronounced the third judge loudly. "Several months ago, when no one wanted to help me, an unknown stranger in a faraway train depot, this man here stepped up and did so. He did not know me. He asked nothing in return. I am not a member of his nation, yet he did not care. I, therefore, cannot believe this man was willingly involved in such a crime, and even if he was, I believe he deserves another chance, as it must have been an anomaly, a one-time moral failing, not at all representative of who he is." Swayed by her powerful retelling of the encounter at the train station, the other two judges reversed their verdict, and the case was dismissed.

## FOOD 4 THE SOUL

**Some people think there is no conflict between their work and their time for study, meditation and prayer. But, on the contrary, they complement one another: Start your day by connecting it to Torah—the day shines and all its parts work in synchronicity. Work honestly, carrying the morning's inspiration in your heart—and your work itself rolls out the deepest wisdom of Torah before your open eyes.**