

Nature in the Parasha

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Parashat Vayetze –The Secret of the Dudaim Deal

Desirable Dudaim Flowers

The Dudaim – the love flowers or mandrakes appear mysteriously in *Parashat Vayetze* as they became subject of a bizarre businesslike transaction between Rachel and Leah. All the Torah mentions about the Dudaim is that Reuven found them in the field and brought them to his mother. When Rachel asked for some of them, Leah scolded her. After Rachel had appeased her, and offered her night with Ya'acov as an exchange, Leah gave all of the Dudaim to Rachel. If we assume that Rachel desired the Dudaim because of their possible fertility effects, then she wasted her effort in acquiring them, as they didn't make her pregnant. On the other hand, Leah, who ended up without any of the Dudaim, became pregnant and gave birth to Yissachar and Zevulun for Ya'acov. Here is the full story as it appears in the Torah.

“Reuven went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah: ‘Give me, please, some of your son’s mandrakes.’ Leah replied: ‘Is it not enough that you have taken away my husband? You also want to take away my son’s mandrakes?’ Rachel said: ‘Therefore, he shall lie with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes. When Ya’acov came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said: ‘You must come to me; for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.’ He lay with her that night and G-d listened to Leah, and she conceived, and bore Ya’acov a fifth son. Then Leah said: ‘G-d has given me my reward, because I gave my handmaid to my husband, and she called his name Yissachar. Leah conceived again, and bore a sixth son to Ya’acov. Leah said: ‘G-d has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have born him six sons.’ And she called his name Zevulun” (Bereishit 30:14-20).

What is the secret of the mysterious Dudaim flowers and why did Rachel desire them so much?

Fertility Remedy or Ecstasy Love-enhancing Drug?

Rashi has only very little to say about the identity of the Dudaim. He classifies them as weeds free for all to take, yet he also identifies them as violets called jasmine in Arabic. Ibn Ezra adds, based on the Targum, that the Dudaim are flowers with a good scent, as it states, “The Dudaim give off their fragrance” (*Shir HaShirim* 7:14). They have the shape of a person with head and hands. He ponders that it doesn't make sense that they are beneficial for conceiving since they are of a cold nature. Why would Leah mind sharing those unimportant common weeds found in the field with her sister? Why would Rachel give up her night with her husband for the sake of these insignificant Dudaim? According to Ramban, Rachel did not desire the Dudaim for their fertility effect, as she understood that conception depends more on prayer than on medicine. Perhaps, the healing effect of the Dudaim may be their ability to bring about love between people, kind of like a natural ecstasy drug.

This is why Reuven, who knew that Ya'acov mainly loved Rachel, brought the Dudaim to Leah, in order to bring his mother close to his father. This also explains Leah's strange reaction, "Is it not enough that you have taken my husband? You also want to take away my son's mandrakes?" She meant to say, "Is it not enough that Ya'acov has established his dwelling with you, and is always with you? Now you also want my son's Dudaim to gain even more of Ya'acov's love, so he will spend even more time with you!" In other words, "You don't need these Dudaim, since you already have Ya'acov's love (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*). The Hebrew word דודאים/Dudaim shares the same root as דוד/dod – the Hebrew word for love or lover. This supports the connection between them.

Trading the Love of Their Husband

Why would Rachel, Ya'acov's beloved favorite wife need a remedy that would attract Ya'acov's love? Although Ya'acov's bed was permanently set up in Rachel's tent, she felt Ya'acov's love drifting away from her and gradually gravitating more towards Leah. Due to being barren, Rachel felt pushed aside to a certain extent. She, therefore, desired to regain Ya'acov's love through the Dudaim, in order that her love would be equal to that of her sister, who bore Ya'acov sons. This is why she requested some of the love flowers. She only asked for some of the Dudaim and not all the Dudaim, for all she wanted was to be loved equally to Leah. Realizing that Leah wouldn't give her the Dudaim for free, she preferred trading one night with Ya'acov in order to become more beloved in the long run. However, it would only be fair that she give up her night with the *tzaddik* in exchange for all of the Dudaim, Neither Rachel nor Leah intended these matters according to their superficial understanding. Our holy mother's did not care about the trivial matters of this world. Their true intentions were to make mystical *yichudim* – unifications between the upper and the lower worlds (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*).

The Dudaim – Outweighing Two Tribes and Burial in the Machpelah

What are the consequences of Rachel's trading her night with Ya'acov? THEREFORE HE SHAL LIE WITH YOU THIS NIGHT – "It was my night to be with him, but I give it to you in return for your son's Dudaim." Because she thought lightly of sleeping with so righteous a man, she was not privileged to be buried with him (Rashi, *Bereishit* 30:15). Rachel gave up one night with Ya'acov for the sake of the Dudaim, and lost her merit of eternal burial with him. "Rabbi Eliezer says, they both lost, and they both gained. Leah lost the Dudaim but gained two tribes and the burial (in Machpelah). Rachel gained the Dudaim but lost the tribes and the burial... "(*Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 7:20). As a result of the Dudaim trade, Leah gained two extra tribes and thus gave birth to six of the twelve tribes, leaving only two tribes for Rachel, and she merited to be buried with Ya'acov. Rachel lost all of the above, but she gained the Dudaim. It seems that the Midrash equalizes the value of the Dudaim with two extra tribes and eternal burial with Ya'acov in the Machpelah cave. What is the big deal about the Dudaim that they outweigh two tribes and burial in the Machpelah? Have you ever heard about anyone making this kind of exchange? How can this tremendous loss be balanced against the gain of these simple Dudaim weeds?

First Fruit of Hashem's People

“Reuven went... found ...and brought.” Why didn't the Torah simply state, “Reuven went in the time of wheat harvest and found Dudaim in the field?” Rav Eliyahu Kitov explains that Reuven was four years old, “and went” – in the ways of the fathers of the world who strove to rectify the sin of Adam. The three Patriarchs paved the way for progressing in holiness. Reuven, the first son of their accumulated efforts was worthy to walk in the way of his Fathers when he became four years old. Reuven is the first plant of Hashem's people. The holiness of the first three years of the life of a tree is not yet available in its fruits (*orlah*). Likewise, the three first years we knew nothing about Reuven; his world opens only in his fourth year. Reuven's deed praises Hashem; therefore, the Torah mentions every one of his moves. A little deed in purity is dearer to Hashem than the greatest accomplishment, which is not totally pure.

The Pure Act of Giving to His Mother

The home of Ya'acov, our Father, was empty. There was nothing there except that which Lavan would give with his stingy hand. Ya'acov's children didn't complain. The little bread with salt, which they honestly earned was dearer to them than all the pleasures of the world. Those who seek Hashem do not desire extras in this world. They are happy with their portion. Reuven, the oldest of the sons was hungry. There was nothing to eat at home, so he went to the field. “It was the days of the wheat harvest.” In contrast to the emptiness of his home, the field was bursting with wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates and more. The soul of the young boy desired them all. However, he had no right to any of them. The field belonged to his miserly uncle Lavan, and whoever even tastes a small bite without permission is a thief. However, the Dudaim are weeds that grow by themselves, they are *hefker* – belonging to whoever finds them. Although nobody planted or tended the Dudaim, they were a desirable sight with their tempting orange fruits with their delicious scent. Reuven wanted to grab some of them for himself but instead, “He brought them to Leah his mother.” He didn't even save any for himself. – “My mother should be the first to enjoy the pleasure. She is stuck in the house with the little ones. “I found the Dudaim, but what about my mother? Let me bring them to her. She brought me to the world; I owe my soul to her!” The eye of flesh and blood cannot see or understand what was going on in Reuven's pure heart, when he performed the first deed of his greatness. Only Hashem tests our heart and knows. Therefore, it is written in the Torah, “And he went, and he found, and he brought.”

Repairing the First Act of Stealing in the World

Reuven's deed is contrasted to that of Adam and Chava in the Garden. Why does the Torah tell us that Reuven picked the Dudaim in the time of the wheat harvest? “To tell the praise of the tribes, that it was the harvest time and he did not stretch his hands out in robbery to bring wheat and barley, rather only a *hefker* matter which people don't care about” (Rashi, *Bereishit* 30:14). What kind of praise is it to state that the holy tribes are not thieves? This alludes to the rectification of the first act of stealing in the world. Adam and Chava were alone in the world; everything in the Garden of Eden was theirs. Only one tree was withheld from them. They desired it and took what was not theirs. At that moment, they descended from their previous greatness and never ascended again. After 20 generations, one family spun a thread from three strands that will never be broken. Reuven, the first fruit of this family, rectified their sin. Nothing in the whole world belonged to him except for one weed. He held it in his

hand and desired it, but did not taste it although he saw that it was good, because the *tzaddikim* do not stretch out their hands in robbery.

Rectifying Eating from the Tree of Knowledge

The *gematria* of עץ הדעת טוב ורע / *chet etz hada'at tov v'ra* – The sin of the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil is the same as וַיִּמְצָא דוּדַיִם בְּשָׂדֵה וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל לֵאָה / *v'yimtza Dudaim b'sadeh v'yave otam el Leah* – “He found Dudaim in the field and he brought them to Leah.” The greatness of this act is depicted on the flag of Reuven in the form of a picture of the Dudaim. The good scent of the Dudaim, furthermore, attest to their rectifying the Tree of Knowledge, as this was the only sense not engaged in the sin of eating from the Tree. When Reuven brought the Dudaim to Leah his mother, she knew what he had brought her. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, transformed in the hand of her son to the fruit of the Tree of Life. Could Leah have brought Ya'acov a gift greater than this?

The Selfless Giving of a Mother

All Rachel cared about was to make Ya'acov happy. He was also a mother even before she had sons. When it states, “Rachel is crying for her children” (*Yirmeyahu* 31:14), it doesn't refer only to Yosef and Binyamin. All the twelve tribes are her sons. Even the barren women can be mothers. Rachel, our Mother, was a mother even before she gave birth to the fruits of her own womb. A mother is someone who gives everything she has to another. Rachel gave even motherhood to her sister in her great mercy. She had worked so hard on herself to accept that her womb was closed. To reach a place within herself where she was happy for the tribes born to Ya'acov, even if they weren't fruits of her own womb. She did not desire the blessings of the other wives of Ya'acov for herself. Because of her happiness for the children of Ya'acov's other wives, she is considered the mother of all his children. Therefore, Reuven's act of making his mother happy belonged to Rachel. Even her request of the Dudaim was an act of giving, “Therefore you will sleep with him tonight...” – “Please merit two extra tribes and burial at the Machpeleh with Ya'acov. May what is yours be yours, and also mine be yours.” Because of her selfless giving, all the glory of Reuven's Dudaim goes to Rachel.

Rectifying Esau's Selling His Birthright

Now we begin to understand the value of the Dudaim and what they represent. Leah gained the tribes and the burial in the Machpelah but lost the Dudaim. They are not called in her name but in the name of Rachel, for she was the mother of the mothers. The deed of Rachel parallels Reuven's deed of rectifying eating from the Tree. All she cared about was giving pleasures to others without taking for herself. She cared more about the long-term result, than instant gratification. She gave up quantity for quality. Rachel wanted to unify with Ya'acov in the highest deepest way. For this she was willing to sacrifice everything to her sister. What was important to Leah, on the other hand, was to use every single opportunity and each current moment to serve Hashem. If she had an opportunity now to serve Hashem, she would do it promptly and willingly without thinking about the future consequences. The approaches of the two sisters represent two legitimate Torah paths. Both of the sisters acted out of love. Through the Dudaim deal they were doing a replay of the selling of the birthright. Leah's selling of the Dudaim enacts a *tikun* (rectification) for Esau's selling his firstborn right. Esau said, “Behold I am going to die, so what is this birthright to me” (*Bereishit* 25:32). He

despised his future spiritual opportunity in order to indulge in physical pleasures. Leah took Esau's cleaving to the present moment for the sake of taking instant gratification for himself and raised it up to become cleaving to the present for the sake of giving Hashem gratification by serving him. Esau was asking for הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הָאָדָם /*ha'adom ha'adom haze* – "this red, red." The word אָדָם/*adom* has all the letters of the word דִּדָּאִים/*dudaim*. The additional letters of Dudaim are יָד/*yad* – The hand – with which you can either take or give! By giving Rachel the Dudaim in order to perform a mitzvah with her husband that night, Leah rectified Esau's sin of relinquishing his birthright and spiritual future, through his desire for instant physical gratification. Rachel, too, had part of this rectification, by giving up everything for her sister, even the extra tribes and burial for the sake of giving pleasure to Ya'acov.

The Dudaim Deal and David's Mother

An additional secret can be gleaned from the word דִּדָּאִים/*dudaim*, you can unscramble this word to become אִמְ דָּוִד /*im David* – meaning the condition of David. Through the Dudaim Deal, David and the Mashiach were conceived. Another way to read the same words is *Em David* – the Mother of David. Through the Dudaim exchange, Rachel became the mother spiritual mother of David. Now we can finally answer our original question, what is the big deal about the Dudaim? How can they outweigh two extra tribes and burial with Ya'acov in the Machpelah? While Leah gained these abovementioned blessings, Rachel gained the merit of becoming the spiritual mother of David and the Mashiach. In Rachel's merit Hashem will ingather the exiles and bring the redemption (*Midrash Eichah Rabbah, Introduction 24*), May it be speedily in our days!