TORAH STUDIES

Vayetze

Better Than Perfect

Why G-d treasures the struggler more than the flawless saint

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayetze

Jacob leaves his hometown of Beersheba and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters "the place" and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting Heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; G-d appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of G-d.

In Charan, Jacob stays with and works for his uncle Laban, tending Laban's sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter, Rachel—whom Jacob loves—in marriage, in return for seven years' labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead—a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.

Leah gives birth to six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun—and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaiden, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaiden, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel's prayers are answered, and she gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years, and wishes to return home. But Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers despite Laban's repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban will prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob but is warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

This *parshah* tells the story of Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah.



TEXT 1A

Genesis 29:31

וַיַּ֤רְא ה' כִּ֣י שְׂנוּאָ֔ה לֵאָ֖ה וַיִּפְתַּ֣ח אֶת־
רַחְמָ֑הּ, וְרָחֵ֖ל עֲקָרָֽה.

And G-d saw that Leah was hated, and
He opened her womb. Rachel was barren.

G-d saw that Leah was hated and opened her womb, blessing her with most of Jacob’s children.



TEXT 1B

Genesis 29:30

וַיָּבֹא גַּם אֶל רָחֵל, וַיֶּאֱהַב גַּם אֶת רָחֵל
מִלֵּאָה, וַיַּעֲבֹד עִמּוֹ עוֹד שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים אֲחֵרוֹת.

Jacob also came to Rachel, and he loved Rachel also, more than Leah. And he worked with [Laban] for another seven years.

TEXT 2

Rabbi David Kimchi, ad loc.

"וַיַּרְא ה' כִּי שְׂנוּאָה לֵאָה". לֹא הָיָה יַעֲקֹב שׂוֹנֵא אוֹתָהּ, אֲבָל הָיָה אוֹהֵב אוֹתָהּ, אֶלָּא לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה אוֹהֵב אֶת רָחֵל יוֹתֵר קָרָא לֵאָה שְׂנוּאָה, כְּלוֹמַר כְּנֶגֶד אַהֲבָתָהּ שֶׁל רָחֵל הָיְתָה שְׂנוּאָה. . .

וּלְפִי שֶׁהָיְתָה עֲלוּבָה בְּעֵינֶיהָ שֶׁלֹּא הָיְתָה אֲהוּבָה כַּאֲחוֹתָהּ, רָאָה ה' בְּעָנְיָהּ וְיִפְתַּח אֶת רַחְמָהּ.

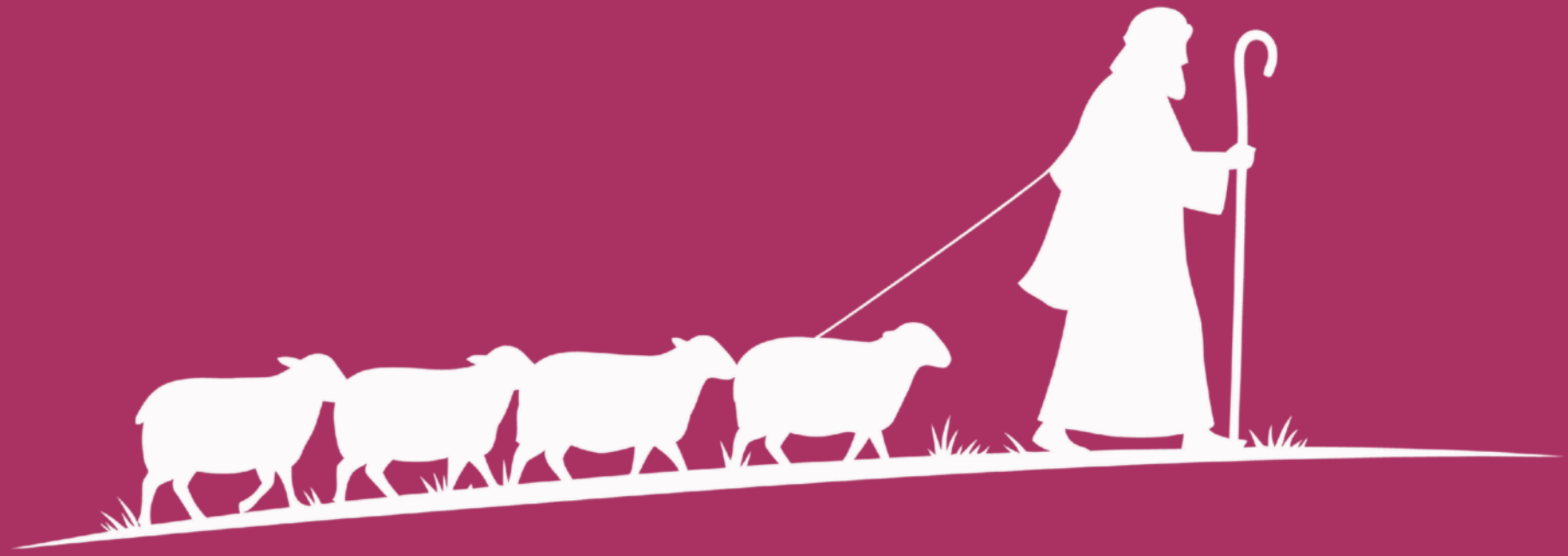
“And G-d saw that Leah was hated”: Jacob didn’t hate her; he loved her. But because he loved Rachel more than her, the Torah calls Leah “hated.” Meaning: in contrast to his love for Rachel, she was considered “hated.” . . .

Seeing that she wasn’t loved like her sister, Leah felt inferior, so G-d saw her pain and opened her womb.

QUESTION

No one wants to be number two. Yet most of us will never be number one in life, success, or spirituality. If we'll always be ordinary, what's the point of trying?

After fleeing his home, Jacob went to work for Laban and asked to marry Rachel as his **payment**.



TEXT 3

Genesis 29:17–18

יז. וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת, וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה.

יח. וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה.

17. Leah’s eyes were soft, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

18. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, “I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.”

The first reason that Jacob chose Rachel

Jacob found Rachel beautiful and was drawn to her.

TEXT 4

Midrash, *Shemot Rabah* 1:32

שְׁלֹשָׁה נִזְדַּוְּגוּ לָהֶם זִוּוּגֵיהֶם מִן הַבְּאֵר, יִצְחָק יַעֲקֹב וּמֹשֶׁה. בְּיִצְחָק כְּתִיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית כד, סב): "וְיִצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר וְגוֹ'". וְעוֹד שֶׁנִּזְדַּוְּגָה רִבְקָה לֶאֱלִיעֶזֶר לַמַּעְיָן. יַעֲקֹב (בְּרֵאשִׁית כט, ב): "וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה בְאֵר בַּשָּׂדֶה". מֹשֶׁה, "וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל הַבְּאֵר. וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע בָּנוֹת" (שמות ב, טו-טז).

Three people met their spouses at a well: Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. About Isaac it says that he came from "Be'er Lachai Ro'i" (Genesis 24:62), and Rebecca was brought to Eliezer at the spring. About Jacob it says, "He saw a well in the field, . . . and Rachel came with the flock" (Genesis 29:2, 6). About Moses it says, "He sat by the well," and "the seven daughters of the priest of Midian came and drew water" (Exodus 2:15–16).

The second reason that Jacob chose Rachel

Jacob met Rachel at the well. Since water symbolizes life and continuity, it seemed like a perfect sign for marriage.

TEXT 5

Rashi, ad loc.

"רַכּוֹת". שֶׁהָיְתָה סְבוּרָה לַעֲלוֹת בְּגוֹרָלוֹ שֶׁל עֵשָׂו, וּבוֹכָה; שֶׁהָיוּ הַכֹּל אוֹמְרִים: שְׁנֵי בָּנִים לְרִבְקָה וּשְׁתֵּי בָּנוֹת לְלָבָן, הַגְּדוֹלָה לַגָּדוֹל וְהַקְּטַנָּה לַקָּטָן.

“Leah’s eyes were soft”: Because she assumed she was destined for Esau, and she cried. For people would say: “Two sons to Rebecca; two daughters to Laban. The older to the older; the younger to the younger.”

The third reason that Jacob chose Rachel

It was already assumed that the older brother, Esau, would marry Leah, while the younger brother, Jacob, would marry Rachel.

TEXT 6

Rabbi Chezkiah ben Mano'ach, *Chizkuni*, ad loc.

אָמַר: אִם אֶשָּׂא הַבְּכוֹרָה, יַחֲזוֹר עֵשָׂו וְיָבֹא עָלַי וְיֹאמַר: לֹא דַּיֶּיךָ שֶׁנָּטַלְתָּ בְּכוֹרָתִי וּבִרְכָתִי אֶלָּא אַף אִשְׁתִּי אָנַסְתָּ.

Because if he married the firstborn daughter, Esau would say, "Is it not enough that you took my birthright and my blessing—now you take my wife too?!"

After taking so much from Esau, the last thing Jacob wanted was to take the woman he was supposed to **marry**.



TEXT 7

Talmud, Bava Batra 123a

אָמַר לָהּ: מִינַסְבַת לִי? אָמְרָה לֵיהּ: אֵין, מִיהוּ אַבָּא רַמָּאָה הוּא וְלָא יָכֵלְתְּ לֵיהּ.

אָמַר לָהּ: מַאי רַמָּאוּתֵיהּ?

אָמְרָה לֵיהּ: אִית לִי אֲחָתָא דְּקַשְׁשָׁא מִינַּאי, וְלָא מַנְסְבָא לִי מִקַּמָּהּ.

אָמַר לָהּ: אָחִיו אֲנִי בְּרַמָּאוּת.

אָמְרָה לֵיהּ: וּמִי שָׁרֵי לְהוּ לְצַדִּיקֵי לְסַגּוֹיֵי בְּרַמָּאוּתָא? אֵין, "עִם נָבָר תִּתְבָּר וְעִם עִקֵּשׁ תִּתַּפָּל".

מָסַר לָהּ סִימָנִין.

Jacob said to Rachel, “Will you marry me?” Rachel said to him, “Yes, but my father is a deceitful person, and you cannot defeat him.”

Jacob said to her, “What is his method of deceit?”

Rachel said to him, “I have a sister who is older than me, and he will not marry me off before he marries her off.”

Jacob said to her, “I am his equal in deceit.”

Rachel said to him, “But is it permitted for the righteous to act deceitfully?” Jacob answered her, “Yes, in certain circumstances. As the verse states [concerning G-d]: With the pure You show Yourself pure; and with the crooked You show Yourself subtle” (II Samuel 22:27).

Therefore, Jacob gave Rachel secret signs.

Jacob and Rachel made secret signs in case Laban tricked them. When Leah took Rachel's place, Rachel kindly gave her the signs, and Jacob found out the next morning.





Leah ended up as Jacob’s lifelong partner, bringing him true joy, bearing most of the tribes of Israel, and being buried beside him.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does G-d pull Jacob apart from Rachel and specifically pair him with Leah?
2. Why does the Torah tell us that Leah's eyes were unattractive instead of simply saying that Rachel was beautiful?
3. Could Jacob, one of the forefathers and a spiritual figure, have chosen Rachel over Leah simply because she was prettier?

TEXT 8A

Genesis 29:25

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה הִיא לֵאָה, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל לָבָן מַה
זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי, הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה
רִמִּיתָנִי.

And it came to pass in the morning, and behold—she was Leah! So he said to Laban, “What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work for you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?”

וְהִנֵּה הִיא לֵאָה behold—*she* was Leah **(*keri*—read)**

Vehineh hi Leah

וְהִנֵּה הִוא לֵאָה behold—*he* was Leah **(*ketiv*—written)**

Vehineh hi Leah

We see Leah's priority reflected in a single letter. The verse is written "behold, he was Leah" but read as "behold, she was Leah."

TEXT 8B

Midrash, *Tanchuma*, Vayetze 11

כֵּיוָן שֶׁעָמַד בַּבּוֹקֶר, "וְהִנֵּה הִיא לֵאָה". אָמַר לָהּ: בַּת הָרַמַּאי, לָמָּה רִמִּית אוֹתִי?

אָמְרָה לוֹ: וְאַתָּה לָמָּה רִמִּיתָ אָבִיךָ, כְּשֶׁאָמַר לְךָ: "הָאַתָּה זֶה בְּנִי עֵשָׂו", וְאָמַרְתָּ לוֹ: "אָנֹכִי עֵשָׂו בְּכוֹרֶךָ"?

וְאַתָּה אוֹמֵר: "לָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי", וְאָבִיךָ לֹא אָמַר: "בָּא אָחִיךָ בְּמִרְמָה"?

When morning came and he saw "and behold—she was Leah," Jacob said, "Daughter of a swindler! Why did you deceive me?"

She answered back, "And why did you deceive your father? When he asked you, 'Are you my son Esau?' you said, 'I am Esau your firstborn.'

"You clamor, 'Why did you deceive me?' but did your father not say to Esau, 'Your brother Jacob came with deceit'?"

ANSWER 1

Jacob and Leah were destined to be together. Since Jacob took the firstborn's blessings and birthright, he took the firstborn's place; and that meant marrying the older sister.

TEXT 9

Talmud, Berachot 5b

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר חָלַשׁ. עַל לְגַבֵּיהּ רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן. חֲזָא דַּהֲוָה קָא גָּנֵי בְּבֵית אָפֵל. גַּלְיֵיהּ לְדַרְעֵיהּ וְנָפַל נְהוֹרָא. חַזְיֵיהּ דַּהֲוָה קָא בָּכֵי רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר.

אֲמַר לֵיהּ: אַמַּאי קָא בָּכֵית? אִי מִשּׁוּם תּוֹרָה דְּלָא אַפְּשַׁתְּ, שָׁנִינוּ: אֶחָד הַמַּרְבֶּה וְאֶחָד הַמַּמְעִיט, וּבִלְבַד שֶׁיְּכַוֵּין לִבּוֹ לַשָּׁמַיִם. וְאִי מִשּׁוּם מְזוֹנֵי, לֹא כָּל אָדָם זוֹכֶה לִשְׁתֵּי שֻׁלְחָנוֹת. וְאִי מִשּׁוּם בָּנֵי, דִּין גַּרְמָא דַּעֲשִׂירָאָה בִּיר.

אֲמַר לֵיהּ: לְהַאי שׁוּפְרָא דְּבָלֵי בְּעַפְרָא קָא בָּכֵינָא.

אֲמַר לֵיהּ: עַל דָּא וַדַּאי קָא בָּכֵית, וּבָכוּ תַּרְוַיְיהוּ.

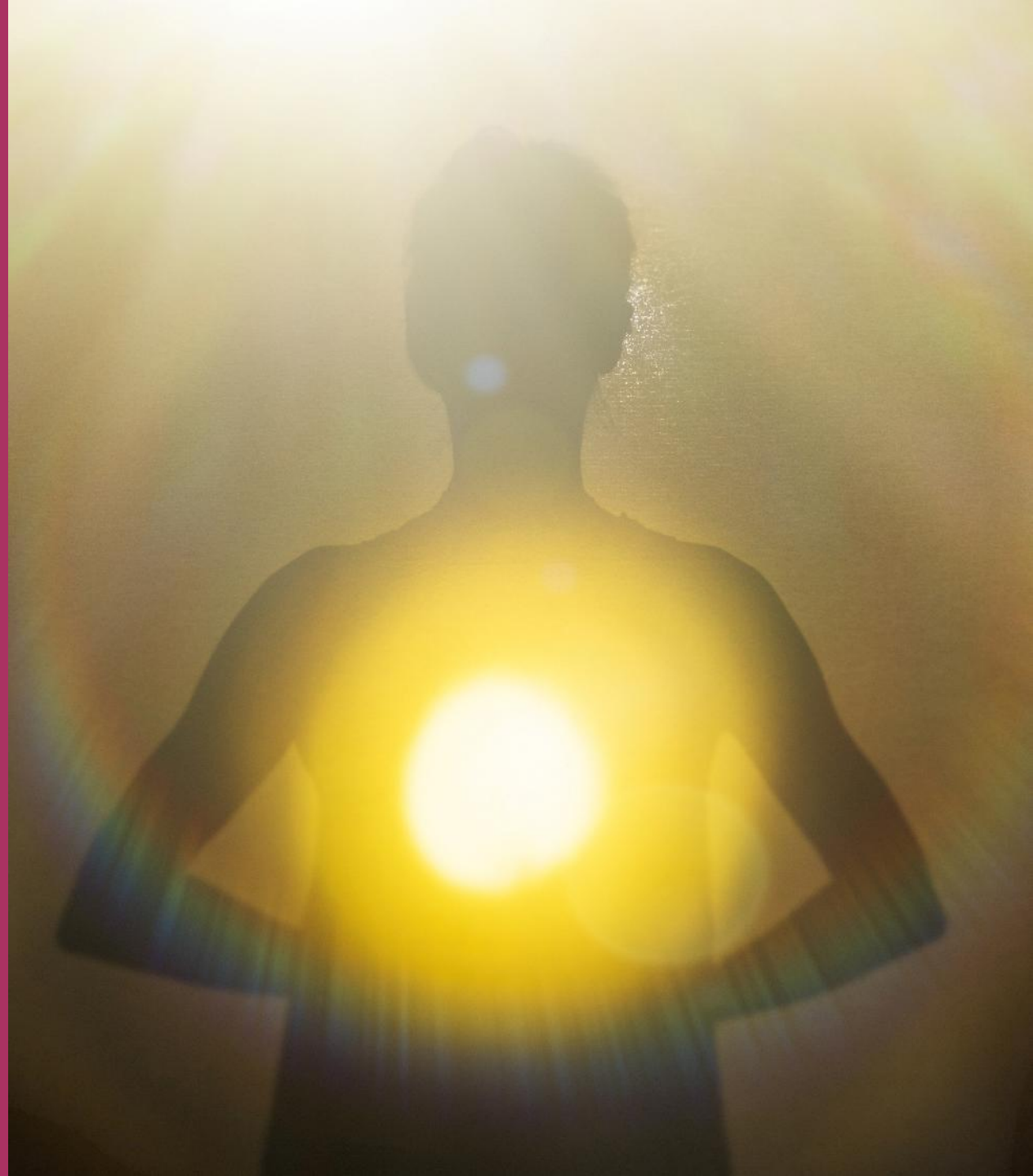
Rabbi Eliezer fell ill with his final illness. Rabbi Yochanan came to visit him, and the light in the room fell on Rabbi Yochanan's dazzling beauty. Rabbi Eliezer began to weep.

Rabbi Yochanan said to him, "Why are you crying? If you're crying because you didn't study enough Torah, we've learned: 'Whether one does much or does little, as long as one directs their heart to Heaven' [it's good]. If because of financial worries, not everyone merits both tables [in this world and the next]. And if because of losing your children . . ." Rabbi Yochanan held up a small bone, explaining that it was from his own tenth child, who had passed away.

Rabbi Eliezer answered, "I am crying because this beauty of yours will one day rot in the earth."

Rabbi Yochanan agreed: "For that, yes, one may cry," and the two of them wept together.

The Torah’s idea of beauty is wholeness and inner goodness. Rachel’s beauty was complete and selfless—she even gave up her secret signs to spare another’s pain.



TEXT 10

Talmud, Bava Batra 123a

"וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת". מַאי רַכּוֹת? אִילֵימָא רַכּוֹת מַמָּשׁ, אֶפְשָׁר בִּגְנוּת בְּהֵמָה טְמֵאָה לֹא דִּבֵּר הַכָּתוּב . . .

אֶלָּא שֶׁבַח הוּא לָהּ, שֶׁהָיְתָה שׁוֹמַעַת עַל פָּרָשַׁת דְּרָכִים בְּנֵי אָדָם שֶׁהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים שְׁנֵי בָנִים יֵשׁ לָהּ לְרִבְקָה שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת יֵשׁ לוֹ לְלָבָן, גְּדוֹלָה לַגָּדוֹל וּקְטַנָּה לַקָּטָן.

וְהָיְתָה יוֹשֶׁבֶת עַל פָּרָשַׁת דְּרָכִים וּמַשְׁאֶלֶת: גָּדוֹל מָה מַעֲשָׂיו? אִישׁ רַע הוּא מְלַסְטֵם בְּרִיּוֹת. קָטָן מָה מַעֲשָׂיו? אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים. וְהָיְתָה בּוֹכָה עַד שֶׁנָּשְׁרוּ רִיסֵי עֵינֶיהָ.

"Leah's eyes were soft": What does that mean? If you think it means literally soft, would the Torah speak disparagingly of a righteous woman when it does not speak disparagingly even of an impure animal? . . .

Rather, it's praise: She would hear people at the crossroads coming from the land of Canaan. They would be saying, "Rebecca has two sons, and her brother Laban has two daughters; the older daughter will be married to the older son, and the younger daughter will be married to the younger son."

Leah would sit at the crossroads asking, "What is the older brother like?" They said, "He is wicked; he robs people." "And the younger?" "A wholesome man who dwells in tents." And she cried until her eyelashes fell out.

ANSWER 2

The Torah’s mention of Leah’s “soft eyes” is not an insult but a reflection of her yearning for holiness. Leah is the struggler who transforms herself through tears, prayer, and determination; she refused a life tied to Esau and reshaped her destiny.

TEXT 11A

Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Fano, *Yonat Elem*, ch. 5

וַיְהִי אוֹר בְּגִימַטְרִיָּה רָחֵל.

The words "**ויהי אור**—and there was light" have the same numerical value as the word "**רחל**—Rachel."

Rachel fills the room with clarity

וַיְהִי אוֹר

1 = א
6 = ו
6 = ו
10 = י
200 = ר
5 = ה
10 = י

= 238

רָחֵל

200 = ר
8 = ח
30 = ל

= 238

TEXT 11B

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Maamarei Admur Hazaken, Torah Umo'adim* 1, p. 169

עַל כֵּן נִקְרֵאת לֵאָה, שֶׁהוּא מִלְּשׁוֹן עֲיֵיפוּת, כְּמוֹ "וְיִלְאוּ לִמְצוֹא כוּ'", שֶׁהִיא נִלְאָה תָּמִיד.

The explanation for the name "Leah" (**לאה**) is a connotation of "fatigue," as in the verse, "And they were exhausted (**וילאו**) from trying to find the door" (Genesis 19:11). She is constantly exhausted.

Leah is associated with fatigue and exhaustion; she is constantly tired because she is continually pushing against her life’s decree.



TEXT 12

Talmud, Bava Batra 17a

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: אַרְבָּעָה מֵתוּ בְּעֶטְיוֹ שֶׁל נָחָשׁ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: בִּנְיָמִין בֶּן יַעֲקֹב.

Four people died only because of the serpent’s sin. The first is Benjamin the son of Jacob.

ANSWER 3

Jacob wanted Rachel because he was seeking perfection: the ideal wife and the best foundation for his future. He wanted to build the Jewish nation through children who were naturally straight from birth and drawn to holiness, awe, and selflessness.



Rachel had perfect children: Joseph was a righteous man, and so was Benjamin, who was described as never having sinned.

TEXT 13

Midrash, *Bereshit Rabah*, Vayeshev 84:19

"וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר".

וְהֵיכָן הָיָה . . . רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר בְּשַׂקּוֹ וּבְתַעֲנִיתוֹ, כְּשֶׁנִּפְנָה הָלַךְ וְהֵצִיץ לְאוֹתוֹ בּוֹר, הֲדָא הוּא דִכְתִיב, "וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר".

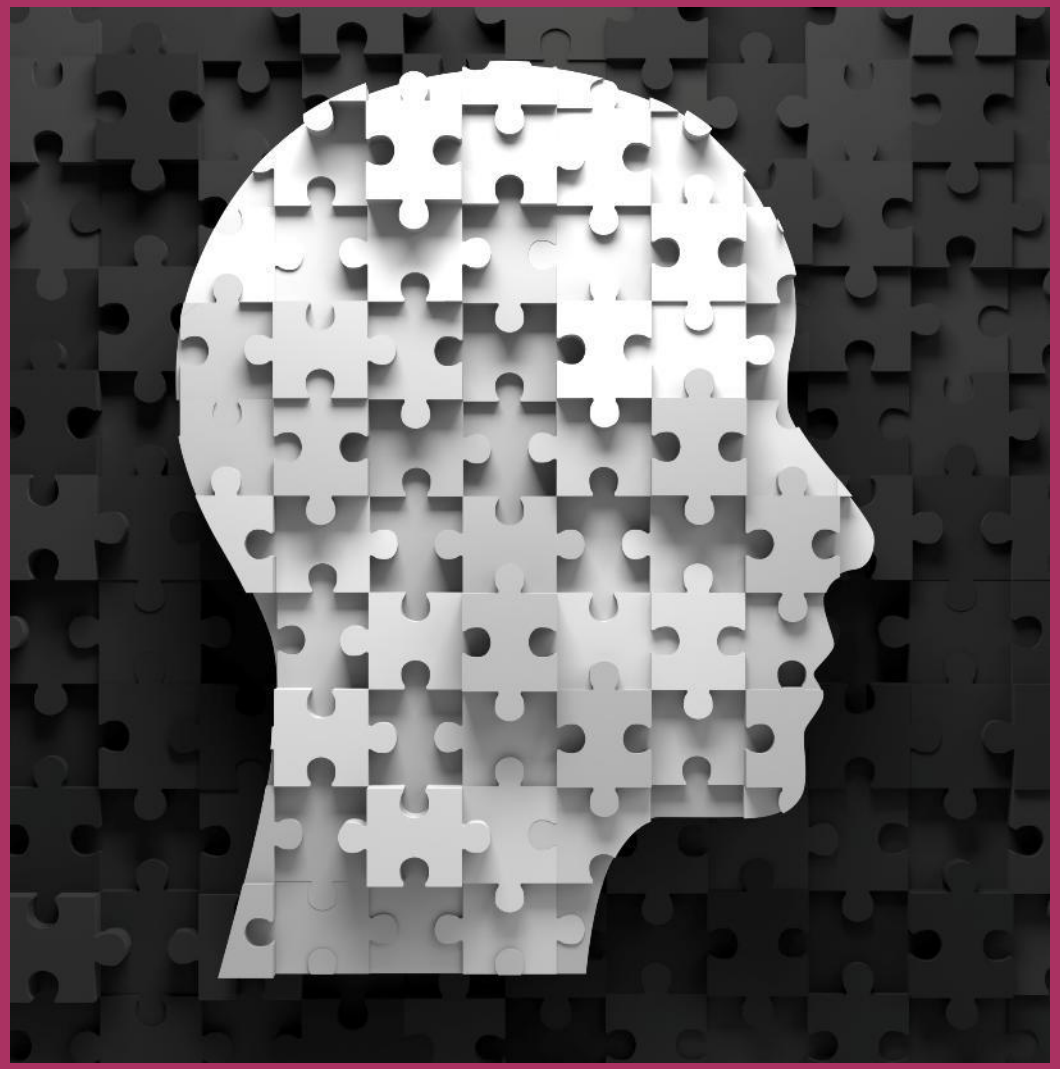
אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא: מֵעוֹלָם לֹא חָטָא אָדָם לְפָנַי וְעָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה, וְאַתָּה פָּתַחְתָּ בִּתְשׁוּבָה תְּחִלָּה, חַיֶּיךָ שֶׁבֶּן בִּנְךָ עוֹמֵד וּפוֹתֵחַ בִּתְשׁוּבָה תְּחִלָּה, וְאֵיזֶה? זֶה הוֹשֵׁעַ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ".

"Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit, and he rent his garments" (Genesis 37:29).

Where had he been? . . . Rabbi Eliezer said: In his sackcloth and his fasting. When he was free, he went and peered into that pit. That is what is written: "Reuben returned to the pit."

G-d said to him, "No one has ever sinned before Me and repented, and you are the first to initiate repentance. I swear, your descendant will arise and be the first to initiate repentance." Who is that? It is Hosea, as it is stated: "Return, Israel, to G-d" (Hosea 14:2).

Leah’s children were more complex: Reuben took responsibility for his error, and Judah admitted, “She is more righteous than I.”



TEXT 14

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot* 35, pp. 152–153

יֶשְׁנָם . . . בִּכְלָלוּת . . . שְׁנֵי אוֹפַנֵּי עֲבוֹדָה — צַדִּיקִים וּבַעֲלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה: עֲבוֹדַת הַצַּדִּיקִים הִיא בְּעוֹלָם הַקְּדוּשָׁה, בְּקִיּוּם הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹות, וְאִילּוּ עֲבוֹדַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה מוֹרָה עַל הָעֲבוֹדָה לַהֲפוֹךְ אֶת הָרַע לְטוֹב, וּבִכְלָלוּת יוֹתֵר, לְהַעֲלוֹת אֶת הַחוֹל לְקוֹדֶשׁ.

וְזֶהוּ הַחִילּוּק בֵּין עֲבוֹדַת בְּנֵי לֵאָה וַעֲבוֹדַת בְּנֵי רָחֵל . . . עֲשֶׂרֶת הַשְּׁבָטִים שֶׁהִשְׁתַּתְּפוּ בִּמְכִירַת יוֹסֵף, אַף שֶׁעָשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה, אֵינָם בְּדַרְגַּת דְּיוֹסֵף וּבִנְיָמִין, בְּנֵי רָחֵל, שֶׁהֵם דַּוְקָא בְּדַרְגַּת צַדִּיק דְּמֵעִיקָּרָא.

וְאוּלַי יֵשׁ לוֹמַר, שֶׁיְּסוֹד הַחִילּוּק בֵּין עֲבוֹדַת הַשְּׁבָטִים . . . שָׁרְשׁוֹ בְּהָאִמָּהוֹת, דְּלֵאָה שַׁיָּיכֶת לַעֲבוֹדַת בַּעֲלֵי תְּשׁוּבָה, וְרָחֵל לַעֲבוֹדַת הַצַּדִּיקִים.

There are generally two types of spiritual work—work of the righteous and work of the penitent. The work of the righteous is within the realm of holiness, focused on observing Torah and *mitzvot*, while the work of repentance is about transforming evil into good and, more broadly, elevating the mundane to holiness.

This distinction is reflected in the work of the sons of Leah and Rachel. The ten tribes who participated in selling Joseph, although they repented, do not reach the level of Joseph and Benjamin, the sons of Rachel, who were specifically at the level of righteous from the start.

Perhaps we can say that the root of the distinction between the work of the tribes lies in the mothers: Leah is connected to the work of the penitent, while Rachel is connected to the work of the righteous.

TEXT 14

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichot* 35, pp. 152–153

וְעַל פִּי זֶה יֵשׁ לְפָרֵשׁ מָה שֶּׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת וְרָחֵל הָיְתָה יְפַת תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה": רָחֵל מוֹרָה עַל עֲבוֹדַת הַצַּדִּיקִים, צַדִּיק דְּמֵעִיקָּרָא, "יְפַת תֹּאַר וִיפַת מַרְאֶה", בְּלִי מוּם וּפְגָם. וְלֵאָה מוֹרָה עַל עֲבוֹדַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה, שֶׁזֶּהוּ עִנְיַן הַבְּכִיָּה דְּלֵאָה, "וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רַכּוֹת", דִּבְכִיָּה קְשׁוּרָה עִם עֲבוֹדַת הַתְּשׁוּבָה.

וְהִנֵּה בְּיַעֲקֹב נֶאֱמַר "וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל", כִּי מִצַּד יַעֲקֹב עִיקַּר הָעֲבוֹדָה הִיא עֲבוֹדַת הַצַּדִּיקִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב "וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהָלִים", הָעֲבוֹדָה בְּ"פְּנִים" בְּתוֹךְ הַקְּדֻשָּׁה עַצְמָהּ, וְלֹא לָצֵאת לַחוּץ לְהַעֲלוֹת הַחוּץ לִקְדוּשָּׁה.

According to this, we can interpret the verse “Leah’s eyes were soft, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance” as follows: Rachel represents the work of the righteous, “beautiful in form and appearance,” without flaw or defect. Leah, on the other hand, represents the work of repentance, which is linked to Leah’s tears, as it says, “And Leah’s eyes were soft,” for tears are associated with the work of repentance.

Now, with regard to Jacob, it says, “And Jacob loved Rachel” because, from Jacob’s perspective, the primary work is the work of the righteous, as it is written, “Jacob was a wholesome man who dwelled in tents”—working within the “inner” realm, in holiness itself, without venturing out to elevate the external to holiness.



This was the education that they absorbed from their mother: not perfection or beauty—that belonged to their cousins — but turning struggle into growth and difficulty into meaning.

TEXT 15

Genesis 49:31

שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת אַבְרָהָם וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, שָׁמָּה
קָבְרוּ אֶת יִצְחָק וְאֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, וְשָׁמָּה קָבַרְתִּי
אֶת לֵאָה.

There they buried Abraham and Sarah, there they buried Isaac and Rebecca, and there I buried Leah.

QUESTION

Did Jacob come to appreciate Leah over time?

ANSWER

By the end of his life, Jacob recognized Leah’s legacy and what shehad built. Her children weren’t “perfect,” but they were loyal and responsible. They grew through struggle, building the foundation of Jewish strength.

OPTIONAL

TEXT 16

Rabbi Shmuel Eidels,
Chidushei Agadot,
Yoma 22b

לְפִי שֶׁהוּא בָּא לְטַהֵר וְהוֹדָה עַל חֲטָאָיו וְקִבֵּל עָלָיו יִסּוּרִים כְּדִלְקַמָּן, וּלְכָךְ מִן שָׁמַיִם סִיְּיעוּהוּ לָשׁוּב בִּתְשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה, כַּמְּפוֹרָשׁ בְּכַמָּה מִקְרָאוֹת בְּסֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים. מָה שֶׁאֵין כֵּן בְּשָׁאוּל דְּלָא מָצִינוּ בּוֹ שֶׁהוֹדָה עַל חֵטְא זֶה לְפָנָיו יִתְבָּרַךְ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, וְלֹא קִבֵּל עָלָיו יִסּוּרִין, וּלְכָךְ עָלְתָה לוֹ.

David came to purify himself, admitting his sin and accepting suffering, as is clear from many verses throughout the book of Psalms, so Heaven assisted him to complete his *teshuvah*. But Saul never admitted fully nor accepted the consequences, and therefore he lost the kingship.

OPTIONAL

DAVID (LEAH)

- Immediately says, “I have sinned,” with full responsibility
- No excuses or blame
- Turns failure into growth and psalms
- Comes from a world where struggle leads to greatness

SAUL (RACHEL)

- Admits wrongdoing but adds excuses and blame
- Struggles with ownership of mistakes
- Loss of kingship follows
- Comes from a “perfect” world where failure feels like collapse

Leah struggled deeply but built something lasting: half the tribes, including kings and the line of Mashiach. **Her life was difficult but meaningful.**



ANSWER

There is always a point in trying. Greatness is not about being number one but about the effort itself. True Jewish goodness is built through struggle, effort, and breakthrough—and that is where its true value lies. It brings joy for us, for G-d, and for the world that will soon reach its perfection, for everything depends only on *teshuvah*.

KEY POINTS

1. Jacob wants Rachel, but Divine providence keeps drawing him toward Leah. This strange turn reveals a deeper truth about the kind of spiritual life G-d desires.
2. Rachel represents natural beauty, wholeness, and the path of the *tzadik*. She is the person whose inner life already flows toward holiness.
3. Leah represents struggle, tears, and self-transformation. Her "soft eyes" are not a flaw but the sign of a woman fighting against the destiny assigned to her.
4. Jacob initially prefers the Rachel model: clean, perfect, and spiritually whole from the start. But G-d shows him that the Jewish people will be built primarily through Leah's path of struggle and *teshuvah*.

KEY POINTS

5. Leah's children are more complicated, but they become the source of *teshuvah*, responsibility, leadership, Torah, and ultimately Mashiach. Their greatness comes not from perfection but from breaking through failure.

6. The lesson reframes spiritual mediocrity. Being average and still fighting upward is not second-rate Judaism; it may be the very form of work that gives G-d the deepest pleasure.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