

תורת אביגדור

הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

SEFER BREISHIS - THE CHOPP HOLDINGS EDITION

לע"נ ר' מנחם מענדל בן נחמן ע"ה ור' שלום בן שלמה הלוי ע"ה

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פרשת ויצא

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

The Afflicted Righteous

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Part I. Leah's Affliction

Builders Of Our Nation

In Mesichta Bava Basra (123a) the *gemara* quotes a statement from Rabbi Yonason as follows: **רְאוּיָהּ הַיְתֵהּ בְּכוֹרָה לְצֵאת מִרְחֵל** – *The birthright of the Am Yisroel should really have come from Rochel* – that means that the firstborn son of Yaakov Avinu should have been born to Rochel instead of Leah. *And how do we know that?* asks the *gemara*. **וְכַתִּיב** – A *possuk* is quoted: **אֵלֶּה תִּלְדוּת יַעֲקֹב יוֹסֵף** – *These are the generations of Yaakov, Yosef*. Yosef, the son of Rochel, is considered the first one, the most important one, and that's because Hakodosh Boruch Hu had planned from the beginning that Rochel would be the primary mother of the Am Yisroel and that her son Yosef should be the *bechor*.

And throughout our history, that's how people understood it; everyone knew that Rochel was the first choice. You remember when

Rus gave birth to a son and the women of Beis Lechem Yehuda gave her a *bracha* – what did they say? “You should be **כְּרוּחַל וּכְלֵאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ אֶת בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל** – Like Rochel and Leah who built the house of Yisroel” (Rus 4:11). It’s Rochel whom they mentioned first. And that’s because even many years later, in the days of Rus, it was understood that it was Rochel who was the one chosen to be the builder of the Am Yisroel.

The Yehudim Are From Leah

But now we come to a queer puzzle. Because actually it *wasn’t* so – Rochel *didn’t* build the Beis Yisroel; instead it was Leah who became the mother of the Am Yisroel. Who are the Jewish people today? We’re called *Yehudim*. The name carried by the Jewish people today came from Leah’s lips – *Jew, juif, jude, yid, yehudi*, all these names come from the name Leah gave to her child, Yehuda, because to a great extent the Am Yisroel is made up of Leah’s children.

Of course, we give Rochel credit as well; she also contributed to our people. We still have among us from Rochel’s children. None of the *shevatim* went lost entirely because Yirmiyahu Hanavi brought back from every *shevet* a little bit. But it’s a minority – other than a few exceptions, the great masses of the Am Yisroel are from Leah.

רְאוּיָהּ הָיְתָה בְּכוֹרָה לְצֵאת מִצְרָיִם, say *chazal*; Rochel was supposed to be our primary mother. But it didn’t turn out that way. The *psak* of history, that means the *psak* of Hashem, is that it’s Leah, not Rochel, who is the mother of the Jewish people.

It’s remarkable that when we look around at the Am Yisroel, now and throughout most of our nation’s history, what we see is the offspring of Leah. Forever and ever until *moshiach* comes and reunites all the *shevatim* in Eretz Yisroel we will be called after Leah’s son Yehuda. Is anybody here called a *Reuveini* or a *Shimoni*? No; we’re all called *Yehudim* because for the most part we are not the children of Rochel. And even though we look back to Rochel with the greatest respect, but to this day and until the time of *moshiach* Leah is the mother of Beis Yisroel.

Rochel Was Chosen

And so we are faced with a big puzzle. Because we know that Yaakov Avinu certainly made no error; when he chose Rochel at the

well, it was done with the instincts of a *navi*; it was a *nevuah*, Rochel was meant to be first – and she *deserved* to be first. And yet, it was Leah, the wife whom Yaakov had no intention of marrying, the one palmed off on him by his father-in-law, she's the one who actually became the mother of the *Am Yisroel*, while Rochel who was supposed to be the first, ended up lagging far behind Leah in building our nation.

Of course we understand that it wasn't just some mishap, a fluke of history. Everything Hakodosh Boruch Hu plans is conditional; all of His decrees are made in accordance with what human beings will subsequently do, and therefore a person with his or her merit could change the course of history. And so we understand that something happened to alter the plan of history.

What Did Leah Do to Win Out?

Now, when we look in the Torah, we find the answer: **וַיֵּרָא ה'שָׁם כִּי וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ** – *When Hashem saw that Leah was hated, so He opened up her womb and gave her children* (Vayeitzei 29:31). This is the explanation that Hakodosh Boruch Hu dictated to Moshe Rabeinu: Why did Leah become the mother of the *Am Hashem*? Because she was the less favored wife.

Now anything written in the Torah is complicated and therefore we don't expect to be *yotzei* just with this brief explanation – right away we understand that there must be much more to it. Could it be that just because Leah felt snubbed, because she was suffering the status of the inferior wife, that she deserved such a great compensation that the course of history should change on her behalf? Such a compensation seems to us exaggerated!

Leah Was Not Hated

Now, the first thing is that we should clear the decks and point out that Leah wasn't actually *hated*; that we know because it says right there on the same page that **וַיֵּאָהֵב גַּם אֶת רְחֵל מִלֵּאָה** – *Yaakov loved also Rochel more than Leah* (ibid. 30). “Also”, “More than Leah,” means more, but it means that Leah was beloved by Yaakov as well.

S'nuah means she was hated?! *Chas v'shalom*; it was only that relative to Rochel, compared to the affection that Leah knew Yaakov had for Rochel, she felt *s'nuah*. But there's no question that Yaakov

fulfilled the words of our sages, אֹהֶב אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ כְּגִּבּוֹ, that a husband must love his wife as much as he loves himself – that means a lot! A man has to be very much in love with his wife to love her like himself!

And yet, as much as Yaakov was careful with the feelings of Leah, as much as he treated her with honor and affection, the truth is that it was understood by everyone that Leah was an intruder – *mamish* she was butting in where it was none of her business.

Everyone knows the story from the *chumash*, when Yaakov Avinu set forth from his home towards Padan Aram to look for a wife – it was a momentous day in our history. All the *Avos* were intent on raising up families that would be servants of Hakodosh Boruch Hu – they wanted their families to increase, that there should be a lot of children and grandchildren – but it was Yaakov who was tasked with raising the *shevatim* who would become the *Bnei Yisroel*.

And so Yaakov our father was going to fulfill now his great ambition to marry and begin raising up a holy nation; he meant business! That should be the ambition of everyone by the way; everybody should get busy with that – don't keep postponing. The sooner the better and the more the better. You'll become important that way; by the time you hit seventy you have a whole tribe already! That's what you're supposed to be – a tribe. You have children and grandchildren and maybe great grandchildren, and you establish a foothold in the holy nation forever.

Yaakov: A Man Of Perfect Character

And that's what Yaakov had in mind when he arrived at the well in Padan Aram – he wanted to get busy building a nation of *ovdei Hashem*. And when he met Rochel at the well, immediately he knew that she was the one. Yaakov was a *navi* and he understood right away that this girl was going to be his wife. It was *min hashomayim*; he knew that something would come out of this *shidduch* that would be very very important.

As far as Yaakov was concerned Rochel was the one and she would become the mother of the *Am Yisroel*; and so he made an agreement with Lavan that he would work for seven years and then he would be given Rochel to marry. And he faithfully worked those seven years looking forward to the great day when he would be able

to take Rochel, the one chosen by *nevuah*, to the *chupah* and begin building the *Am Yisroel*.

And then what happened when that day finally came? There was a wedding, a big *simcha*, and suddenly in the morning Yaakov discovers that he was married to Leah! It wasn't the one he asked for; the sister he didn't choose was smuggled into his life. Now, it wasn't the fault of that poor girl – her father pushed her in. But still she was a trespasser. “What's she doing here?!” That's what Yaakov was thinking.

Of course, he didn't insult her; he couldn't say, “Go away.” I'm sure that Yaakov didn't show any disrespect to Leah. Although Leah was palmed off on him, this man of impeccable character – **יְעֻקֵב אִישׁ תָּם** means that Yaakov was a man of perfect character traits – treated her very well. Now that Leah was his wife, so he loved Leah too.

Leah: The Second Wife

And yet, there was always that skeleton in the closet, the knowledge that Leah wasn't the one. Everyone knew that she was only an afterthought and she therefore felt very uncomfortable in the house. She saw that she was second choice and it pained her to no end. When it says *ki s'nuah Leah*, it means what Leah *felt* – she felt *s'nuah*; she felt despised and neglected because after all she wasn't asked for. And all her life she felt that stigma. There's no question in my mind that Yaakov tried his best to cover up her discomfiture but Leah knew the truth, that she was supercargo, an extra passenger along for the ride. As much as Yaakov treated her well, Leah still saw that she wasn't asked for and that's something that a wife can never forget.

Of course, she had a great deal of *tza'ar*, a great deal of distress, because of that. All her life, Leah recognized her place in the home of Yaakov. If you read the *chumash* you'll see that constantly she is talking to Hashem and weeping. Again and again.

There were times when she was even publicly snubbed. I'll give you an example. You remember when they had to meet Eisav, so Yaakov put Leah and her children in front, where it was more dangerous, while he put Rochel and her son Yosef, behind them, closer to Yaakov. It was a very big snub. Now we don't blame Yaakov for that. It couldn't be helped. Yaakov understood that he came to

Padan Aram for Rochel, and Rochel's son, Yosef, was to him everything. And Leah had no complaints against Yaakov or Rochel. She was a *tzadeikes* and she understood that this is how it had to be. But it hurt her no end; she was in *tza'ar* all her days.

Leah's Deep Desire

Now, Leah wasn't a nobody – she was a very smart young woman. I won't tell you my proofs for that, but from the *gemara* we see that she was a very wise young woman. And she understood that Yaakov wasn't just somebody from their family in *Cana'an*. She understood he was a *big* somebody. The family of Leah and Rochel had studied the family of Avraham and they all recognized the greatness of that family. Even Lavan said, "I have discovered that Hashem is giving me success just because of you." If the wicked Lavan admitted such a thing so you understand that it was something everyone was aware of.

And so Leah wanted with all her heart that Yaakov should accept her. Leah understood the greatness of Yaakov Avinu and she aspired to be a mother of *Beis Yisroel*. She was the second wife? So what?! Once she was married she knew that it was her opportunity, her destiny, to build the chosen nation. It was in her bones – she lived only for that purpose. She knew that there would be greatness in her posterity and she wanted to live up to that destiny as much as she possibly could.

And Leah, knowing always that she was in second place, desired even more to become a mother. We see in all her prayers – "*Maybe this time my husband will join me*" (29:34). She wanted to join the great *talmid chochom*. It's a great pity to hear those words of Leah. "Hashem has seen my humiliation; maybe now my husband will love me" (ibid. 32). "Hashem has heard that I am unloved" (ibid. 33). My heart aches when I read Leah's words. Again and again this great woman expressed her heartache to Hashem. She poured out her heart in *tefillah*.

Now, it doesn't mean that Rochel didn't, but Leah davened even more. And the reason for that is because she suffered more. Because of that she wept and prayed and strived to be better; she was always thinking, "My husband is a *navi* and I want to build the *Am Yisroel* with him."

The Wise Approach To Encumbrance

And that's the important principle you're hearing now. When a person is under a certain encumbrance, so if he or she is wise, that person will try to compensate. And that's exactly what Leah did. She didn't sulk and complain about her status in the house – instead she made use of it to grow even greater. It's not merely the fact that Leah suffered so much that caused her to become the mother of the Am Yisroel. *It was how she reacted to her suffering!*

Because of her status as the less favored wife, she compensated in other ways. I couldn't tell you all the details of how she did that but there's no question that Leah, as a result of her handicap in that house, strove more than Rochel to be an ideal wife and an ideal mother. Of course she *davened* very much to find favor in Yaakov's eyes and for children too, but she also exerted herself in her behavior, in how she spoke to Yaakov, even in how she cooked and fulfilled all of her household duties.

To make up for her lack of status in the household, Leah exerted herself to a much greater extent than Rochel did. I'm sure that both of these great women strove to attain perfection in character. That's what all the *Avos* and all the *Imahos* did constantly. Like the Rambam says, they felt that they were standing before Hakadosh Baruch Hu twenty four hours a day. But Leah was standing before Hakadosh Baruch Hu *more* than twenty four hours a day – she went beyond her limits and tried to make up for her encumbrance and to excel. She strove with all her might to be the very best person that she could be.

And that's why Hakadosh Baruch Hu rewarded her, because actually *she attained a bigger perfection than Rochel*. Now this doesn't mean that Rochel wasn't better; Rochel started out being better and in a certain sense she was always better – that's why she was chosen. But because Leah *wasn't* chosen, she therefore struggled mightily to become better and better and Hakadosh Boruch Hu helped her in her effort to achieve and she became more and more perfect.

Part II. Our Affliction

Dovid and Shaul

Now, we find a parallel in our history that is suited to this subject. We know that Shaul, the first Jewish king, was a perfect man. The *gemara* says he was *m'shunah b'maasav* (Moed Katan 16b); it means he was better than all those around him, a *tzadik gomur* (Rashi *ibid.*). In fact, he was so perfect that he outdid Dovid in quality of character. The *gemara* there says that Shaul Hamelech was greater than Dovid Hamelech.

And yet, what happened at the end? Shaul was eventually rejected by Hashem and Dovid took his place as the leader of the Am Yisroel and the father of the royal line forever. Dovid became the true servant of Hashem, more than the *tzadik* Shaul.

Who was it that gave us the great gift, the *sefer Tehillim*? Dovid was the one who contributed the *Tehillim* to the Am Yisroel – most of our *tefillos* come from Dovid Hamelech. Who built the *Beis Hamikdash*? It was *malchus beis Dovid*. It was Dovid, not Shaul, who prepared all the material for building the *Beis Hamikdash*. And he was the one who conquered all of Eretz Yisroel and built up Yerushalayim – Dovid Hamelech did everything!

Dovid Wins Out

Dovid's name became the greatest name in *tanach*. Hakodosh Boruch Hu said to Dovid, וְנָתַתִּי לְךָ שֵׁם כְּשֵׁם הַגָּדוֹלִים – *I will give you a name like the name of the greatest*, (Divrei Hayomim I, 17:8). And we know that the prophecy was fulfilled. Dovid's name is found in *tanach* more than any other name – more than a thousand times that name occurs. And the name of Dovid is on the lips of the *Am Yisroel* much more than the name of the first choice, Shaul Hamelech.

And so we see this queer phenomenon again. Because Shaul was the more perfect one and he was therefore the chosen one: וְשָׂאוֹל בְּחִיר הַשָּׁמַיִם – *Shaul was chosen by Hashem* (Shmuel II, 21:6). He was a man of almost blameless character. Besides for being a tall and beautiful man, he was humble. He was kindly and unselfish too. We know all these things from the stories that took place in the *Tanach*

and also the descriptions added by our sages. Shaul was a man of perfect character, a *tzadik gomur*.

And yet what happened at the end? Dovid won out! It's that same puzzle again. And the answer is the same. It's true; Dovid *wasn't* born as perfect as Shaul; but despite that – actually *just because of that* – Dovid strove with might and main to excel in service of Hashem and in perfection of character and he became great.

If Dovid had been the oldest son of Yishai, if he had been the *bechor*, the one destined for greatness, then he wouldn't have become Dovid. I'm sure he would have been a upstanding Jew; he would have had fine character and been a good and loyal Jew. But he wouldn't have become Dovid Hamelech. It's because he was the littlest of the brothers, because he had to climb the ladder to greatness, that's why in the end Dovid became much greater. You know, now, *post facto*, it happened already so we look back and we say "Certainly, certainly; it's *poshut*, it's simple." No it's not *poshut* at all. At that time it was such a big surprise that Shaul couldn't get over it. It was a big shock to everyone.

Now, remember, Shaul came from Rochel, the perfect one, and Dovid came from Leah, the second choice. And so, in the posterity of these two sisters, a repetition of the first instance took place. And it's not an accident; the truth is that this is the plan of Hashem throughout our history because Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to learn that lesson.

Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabeinu

Even the first Jew, Avraham Avinu, was catalyzed because he was in a house where idolatry was a business. Every day he saw his father cleaning off the idols that were for sale with a feather duster; it was the worst of environments! And yet, it was only because he grew up in such a house that Avraham began to think about the truths of this world and he was catapulted into greatness. Not he was catapulted – *he catapulted himself* into greatness. You have to know that Avraham needed his childhood experiences to catalyze his mind into action. He was *s'nuah* in Ur Kasdim, and because he struggled mightily to overcome, that's how he became Avraham Avinu.

And how did Moshe become so great? Our great Moshe Rabeinu, the *ish ha'Elokim*, the one whom Hashem spoke to *peh el peh*! A man

like that should have grown up in the house of his father, Amram. Amram means “the nation of the exalted one.” What a name! And Yocheved – “Hashem is my glory.” What a beautiful name! What a beautiful house that must have been!

But where did Moshe grow up? He was in the house of Pharaoh, the oppressor of the Jews. And Moshe was thinking, “What’s this? Why oppress them? Why are they downtrodden for nothing?” And he began to compare the Jews to the gentiles and he came to the realization that a great travesty of history is taking place – that the wicked are oppressing the righteous and he began to understand. And that made him great.

Now it doesn’t mean we have to look for adverse circumstances, but there’s no question that these great souls, Avaham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid Hamelech, were put into an adverse environment at the beginning of their careers and that’s what sparked their careers of greatness. That’s what made them great. Avraham, Moshe and Dovid wouldn’t have been as great if he didn’t have the early childhood encumbrances that they did.

The Benefits of Exile

And we understand now that it is this same misfortune that is the good fortune of our people. It’s because we are always the nation that is *s’nuah* - because we are exiled, and because we wander among the nations, and because we are hated and persecuted, *that’s* the reason that we persist in being the very best – by far – of all the people in the world.

That’s why some of our best works were written in exile. When we were in Yerushalayim or even in Bavel, we didn’t have to contend with gentiles. We lived among Jews and there was no question of explaining principles of Judaism. But after we began to mingle with the Arabs and with the Christians, and we had to contend with them, then great books on these subjects came into existence. The *Emunas v’Deos*, the *Kuzari*, the Rambam’s *seforim*, and many many more - all these *seforim* were born out of the needs of the time, out of battle. It’s only the necessities of battle against the difficult environment that created these great men and great works.

Greatness Of Our People

If we had always been a favored nation, if we had always had our own land, if we always would have been respected as one of the peoples of the world, we wouldn't be where we are today. It's **וַיְרֵא** **הַשֵּׁם** **כִּי שָׁנוּאָה לְאַה** – it's only because of our persecutions that we are the best in the world! You have to study that. We look back and we have the idea that persecution is the sign of our wickedness; that we are being punished but it's not that simple at all.

Hakodosh Boruch Hu says openly, “I loved you of all the nations, that's why I visit upon you all of your sins” (Amos 3:2). It means, “That's why I'm giving you this treatment of being *s'nuah* in this world. It's because I love you more than all the nations and I want you to struggle to achieve perfection.” And this is the reason why the Jewish nation is the highest in morality of all the people. I'm not talking about the Jews who are so in name only. We're talking about true Jews. There is nobody in the world and there never was who could even remotely compete with us in morality.

Don't think the ancient Pilgrims were moral. Don't think that the Baptists or the nuns or the monks were moral. Don't think that the Lamas, priests in the Buddhist monasteries were moral. None of them, none of them! As soon as you get close to them you'll discover that it's a different story. None of them can remotely compare even to the plain Jew of the original genuine Jewish communities. When Jews were Jews – and in places where they still are – we are supreme in everything. And it's due to the fact that **וַיְרֵא** **הַשֵּׁם** **כִּי שָׁנוּאָה לְאַה**.

A Tremendous Opportunity

Now, when Hashem taught our nation this lesson over and over again in our history, it wasn't intended only on a national level. What Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants us to know is that every individual must learn to make use of the encumbrances in his or her private life as a spur towards success. Any situation of *s'nuah* that one faces, when utilized properly, is a tremendous opportunity for becoming greater than those who have it easier.

We know it very well – we see it every day in the *yeshivos* – some of our best boys became great because they were not given the best circumstances and they therefore had to struggle mightily! *And they came out on top!* Sometimes these people have become the

biggest assets to us. It's the difficult circumstances of life, the tight spots when a person is pushed to the back, those are the episodes in life that bring out the great qualities in a person and make him a success.

A Tale of Two Boys

Here's a young man – a true story. I knew him as a boy. He was twelve years old and he came into my room in the *yeshiva* and I tutored him. This boy came from a family where they talked in Rambam all the time – at the table they were speaking out the *kasha* of the Raavad on the Rambam. Not only at the Shabbos *seudah*. At breakfast, on a weekday, the Rambam was their table talk. He grew up in a house that was *kulo Rambam*. I remember how this boy walked into the room with a Rambam under his arm. He came in and sat down and I was tutoring him but he wasn't even listening to me; he was thinking of the *kasha* on the Rambam he heard in his father's house just before because the conversation in that home was *kulo pilpul* on the Rambam.

Now, maybe this boy become great in Torah, and greatness in Torah is an intrinsic perfection that is prized by Hashem. He's a very holy man because he was planted in a holy home. But it's like a *sefer Torah* – it doesn't choose to be a *sefer Torah*; they take a piece of skin off the back of a goat, and they inscribe words on it and now it's a holy object; it's *kadosh*. You can't argue with that – it's a *sefer Torah* now. So this man is like the skin of a goat – they inscribed onto his mind the Torah. His parents and *rebbeim* inscribed on him the Rambam and the Raavad, so he's *kadosh*.

There's another boy who didn't grow up in a house like that. He comes from Oshkosh and there's nothing there except ignorami and assimilated Jews. The table talk in his house was only worthless things; they never mentioned the Rambam in that home – they didn't know who the Rambam was. But he decided that he wants to make something from himself and so on his own he decided to break away from his family in order to serve Hashem. Nobody is helping him; on the contrary, his family is fighting him every step of the way.

But he comes to New York, and he goes to *Hadar Hatorah* or to *Shor Yashuv* and he becomes a *ba'al teshuva*. He's without a family;

he's on his own and he's forsaken. He doesn't have money, and he has no supporters.

Now, this boy is very hampered by his circumstances; he knows that he's encumbered by his home and by his background, and that he is therefore in second place when matched up to the first boy. He has many foolish things inscribed on his mind and so when he finally makes his way to the *yeshiva* he is saddled by many things and therefore he's only second best; what could he do already?!

But just because of that he fought his way up; he worked very hard to achieve, and by his own efforts he became a *ben Torah*, a *lamdan*. He worked much harder and he became great. He was pushed by his circumstances to persevere much more than that other boy, the *sefer Torah*, who was brought up in Williamsburg. And now he's traveling with idealism, with a fire of trying to always move forward because that was his only way to accomplishing anything in this world. He was on the bottom of the pile, he was the *s'nuah*, and that's why he came out on top.

Sometimes these people have become the biggest assets to us. We know it very well – we see it every day in the *yeshivos* that some of our best boys became great because they were not given the best circumstances and they therefore had to struggle mightily! And they came out on top! It's the difficult circumstances of life, the tight spots when a person is pushed to the back, those are the episodes in life that bring out the great qualities in a person, and make him a success.

The Rabbi's Installation Ceremony

I was once invited to the installation of a rabbi. This rabbi is one of the best; I won't say his name but I can tell you that he's a gem. He was an American boy, but when I went to see him he had a beard down to here, he had *payos*; a very *frum* rabbi – a big idealist. And now he was being appointed Rav in an exceptionally good congregation. The women were all sitting at this side, the men at that side. Every woman had a *sheitel*. That was a long time ago – now it's a style to wear *sheitels*, but in those days it was uncommon. And still, in this place they all wore *sheitlach*. All the women were decently dressed. Except for one who had sleeves up to here and her hair uncovered, her dress was cut down. She was the rabbi's mother.

And I said to myself, “That’s why we have such a good rabbi here. He had to battle his way in from the outside and because of that he’s an idealist. There’s a fire in him that you won’t find in any rabbis of the same age and same status in life.”

Growing Up in Shul

By the way, I want to tell you something very important. Some people regret that they were not brought up in a Torah atmosphere and rightfully so. However, in very many cases, it’s a stroke of good fortune that they weren’t. Had they been brought up in an Orthodox atmosphere, they would have gone all their lives, as many do, living by rote. They would live by habit, never appreciating anything above the common routine to which they became accustomed to in their home.

Here’s a fellow brought up all his life in a shul. He was a little child who ran around; he misbehaved in the shul. As a boy, he was talking all the time; he had no respect for the shul. When the rabbi was speaking, he ran outside and played. Then he grew up and was married in the shul. This shul or that shul – it makes no difference – he has no respect, he sees no glamor in the shul. He doesn’t see anything heroic in it. As a young man, he couldn’t run around outside so he sat and daydreamed, not listening; he never had any interest. And now he’s an old man, an old lump of meat sitting in the synagogue. The rabbi is still talking to him and he’s still not listening.

But those who had to make something out of themselves – they didn’t grow up in shul and they had to work hard because they didn’t find themselves in the best of circumstances – they became great. I want you to know that because it’s very important. I know it from experience over and over again. Some of our very best people are those who battled their way back.

Everyone Has Opportunities

Now, I couldn’t spell out for you all the ways that this applies to the lives of different people but there’s no question that everyone has circumstances that are opportunities. Here’s a woman with a rough husband. He has a big mouth and he says things he shouldn’t say, and she suffers from his tongue. That woman has opportunities for greatness that another woman will never have! Every time she

bites her tongue she's become greater and greater. She's willing to swallow everything and she does everything in the house, with a smile, with kindness – that's a great perfection of character; she's accomplishing more than all the fortunate women in the world who don't have that encumbrance.

Here's a boy who told me that his *rebbe* doesn't give a good *shiur* and doesn't answer his questions. Now, I don't know if it's not a good *shiur*. It could be it's a very good *shiur* – that I can't tell you. But even if it's true – the *shiur* is no good and your *rebbe* doesn't answer your questions. It's an opportunity – there are plenty of other people to answer your questions. You can mark off your questions in the *gemara* when you get stuck and then take your *gemara* down to the *beis medrash* and you'll find someone to tell you the answers. Ask an older *bochur*; he'll tell you the answers. You'll become a *beis medrash bochur*; you'll hobnob with the older *bochurim* who are serious and you'll learn and you'll grow. You could become even greater than had you had the best *rebbe* in the *mesivta*.

There's no end to these opportunities. Another boy wants to be in a better *mesivta*. A girl wishes she had the better circumstances of her friend next door. Nothing doing! All of these encumbrances are the opportunities for the greatest achievements in this world because although people who achieve success when things are easy will be rewarded for their piety – no question about that; but when people are placed in a position where it's not so easy, when they have to struggle to be better, those are the ones who become truly successful.

The Secret of Kever Rochel

And that means that the story of Rochel and Leah was a portent for all of history; for our own lives too. Had Leah been favored as much as Rochel it never would have happened. Of course if Rochel had been placed in the same circumstances as Leah, I'm sure she would have also made use of her disadvantages to become great. But she didn't have that distress that Leah did and therefore Leah was the one who actually accomplished. The fact that Leah made use of her disadvantages, that was her success. She became so much greater in her character and everything else – she became the mother of the *Am Yisroel*.

And what was the end? The end was that Rochel passed away early and Leah was the one who was finally buried together with Yaakov Avinu in *Me'aras Hamachpeilah*. It's a remarkable end to the story. Leah was the one who lived long enough to be buried together with her husband in *Me'aras Hamachpeilah*. I want to tell you a little secret; it's what I think. I think that one of the reasons why Rochel passed away early was to give Leah her *bakasha*, to give her what she desired so much and worked so hard for – to remain with her husband; to be the first wife. It's not the *only* reason but I think it's one of the reasons. I suspect that. When you visit *Me'aras Hamachpeilah* where the *Avos* are buried, it's Leah who is buried with Yaakov; Rochel is not there. Of course, she's together with him forever and ever in the next world, but the bodies of Yaakov and Leah are buried together in this world and that's also very important – it means something too.

It's a permanent monument to that great lesson that Hakodosh Boruch Hu wants you to learn – that even though you thought that Rochel was the chosen one; and actually she was – but Hashem said, “No. That's why I brought Leah in by trickery, so that *she* should have the opportunity to become the chosen one!”

And as a result of what Leah accomplished she was rewarded that her sons forever and ever would be the main body of the *Am Yisroel*. It's because of Leah that we're going to endure until *moshiach's* time, and we will continue to achieve greatness just because of the hardships we face – as a nation and as individuals – just as Leah did in her time when she rose to the challenge and won out forever.

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A VORT ON THE PARSHA

Vayeitzei

וַיֵּעַקֵב הַלֵּךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ וַיִּפְגְּעוּ בּוֹ מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹקִים:
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כְּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹקִים זֶה:

***And Yaakov went on his way, and angels of G-d met him.
And Yaakov said when he saw them: This is the camp of Elokim.***

Everybody knows that Yaakov Avinu on his way to Padan Aram had a dream. He dreamed of *malachei Elokim* ascending a ladder, **וַיַּעֲלֶה עָלָיו וַיֵּרֵד בּוֹ**, going up on a ladder and coming down. A wonderful dream. That dream had many lessons for him. It had a tremendous influence on him.

Many years later when he was leaving the house of Lavan with his family, he encountered a *machaneh Elokim*, a company of *malachim*. A remarkable thing. In the dream that he had before he came to Lavan, he only dreamed about seeing *malachei Elokim*. He didn't see any *malachim*, it was only a dream. On the way going away from Lavan he encountered *malachim*, he saw them. **וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב כְּאֲשֶׁר רָאָם מַחֲנֵה אֱלֹקִים זֶה**, *this is the camp of Elokim*. He saw the *malachim* with his eyes.

So the question is did he become greater in the house of Lavan that he was *zocheh* to a bigger vision than he had when he was going from his father's house, his mother's house? When he was in the tent of his father and his mother it was a tent of a Beis Hamikdash. And still, coming from Lavan's house he had become so much greater that this time he didn't see *malachim* in the dream, he saw them with his own eyes. What happened? What took place in the house of Lavan that made Yaakov so much greater? That's the question.

Now many things took place we don't know. But one thing was told in the Torah. When Yaakov was a shepherd for Lavan **הַיְיָתִי בַיּוֹם אֶבְלַנִי הַרְבַּ**, *the heat of the day consumed me*, it was terribly hot. But he did not forsake Lavan's sheep. **וְקָרָה בַּלַּיְלָה**, *at night sometimes there was frost*. And still, he didn't forsake the sheep. Now a shepherd has a right to forsake his flock and go into town sometimes for a rest. But he never forsook the flock at all. That's what we know about Yaakov Avinu, that he was loyal to his master Lavan to the highest extent. And it's all we know of him during that period.

And so we learn that the loyalty of Yaakov to Lavan so purified his character, made him so excellent, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu conferred upon him more greatness than he ever had before. And now when he saw *malachim* he saw them with his eyes and not merely in a vision. Now that's a *chiddush*. Most people wouldn't appreciate that. That's all? If you said that he prayed to Hashem, he studied Hashem, he did certain good deeds, we would understand, but all we know is that he was loyal to Lavan, a loyal shepherd. And because of that he became so great that he's now worthy of seeing *malachim* with his eyes? The answer is yes. That's the answer. And so we see that loyalty, is a tremendous achievement.

The loyalty of Yaakov to his master Lavan gave him the opportunity to go out and raise up the Jewish nation from his glorious family, the great family that he raised up in the house of Lavan and they were the foundation of the Jewish nation.

And now Yaakov looked back and he remembered that dream of a ladder **אֲרָצָה אֲרָצָה אֲרָצָה**, *a ladder was standing on the ground*. First you have to start with things close to the earth. You start with things between you and your employer, you and the people around you. That's the beginning. If you excel in your relations with others, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will allow you to go higher on the next step of the ladder. **מִלְאָכֵי אֱלֹקִים עָלָיו**, Yaakov Avinu began to climb the ladder first by being an *eved neeman* to Lavan. And that made him great enough for the next step, and higher and higher.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

How does one encourage a husband or a child without becoming just an ordinary nag?

A:

And the answer is that חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה – *It is the wisdom of a woman that builds up her house.* Now, that's not an easy answer because you have to learn how to do it. You have to plan what you want to say. Sometimes you feel that you must say something on the spur of the moment. Don't! Wait until you can say it with cunning. And many times you'll accomplish what you wouldn't have accomplished otherwise.

Sometimes you might want your husband to go out and learn in the beis medrash at night and he's sitting with his feet up at the table reading a newspaper. That's how he's wasting his evenings. So you have to wait for an opportunity and you let pass a remark, "What a nice neighbor Mr. Cohen next door. I see he's such a fine man; every night he goes out to learn in the beis medrash." That's all; don't say any more than that. Just let those words sink in a little bit.

I'll give you another suggestion as well. Sometimes when your husband does do one good thing, go out of your way to praise him. And that way you'll give him incentive to do it again.

Whatever it is, you'll have to find tactful ways because the frontal attack usually doesn't succeed and it only causes irritation.

[TAPE # 239]

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