

**TORAH from
GOLD OF JERUSALEM**

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Rachel and Yaakov

The Torah relates a painful and perplexing dialogue between Rachel and Yaakov.

Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov, so Rachel became envious of her sister; she said to Yaakov: "Give me children — otherwise I am dead."

Yaakov's anger flared at Rachel and he said: "Am I instead of G-d, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (B'reishit 30:1, 2).

Rachel's remarks are obviously an outburst from a woman deeply troubled and extremely distressed. Her older sister has given birth to four children and yet she remains barren. Her pain compels her to make such an outrageous and irrational request of Yaakov. In fact it is not even a request, but an emotional eruption from the depths of her being. We can understand her, sympathize with her and even empathize with her plight.

On the other hand, Yaakov's sharp and biting reply defies comprehension. How does he permit his "anger to flare" at his beloved wife in her moment of anguish? How does he respond in such an unfeeling, nearly spiteful way?

In fact, the Midrash recorded by the

Ramban says that G-d rebuked Yaakov and said to him: "Is this how you answer those who are oppressed? Upon your life your sons will stand before her son." The day will come that the sons of Yaakov will stand in fear before Yoseph the son of Rachel.

This conversation and the Divine chastisement still leave us with unanswered questions. Should not G-d instruct Yaakov how one should respond to a woman in distress? Should there not be some good that emerges from this episode? Have we not been taught that "The deeds of the fathers are a guide for the children"? What meaning do these two passages hold for the Jewish people?

Let the scene shift over a thousand years later. The destruction of the first Beis HaMikdash is imminent. In heaven the unfolding tragedy brings together the patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, who plead on behalf of their children, Israel. Moshe Rabeinu and Yirmiyahu raise their voices in defense of their people, yet the L-rd is not moved.

The Midrash records in detail the defense presented by each of the great. Avraham says: "G-d, I brought mankind to know you." Yitzchak reminds G-d of his willingness to be a holy sacrifice before Him. Yaakov describes how he was prepared to fight for his children against Eisav. He says: "I raised them like chicks and suffered great pain for their sake. Will You not remember this and have mercy upon my children?" Moshe speaks of the journey through

the desert until he brings them to the Promised Land. Yet the Holy One Blessed Be He remains silent. Until as the Midrash describes: "At that moment Rachel jumped before the Holy One Blessed Be He" and presents her plea on behalf of Israel. She reminds G-d of the fact that she surrendered her greatest love so that her sister Leah not be embarrassed. To her G-d responds with promises of redemption.

I wish to propose that there may be yet another reason why Rachel's plea elicits such a poignant and moving reply from G-d.

Let's try to imagine the scene. Rachel approaches the Heavenly throne and cries on behalf of her children. Yirmiyahu paints the powerful portrait of the moment. "A voice is heard on high, wailing, bitter weeping. Rachel weeps for her children, she refuses to be consoled for her children for they are gone."

What is Rachel saying to G-d? "Give me my children and if not, I am dead." Isn't that what she had said to Yaakov? She refuses to be consoled.

Well, how will G-d respond? Yaakov is standing there waiting to hear G-d's next words. Will he tell Rachel that He is truly sorry but He can't help her because her children Israel have sinned and must be punished? They can no longer continue to transgress with impunity. Will G-d present her with a litany of Israel's crimes for which exile must be their fate? Can G-d respond as Yaakov did by saying: "Am I instead of G-d Who has withheld from you the

fruit of the womb?" But you are G-d and you are withholding Rachel's children from her. Would G-d have said that, Yaakov would have cried out: "G-d is that how You answer those who are oppressed?" Is that how You treat a woman in great pain and agony over the suffering of her children? Because G-d had reprimanded Yaakov all those years earlier He is now left with only one response. He can not exhibit anger. He can not deny a woman in distress. He must comfort her. He must console her. He must ease the pain. He must give succor and assuage. The great promise to Rachel that resounds across the centuries.

Thus said Hashem: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for there is reward for your accomplishment - the word of Hashem - and they will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future - the word of Hashem - and your children will return to their border (Yirmiyahu 31:14-16).

That millions of Jews have returned to Eretz Yisrael in our days is Hashem's fulfillment of the great promise made to Rachel. How a mother takes care of her children. This all means that from that painful exchange between Rachel and Yaakov, and Hashem's rebuke of Yaakov, ultimately comes the great promise of redemption and return. 🧡