

VAYISHLACH – 5770

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

Towards end of the parsha, Rachel Imeinu dies (35:19). Our Sages offer many different reasons for her premature death.

The Mishna LaMelech, in his drush seifer called Prashat Derachim has a very unique interpretation. He cites the Gemara Shabbat (32b) “BA’AVON NEDARIM MEITA ISHTO SHEL ADAM”, because of the sin of (violating) Nedarim (vows), the wife of a man can die. The rationale is that most likely he might have wanted to pay for his vow but she insisted on using the money for her own personal needs so that caused his negligence in failing to honor his neder (vow).

Yaakov Avinu made a neder to HaShem (28:20), “If HaShem will be with me, will guard me....and I will return in peace to my father’s house,...then this pillar I will build as a house of HaShem, and whatever You will give me, I will give ten percent to You.” It is now 22 years later, Yaakov returns home as a wealthy man and has not yet fulfilled his neder. Says the Mishna LaMelech, that’s why Rachel died.

A fascinating story (I once heard from Rabbi Moshe Weiss) relates beautifully to this interpretation. A small town in Europe needed a Mikva but did not have the funds to build one. Once the Klausenburger Rebbe who used to visit communities where many of his Chasidim reside, decided to spend a few weeks in this community. Upon discovering that they couldn’t afford to build a Mikva, he asked, “are there no Gevirim (rich people) living here?”. They replied that there was only one Gevir, but he adamantly refused to give any money towards the Mikva. The Rebbe decided to see what he could do.

Coming to the house of the Gevir he was warmly and respectfully welcomed, but as soon as he was seated the Gevir tells him “I know why you are here. The answer is positively, NO! I don’t want to waste your precious time.” The Rebbe anticipating such words, responds immediately, “No, I’m here only to visit you since you didn’t attend my reception. I want to show my love for you, since I love every Jew, and to ask if there is anything I could do for you.”

The Gevir hadn’t expected such an expression of love and is caught off guard. He then whispers to the Rebbe, “Well, since you asked, there is one thing you can do for me. I am stuck in marriage to an awful wife; she is always belligerent and argues with me, making my life miserable. My request to you is to pray that she should die. I would be greatly indebted to you”. Says the Rebbe, I do give Berachot but I don’t generally give Kellalot (curses). However, I can give you advice. The Gemara states, if a husband makes a vow and he doesn’t fulfill it, the wife will die. So why don’t you make a grand neder, and don’t pay it.”

The Gevir thought this was a brilliant idea, and best of all, it won't cost him anything. The following Shabbat he came to shul and at his Aliya, he pledged to foot the entire cost of the Mikva. The people were astonished at the great miracle the Rebbe had performed. On Motza'ei Shabbat, a committee went to the Gevir's house hoping to get a sizable down payment so that construction can begin. The Gevir responds abruptly, saying he is not giving a penny towards the Mikva; he has no intentions of redeeming his pledge.

The Gevir now carefully observes his wife's physical condition every day. After two weeks he notices no difference; she was still as belligerent and in the best of health. He comes to the Rebbes' house and complains that his advice is not working. "Impossible" says the Rebbe. "Tell me, when your wife talks disrespectfully to you, do you answer her back?". Certainly I do, I berate her and embarrass her to the fullest extent." "That's the answer" says the Rebbe, "when you embarrass her you are killing her", for Chazal say that embarrassing is like spilling blood of the person. What you should do is not to embarrass her but speak softly and kindly to her. "Alright, I'll try anything", said the Gevir.

After another two weeks pass, the Gevir frantically knocks on the Rebbe's door and cries "please Rebbe, help me. Since I began speaking nicely to her, she is a changed woman a pleasant wife and I even love her. I don't want her to die. What should I do?" The Rebbe smiled and said, "The one and only thing you can do to save her life is to fulfill your pledge and pay for the Mikva."