

RACHEL'S SACRIFICE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The interplay of destiny and individual initiative is a complex equation that underscores our mortal, time-bound limitations. When events are actually occurring it is impossible to predict how our decisions will impact the outcome of those events. Nevertheless, we must take the initiative to make decisions as best we can and involve ourselves in the outcome. We question, analyze, evaluate, rethink and then tentatively decide what to do, all the while hoping that we will successfully accomplish our goal or advance our cause. Yet, we know that as mere mortals we can not possibly take into account all the variables that could and most likely will, impact the final outcome.

G-d is the only one who knows the exact outcome of any given set of circumstances. This is why we refer to G-d as the Dayan Haemes - the Truthful Judge. Only G-d can know the exact impact His justice will have on an individual, his family, associates, society, and the world. Therefore, He takes them all into account before passing sentence. A human judge is limited by the here and now. He can not possibly know the far-reaching effect his judgment will cause. Yet, for the sake of society, we must pass mortal judgment over events and circumstances, disregard our limitations, and hope that we are making the right decision. This is why the Talmud says that G-d is present when justice is being administered. It is the fervent hope of every judge that his limited grasp of truth and consequences will suffice to render divine justice.

Rabbi Berel Wein Shlit'a once illustrated the unknown interplay of destiny and individual initiative by relating the Abarbanel's concerns for the amount of time he had spent in government service. The Abarbanel in the later part of the 15th century was the leader of Spanish Jewry as well as Minister of Finance to the court of Isabelle and Ferdinand. His monumental commentary on Tanach is prefaced by his regrets for having spent so much time in government service, rather than the study of Torah. One of the projects which the Abarbanel helped to finance was Columbus's journey to the new world. If the Abarbanel had known that his time in government would help set in motion the eventual evolution of the United States, which 500 years later would provide safe haven for the survivors of European Jewry and prove to be Israel's greatest and often only ally, would he have regretted the time spent? The fact remains that we can not know the consequences of our decisions. We must hope and pray that G-d will insure their positive outcome.

In this week's Parsha there is another excellent example of the interplay of destiny and individual initiative. From the moment that Yakov purchased the birth right from Eisav he assumed the dual role of Yakov and Eisav. As the Medresh relates, Yakov was supposed to marry Rachel and Eisav

was supposed to marry Leah. Each would have given birth to six of the tribes and Yakov and Eisav would have forged an unbeatable partnership. Eisav's strength in support of Yakov's spirituality would have guaranteed the primacy of the Jewish nation. Instead, Yakov rightfully took away Eisav's initiative to be one of the Avos - Fathers and therefore had to marry both Rachel and Leah.

Rashi on verse 29:25 references the Talmud in Megilah 13b that explains how Lavan managed to dupe Yakov into marrying Leah. Yakov suspected his uncle of deception and had given Rachel a set of passwords to insure that he was indeed marrying Rachel. When Rachel saw that Lavan was going to marry off Leah to Yakov, she took the initiative and revealed to Leah the secret passwords so that she would not be publicly humiliated when Yakov discovered the deception.

The mission of the Jewish nation is to continue the teachings of Avraham and reveal G-d's presence to the entire world. In order to do so, each of the 12 tribes contributed the necessary talents and qualities to accomplish this mission. The Jewish nation has two persona, the personality of Yakov and the personality of Eisav. Yakov's personality, the "single minded man living in tents," is our inner spirituality and strength. Eisav's personality, "a man who understood hunting, a man of the field," is our external physical strength and ability to survive and influence the other nations. Both components of our national persona are essential in accomplishing our mission.

It makes sense that we must first develop and strengthen our spirituality, the personal of Yakov, before we develop our physicality, the personal of Eisav. Our Eisav side must do battle with the pressures of society and assimilation while protecting our Yakov side behind the walls of our homes, Shuls, and Yeshivos. However, in order for our Eisav side to be victorious, our Yakov side must be strong and enduring. If we attempt to engage the other nations in theological battle before we are internally secure in our own relationship with G-d, we will not be able to withstand the temptations of the non-Torah world.

Our internal spirituality and strength, the persona of Yakov, is represented by Levi and Yehudah, the children of Leah. Levi represents the Kohanim and Leviyim who were charged with teaching Torah and maintaining the Bais Hamikdash. Yehudah represents the kings of Israel who were charged with protecting our spirituality and our adherence to the Mitzvos.

Our external physicality, the persona of Eisav, is represented by Yoseph, the child of Rachel. Yoseph represents our ability to, survive exile, interface with the other nations, and rise to the position of international leadership without compromising an iota of our spiritual stature.

As related in the Parsha, Levi and Yehudah were among the first children to be born, whereas Yoseph was next to last. This is consistent with the understanding of first developing our internal spirituality and strength and then focusing on our external persona and physicality. However, there is clearly a problem in the spiritual genetics of this order. As the Medresh states, Rachel was supposed to marry Yakov and Leah was supposed to marry Eisav. Yakov represented our internal persona and Eisav represented our external persona. Therefore, the intended union of Rachel with Yakov should

have given birth to our internal persona and the union of Leah and Eisav (the other side of Yakov once he had purchased the birth-right) should have given birth to our external persona. However, being that Rachel gave the secret passwords to Leah so that she would not be humiliated, Leah ended up marrying Yakov before Rachel. Being that the internal persona must be developed before the external persona, the children that represent our internal spirituality and strength, Levi and Yehudah, had to be born first to Leah when they should have been born to Rachel! Yoseph, who represents the personal of Eisav, the external physicality of the Jewish nation, was born later to Rachel when he should have been born to Leah!

The interplay of destiny with individual initiative is truly a complex equation. As limited mortals we have no other choice but to deal with circumstances as they appear to us and as we understand them. Rachel acted with love and compassion for Leah in protecting her from public humiliation. However, she could not have known the price she would have to pay for her kindness.

It is interesting to note that Rachel is the Em - Mother who is most directly linked with sacrifice and compassion. She is the one who stole the "Tirafim - idols" from Lavan in order to protect the family and in the process sacrificed her life. She is the one who was not buried in the Cave of Machpelah so that she would be there when the Jews were taken into exile after the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash. The Talmud tells us that it was her tears and prayers at the time that the Jews filed past her grave that guaranteed G-d's protection over the nation and their swift return to Israel.

The bottom line is that we have to live within the confines of our own limitations. We have to attempt to do what is right, as per our understanding of G-d's expectations, and trust that He will continue to insure our survival and destiny. Like Rachel, we must not be afraid of the sacrifice. We must live our lives with compassion, and trust G-d to do the rest. A Jew must do what a Jew must do.

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