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Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Vayetzte

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ר' מרדכי פייביש רפאל בן ר' אריה צבי הכהן גולדמן זצ"ל ("ג. כסלו תשע"ה) Dr. Mordechai (Macky) Goldman

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Rachel, Mother of Exiles

A cry is heard in Ramah - Wailing, bitter weeping - Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone. Thus, said G-d: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your labor - declares G-d: They shall return from the enemy's land. (Yirmiyahu 31:15-16, modified JPS)

Some have suggested that Emma Lazarus' poem, "The New Colossus", inscribed on the plaque below the Statue of Liberty, is biblically inspired. They suggest that Lazarus identifies Lady Liberty as the "Mother of Exiles". The image of Rachel standing and watching those in exile emerges from the above verses, which are often put to music due to their power.

Why, though, is Rachel defined as the mother of all exiles? This is especially surprising given that Yirmiyahu's prophecy was directed at the kingdom of Yehudah; Yehudah was the fourth born of Leah. The northern kingdom of Yisrael was identified with Rachel's children, as its first king was Yeravam ben Nevat from Ephraim. Yisrael had been exiled decades before Yirmiyahu spoke these words, and even longer before the exile he described was to take place. Furthermore, G-d's promise that those children would return did not apply to Yisrael, the kingdom which was not brought back during *Shivat Tzion*, the Return to Zion. The Talmud debates if they ever will! (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:3) So why is Rachel central to his prophecy?

Some commentaries struggled with this and applied these verses only to Rachel's direct descendants. According to Malbim (31:4) the southern kingdom of "Yehudah" also consisted of Binyamin, and G-d's comfort refers to those in the southern kingdom who would return. However, the words "has no comfort" indicate that the children of northern Ephraim will never come back. Abarbanel writes that the ten tribes will return and "there is reward for your labor" refers to Binyamin who will return first, and "there is hope in the end" refers to Ephraim who will return at the end of days. While different, both of these commentaries believe that Rachel only prayed for her children, not the Jewish people.

However, a midrash (Eichah Rabba 24) clearly understood Rachel as the mother of all Jewish exiles. It records that when G-d decided to destroy the Beit HaMikdash, Rachel successfully appealed for mercy. She argued, "If I had mercy and allowed a rival wife [Leah] into my home, You can forgive their idol worship; idols are not threats to You." Per Rabbi David Altschuler's Metzudat David commentary, Rachel was referring to the idolatry of King Menasheh, who was a descendant of the tribe of Yehudah - Leah's child. Thus, Rachel is the mother of *all* exiles.

Why do our Sages understand Rachel in this universal way, given that she was not the biological mother of most of the relevant tribes? It seems that the answer is in that midrash we cited.

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rachel's claim is not about biology. Rachel's experiences are the story of the exile. Rachel had a relationship with Yaakov, but then she was switched. Even when she married Yaakov, the relationship was forever tainted by the strained relationship with her sister. Nevertheless, Rachel was willing to live with that to protect her commitments to her sister. G-d, by right, had no reason to forgive the Jews. They had a relationship, and the Jews violated its terms. However, Rachel "reminds" G-d that one who cares for another may choose not to stand up for their rights in every situation.

It is this understanding, that this midrash describes, that makes Rachel the thematic mother of exiles, the one who "reminds G-d" that sometimes we sacrifice for those we love. Ironically, it is this commitment to Leah, threatening Rachel's own relationship with Yaakov that brings all of Israel together, ensuring that all the tribes will be born. Thus, Rachel's love for her sister enabled Yaakov to become Yisrael. So too, this midrash argues, her love enables G-d to "find compassion." Though only a minority of Jews are "Rachel's children", she sets the tone for our relationship with G-d and sets the bar for how we must learn to overlook even significant things, to maintain the relationships we care about.

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Summary

The previous two chapters presented Elisha as a dangerous prophet and bringer of death. Our chapter, which includes the haftorah for Parshat Vayera, describes numerous benevolent miracles performed by Elisha.

The chapter begins with the wife of a deceased student-prophet seeking Elisha's help to alleviate her debt-ridden poverty. All she owns is a pitcher of oil; Elisha miraculously causes her oil to increase, filling as many vessels as she can bring. According to the Aramaic Targum on Melachim II 4:1, the woman's deceased husband was the prophet Ovadia. (4:1-7)

Elisha then goes to Shunem; he is hosted by a couple whose matriarch designates an area of the home for his use. In response, Elisha wishes to help the family. Elisha's servant Gehazi notices that the couple is childless and the husband is aged; Elisha promises that she will have a child within one year, and so it happens. (4:8-17)

One day, the child develops a bad headache, and collapses. Before long, he is

dead. The Shunamite woman goes to Elisha for help. She falls upon his feet. Gehazi seeks to stave her off – whether for her honour or for Elisha's honour is unclear (Radak) – but Elisha tells him to leave her alone, for she is suffering. The woman explains what has happened. (4:18-28)

Elisha sends Gehazi to the child, with instructions to place Elisha's staff on the child's face – but there is no visible impact. Elisha arrives and closes the door; only he and the child are in the room. He prays, and then he lies atop the child. The child's body warms, and after seven attempts to revive the child, the child opens his eyes. The child is restored to life. [This story has a sequel in Melachim II 8.] (4:29-37)

Elisha returns to Gilgal, where a famine is still raging. Elisha has his servant prepare a stew for the student-prophets, but one of the students puts wild vegetables into the pot, and the stew is bitter to the point of seeming to be poisonous. The student-prophets refuse to eat, but then Elisha has them add flour to the pot, and then the stew is edible. (4:38-41)

Finally, a man brings Elisha twenty loaves of barley bread from his first produce, as well as loose grain. Elisha says to give this to the community to eat, but his servant protests that it won't suffice. Elisha declares, "So says G-d: Eat, and there will be extra." And so it happens. (4:42-44)

Insight

In our chapter, Elisha is assisted by a servant named Gehazi. In a later story (Melachim II 5), Gehazi attempts to profit personally from his master's miracles; Elisha curses him and sends him away. The Talmud (Sotah 47a, Bava Metzia 87a, Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2) criticizes Elisha for his harsh stance, even indicating that Elisha was Divinely punished with illness for this. The Talmud (Sotah 47a) records that Elisha went to Damascus to bring Gehazi back, but he was unsuccessful; his rebuke had been irreversibly harsh.

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It Happened in Israel: Miscommunications**Rabbi Jared Anstandig****The Story**

A certain Babylonian man makes aliyah and marries an Israeli woman. One evening, he asks her to cook two *telufchi*, meaning lentils. [See Rashi for additional interpretations of the word *telufchi*.] She cooks exactly two lentils, and the husband becomes angry.

The following day, he requests a *geriva* of lentils. A *geriva* is an enormous quantity that far exceeds what any person could eat. The wife makes a literal *geriva*'s worth of lentils. Next, the husband requests two *botzini*, Aramaic for gourds. Instead of gourds, however, she brings him two lamps. He reacts by instructing her to smash the lamps on the head of *bava*, Aramaic for gate. She in turn smashes them on the head of a distinguished rabbi named Bava ben Buta. Bava ben Buta asks the woman why she did this, and she tells him that she was simply following her husband's request. He responds with a blessing that she will bear two children that are just like himself. (Nedarim 66b)

Insight

Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) writes that this story reveals the immaturity of the wife. Though she technically followed every request her husband made, it does not appear that she ever accomplished what he asked her. Simply put, she took his words too literally and made a complete fool out of herself.

Rabbi Shemuel Eidels (Maharsha), in his talmudic commentary, offers an entirely different read. According to him, this story is not about a woman who didn't think. Instead, this is a story about two people who literally speak different languages. After all, the Talmud notes that he was a recent Babylonian transplant to Israel, whereas she was a born Israeli. In Babylon, "two lentils" connoted "a few lentils," but in Isra-

el, "two lentils" meant "two lentils." And, whereas in Babylonian Aramaic *botzini* meant gourds, in Israeli Aramaic it meant lamps. Every single disagreement between them was a miscommunication of language.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Chatam Sofer) takes Maharsha's interpretation one step further. Even if she did not know what the word *bava* meant, why would the wife even consider embarrassing this sage by smashing the lamps on his head? Shockingly, Chatam Sofer offers that Bava ben Buta deserved it. As we learn elsewhere in the Talmud, Bava ben Buta influenced King Herod to renovate the Temple in Jerusalem. [See Toronto Torah 13:4 for more on this.] Chatam Sofer argues that as a result of Herod's involvement in the Temple, prophecy ceased and halachic debate, beginning with Beit Shammai versus Beit Hillel, erupted. Because of Bava ben Buta, rabbis could no longer successfully communicate; every simple disagreement devolved into major strife.

Combining Maharsha and Chatam Sofer, the remedy for halachic debates may be the same as the remedy for this poor couple. Whether it's a couple fighting because they speak different dialects of Aramaic or it's Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai arguing Halachah, resolution is reached when the involved parties finally find a shared language.

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Biography The Apter Rav

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel was born in Żmigród, Poland, in 1748. He was a scion of well-known rabbinic families; his father, Rabbi Shemuel, was a famous rabbi. In his early years, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua studied under Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, and he soon developed a reputation for a sharp mind and friendly nature.

As the new Jewish movement of Hasidism gained supporters in Poland, Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua became one of its most prominent advocates. He served for eight years as the Rabbi of Apt, Poland, which provided his popular nickname: "The Apter Rov". In 1816, after the death of the Rebbe of Mezhibizh, he settled there, in the birthplace of Hasidism. There he established a Beit Midrash which became known as the Apter Rov's Kloise, attracting thousands of Hasidim.

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua was famous for his love of the Jewish people, and his effort to see the simple Jew favorably regardless of the circumstances. This characteristic allowed him to connect with the most uneducated Jews, giving them a feeling of belonging. Sometimes, it also led him to ideas which others saw as hyperbole and exaggeration. Some described him as inheriting a spark from the soul of Rabbah bar bar Chana, a talmudic sage known for legends which appear exaggerated and even grotesque in superficial reading, but which have accurate and piercing inner meanings.

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel asked that no lofty titles be inscribed upon his tombstone, other than "Lover of Israel". He is physically buried in Mezhibizh, but Hasidim tell – in a legend that befits its subject – that his body was carried to the Land of Israel by angels and reburied in Tiberias, where a stone marks his second place of burial to this day.

Rabbi Heschel's yahrtzeit is the 5th of Nisan. In the Ruzhyn Hasidic dynasty, this day is designated for baking matzah. Rabbi Yisrael of Ruzhyn, founder of the dynasty, is quoted as saying, "If I did any wrong in baking the matzah, the Apter Rov's holy soul will certainly correct my misdeed, so that I will have kosher lime-hadrin matzah for Pesach."

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Torah and Translation Be the Ladder

Rabbi A. Y. Heschel of Apt, Ohev Yisrael, Vayetze 2

Translated by Rabbi Steven Gotlib

תוכחת מוסר גדול יוכל כל איש ישראל ליקח לעצמו מזאת הפרשה ולפנות מחשבתו מהבלי הזמן המדומ'. ולדבק באהבת הש"י בהוב"ש ולעבדו בתור' ובתפל' ובמעשים טובים בשכל אמת וזך.

ועיקר שכל מעשי האדם היינו הילוך. דיבור. שמיעה. ראייה. שכיבה וקימה וכדומה. בכל דבר יהא מעוטף בתוכו שכל אמת וזך לעבודת הש"י בלי שום סיג ופסולת ח"ו. וצא ולמד מאבותינו הק' ולך בעקבותיהם.

פך עיניך וראה איך ממעשה גשמית של אבותינו הק' נארג ונעשה מהם תורה הקדושה. ואיך התורה מספרת לנו הליכת יעקב מבאר שבע ובאיזה מקום ישן והדיבורים שדיבר עם רחל בת זוגו ואיך שנשק אות' ואיך שהיה רועה את צאן לבן. ותחבולתיו שעשה המקלות. וכיוצא באלו. הלא מזה מוכח שכל מעשיהם מקטן ועד גדול היה הכל רק בהשכל ודיעה מיושבת בחכמת אלקות. והיאך רמזו בכל עניניהם לדברים עליונים נפלאים ונוראים.

וכשיסתכל ויתבונן האדם בזה היטב. ראונו לו להתלבש בבושה ועונה גדולה איך הוא נבער מדעת ולא בינת אדם לו. והגם שהוא מתפלל ולומד הוא בלא שכל ודעת ותשוקה רק כאיש חולם. והלואי שיחלום לנו בהקיץ כחלומו של יעקב.

וגם צריך האדם לצייר בשכלו ומחשבתו וידמה לו ממש שהאדם הוא סולם מוצב ארצה בתוך ארציות וגשמיות. אך וראשו מגיע השמימה. היינו שכלו ושוורש נשמתו הוא דבוק למעלה בשמים. והנה מלאכי אלקים עולים ויורדים בו. ר"ל כשהאדם מגביה את לבו ומוחו לעבודת הש"י אז מעלה כל המלאכים לרום שמים העליונים... גם זאת צריך האדם להיות תמיד במחשבתו איך שכל הכוחות כולם העליונים כולם כאחד תלויים במעשה האדם הן להעלותם או להיפך ח"ו.

Every Jew can take great ethical rebuke from this portion, to direct their thoughts away from imaginary time-bound nonsense and attach themselves to the love of G-d (may He and His Name be blessed), serving Him through Torah, prayer, and acts of goodness with a true and pure mind.

The main thing is that in all human activity - walking, speaking, hearing, seeing, lying down and getting up and the like - concealed in the core of all things should be a true and pure mind, intended for serving Hashem without any flaw or waste, G-d forbid. Go and learn from our holy ancestors and follow in their footsteps.

Open your eyes and see that even the physical actions of our holy ancestors were woven together and made into the holy Torah. The Torah tells us about Yaakov's journey from Be'er Sheva, the place where he slept, the words he spoke to Rachel, his destined match, how he shepherded Lavan's sheep, how he strategized with the sticks, and the like. It is indeed proven from this that all of their deeds, from small to large, were all performed with reason and a settled mind, and with Divine wisdom, and how they hinted in all their affairs to wondrous, and awe-inspiring supernal matters.

When a person examines this closely, they should feel embarrassed and greatly humbled by their ignorance, and lack human intellect. For although they pray and study, they are only as a dreamer without wisdom, knowledge, or desire, like dreamers. If only we would dream while awake, like the dream of Yaakov.

The individual person must also conceive in his thoughts and mind, must imagine, that they are a ladder planted on the ground in the midst of earthiness and physicality. But their head should reach toward the heavens, meaning that their mind and the root of their soul is attached [to G-d] above in Heaven. Behold - the angels were going up and down on it. The intent is to say that when humans raise their hearts and minds in service of Hashem, may He be blessed, the angels rise to the highest of the heavens... One must always keep in mind that all the powers above depend on the acts of humanity to raise them, or the opposite, G-d forbid.

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Monday-Thursday

10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)

Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook

Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim

Shabbat November 12-13

After 8:00 AM shacharit R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park *not this week*

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Weekly Class, Shaarei Tefillah *not this week*

Sunday November 14

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, Postmodernist Jewish Thought, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Eruvin, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613 (univ)

Monday November 15

8:00 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, S. Y. Agnon: *HaNidach* (The Outcast), Part 2, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/agnon>

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud>

Tuesday November 16

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, King Solomon's Arc (Melachim I 2), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 8), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

Wednesday November 17

6:15 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Beitzah, Shaarei Shomayim and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/beitzah>

10:00 AM R' M Torczyner, The House that David Built, #2 of 3 ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>

12:30 PM The Ethical Challenge (with CPD credit for accountants), Week 3

Rabbi Yehuda Mann, Appraisal of Loss: Secular and Halachic Systems

On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/bmlunch>, Register (free) at <http://torontotorah.com/business>

8:15 PM R' Chaim Metzger, Artscroll Through the Ages, BAYT and ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/translated>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah Chabura, Clanton Park *not this week*

Thursday November 18

8:30 AM R' Chaim Metzger, Trei Asar, Yeshivat Or Chaim or ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/trei> (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 22), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Beitzah, email ymannt@torontotorah.com for location (advanced, men)

8:00 PM R' Jared Anstandig, Gemara Bava Batra, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/torontowbm> (university women)

Friday November 19

8:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

Coming Up!

**10 AM to NOON on SUNDAY NOVEMBER 21
CHANUKAH LEARNATHON—IN PERSON AT SHAAREI TEFILLAH!**

Idan Rakovsky: Miracles, Nature and the Candles In Between

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner: Jews, Greeks and Beauty

Rabbi Yehuda Mann: Oil or War: Which was the Miracle?

Rabbi Chaim Metzger: What Angered the Maccabees?

And on November 28: Chanukah Learnathon at the Forest Hill Jewish Centre!