

# WHY RACHEL WAS REMEMBERED

by Rabbi Leib Kelman

*"And G-d remembered Rochel, and G-d hearkened to her, and opened her womb." (Beraishis 30:22)*

Rashi offers two reasons as to why Rochel merited to be remembered and blessed with a child. "He remembered her, for she had handed her identifying signs from Yaakov to her sister, and because she was troubled lest she fall to the lot of Eisav, since Yaakov might divorce her, for she had no children."

As a rule, when Rashi offers two explanations, we may presume that the first one is not adequate and needs to be reinforced or supplemented by a second one. But in this instance, surely the first reason should more than suffice. What stronger justification is needed for her prayers to be answered! She had waited seven years and the joyous day finally arrives, when suddenly her father informs her that she is not to be the bride. It is Leah, her sister, who will be brought to Yaakov.

One can imagine Rochel's bitter disappointment and frustration; yet our Sages tell us that Rochel did not protest. Moreover, she gave her sister the secret password that she had arranged with Yaakov, precisely to prevent such a deception. It is difficult to visualize a more noble and selfless deed on the part of a would-be-bride.

Our Sages also considered Rochel's behavior an act of extraordinary "mesiras Nefesh" and self-effacement.

The Midrash (Eicha) describes how our ancestors from Avraham to Moshe sought to intercede at the time of the First Exile.

One by one they implored the Heavenly throne, pleading for the return of their children, but all were turned aside. It was only when Rochel appeared and cried out, "Ribono Shel Olam, I did not hesitate to accept another woman into my house. Can't you, too, forgive your children for the sin of idolatry?" It was her prayer and the remembrance of her deed that brought the promise: "Your children will return to their borders, V'shavu banim l'gvulam."

Yet Rashi chooses to provide an additional reason as to why Rochel was remembered. Why? Acts of 'Mesiras nefesh,' as inspiring and noble as they are, usually represent the surrender of something very precious - sometimes life itself. Mesiras nefesh is an inspirational act, a heroic gesture, but it

does not always secure the future. It often has to do with defiance against tyranny and a readiness to suffer and even die for the sake of a higher cause. In this instance, too, Rochel willingly gave up her bridegroom, with no assurance that she would ever marry him. It was a brave and magnanimous act on her part. It was a response to a crisis which faced her sister.

Rashi, however, teaches us that there was another aspect to Rochel's character and outlook that made her even more deserving of Heavenly attention. She spent years, anxious and worried, lest she end up as the wife of Eisav. The very thought of it pained and oppressed her (metzirah)) for her deepest longing was to have a share in the establishment of the House of Israel. To be denied that opportunity was to her as awful as death. This powerful craving to be among the "mothers of Israel" was equally a great manifestation of Rochel's righteousness for which a Heavenly response had to be forthcoming. Rochel's life thus encompassed the two necessary components of greatness: a readiness for 'mesiras nefesh," self-sacrifice when necessary, and an equally strong determination for building the future of The Jewish Nation...

Good Shabbos!

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