

Parshas Vayeitze-Rachel Emainu Watching over Us in Galus

by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

“So says Hashem, A voice is heard in Ramah, on high, wailing, bitter weeping. She weeps for her children, refuses to be consoled for they are no more. So says Hashem, Hold back your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for there is reward for your efforts and you children will return from the land of their enemies.”

[Yirmiyahu 31:14-15]

The above quoted verses are read in the Haftarah of the second day of Rosh Hashanah. They remind us that Rachel Emainu is crying for her children in galus. While our galus has lasted for years and centuries we are not to despair. In merit of Rachel Emainu we will merit the end of our galus. As moving as these verses are, they present a fundamental question. Why is Rachel more than Leah crying and why is Hashem more receptive to Rachel's tears? The Midrash tells us that all of the patriarchs as well as Moshe Rabbeinu, among other personalities, were all begging Hashem for mercy at the time of the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash and the above verse is quoted to show that Hashem specially gives in because of Rachel's tears. Statistically, more of us are probably descended from Leah than Rachel. Yet, it is Rachel's tears that will merit our redemption.

Rashi, Radak and Metzudos David all take us back to Rachel's marriage to Yaakov as the source for her plea before Hashem which was crucial to Hashem for having compassion on Am Yisroel. Yaakov works seven years for Lavan to obtain Rachel's hand in marriage. Leah is given over to Yaakov instead. Rachel's extraordinary character was revealed at this time. The midrashim tells us that Yaakov and Rachel had suspicions that Lavan would try to pull a scheme such as the one he did. So they invented a system of secret passwords so that Yaakov would know if Leah was being led to the chuppah instead. Rachel realized how embarrassed Leah would be if right before the chuppah, Yaakov would test her with the passwords and probably call off the wedding right then and there. So Rachel revealed the secret passwords to Leah and the wedding proceeded as planned. Imagine, even for a moment, what Rachel gave up. She not only gave up her own wedding night but her chance to be one of the matriarchs for Am Yisroel! After all, it was not yet known that Yaakov would end up marrying both Rachel and Leah.

When Am Yisroel was being taken into exile, Rachel Emainu could not bear it. She said, “What have my children done that is so bad? Their avoda zara, idol worship? [This refers to Menasheh the king placing idols in the Bais Hamikdash.] I allowed another woman, my own sister, into my home. I did it all to protect Leah from the pains

of embarrassment and gave up everything for her. Whose compassion is greater, mine or yours? If I could have such compassion on my sister, you, Master of all worlds and master of compassion can find it in your heart to forgive my children! From this plea, Hashem told Rachel to hold back her tears and in her merit, her children will return from exile.

It was for this reason that Rachel was buried where she was on the road to Efrata, outside of Bais Lechem and not in the Mearas Hamachpelah, where the rest of the patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried. It could be argued that both Rachel and Leah could not be buried there because of the fact that they were both sisters which the Torah was later going to forbid, nevertheless, it could be argued that Rachel should have been buried in the Mearas Hamachpelah since she was the wife Yaakov originally wanted. Just before his demise, when Yaakov was reminding Yosef to make sure the burial takes place in the Mearas Hamachpelah, he mentions that he buried Rachel in this location as we read in Bersheith 48:7. Rashi tells us over there that Yaakov was telling Yosef that it was Hashem's command to bury Rachel in that place so that when the Babylonian armies would drag us to Bavel, they would pass Rachel Emeinu's burial place and arouse Rachel to pour out her heart for her children.

The Late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Zt"l, pointed out that we see Rachel Emeinu's selflessness both in her lifetime as well as afterwards. The Midrash quoted above shows her selflessness during her life. But the Rebbe pointed out that this same selflessness extended to afterwards as well. She was buried in a lonely place, relatively. In Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 362:5 we are told not to bury good and bad people together. Generally, we bury Tzaddikim near each other. Husbands and wives are usually buried together. In halacha 6 we are told that two people who disliked each other should not be buried together. While the full ramifications of these halachos are esoteric and beyond the scope of our discussion, there is a sense that the deceased are more aware of these issues than we think and we should not think that such things do not matter anymore. So we see Rachel Emeinu giving up her chance to rest next to tzaddikim such as the other patriarch and matriarchs just to be there for her children who needed her in the future. We should also remember that these were not exactly the children she would want to show off as her children. From even a superficial reading of Tanach we see how undeserving these children were. They worshipped idols and lived lives of immorality as well as oppressed the poor in all ways. These certainly were not the ways of the patriarchs and matriarchs. And yet, Rachel was there for them and remains there till Techiyas Hameisim in her selfless motherly devotion!

Till this day, Rachel's burial site Kever Rachel is a place where her children come to daven and cry their hearts out for Hashem's mercy. Many women who have trouble conceiving come there to pray because they relate so well to Rachel who was childless for many years and gave birth only due to divine intervention. It is understood that only

Rachel Emainu can really understand their suffering. However, many men go there as well. It is also understood that our mother will not let a child suffer no matter what the circumstances and 'Mama Rachel' will surely intervene.

There is a very beautiful story told of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz , Zt'l, of his prayers at Kever Rachel. He pleaded the following. "Mama Rachel, keep on crying and do not hold back any wails. Do not hold back any tears. We all know the verse in Yirmiyahu where Hashem tells you to hold back your crying. That is because the way of the world is that a father tells his daughter not to cry. But I am not your father. I'm your child telling you not to stop crying till every one of your dear, precious children is taken out of galus." In merit of Rachel Emainu, may all Klal Yisroel speedily taken out of galus and be brought to the final geulah. Amen.