

CURSED BE

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

And Rachel died... (Bereshith 35:19)

Rachel did not die from natural causes.¹ When Lavan accused Yaakov and his family of stealing his gods, Yaakov, totally unaware that Rachel had taken them, was infuriated. In asserting his innocence, he cursed anyone who actually stole Lavan's idols. This curse was realized in Rachel's death.

The dreadful consequence of his words taught Yaakov a lesson about the power of speech that he never forgot. Decades later, when Shimon was being held prisoner in Egypt until the brothers would return to prove their innocence, Yaakov was careful not to curse whoever had imprisoned Shimon. Since Yaakov did not know who was responsible for Shimon's imprisonment, he would not take any chances. In fact the captor was Yosef, and had Yaakov cursed him, Yosef would have met a fate similar to that of his mother Rachel.²

No matter how much someone aggravates you, you must never curse your fellow. The spoken word has sublime ramifications, and even if one is motivated by anger and has no harmful intentions, a simple remark can cause tremendous harm.

The Gemara tells the story of someone who had just come from a long journey and was feeling ill. His host, who was familiar with medical practices, gave him special foods in order to relieve him of his pain. His idea backfired, and actually caused the guest to suffer even more. Exasperated by all that had transpired, the guest said that one who causes pain to others should not have children. Although his words were merely an expression of his frustration, they were fulfilled, and his host did not have any more offspring.³

Footnotes:

¹ Rashi on Bereshith 31:32.

² Chofetz Chaim 42:36.

³ Shabbath 108a.

