

## *Parashat Vayetze*

### Sister-Heart Protects the People of Israel

#### Sisters are Called to Bridge the Schisms of the World

In last week's *parasha* we discussed the reconciliation between the two brothers, Ya'acov and Esav, whose hatred toward Ya'acov is eternal. This week highlights the even deeper relationship between the sisters Rachel and Leah. The foundation of the Jewish people is rooted in perfecting relationships between brothers and sisters. Parallel to the birth of the tribes of Israel, the Torah depicts the love and self-sacrifice between their mothers. Likewise, the rebirth of the tribes during the final redemption depends on rectifying our relationships and repairing the fragmentation of our people.

I thank Hashem for the most wonderful sister in the world, whom I deeply treasure. In some ways, I feel even closer to her than to my own husband. Since we grew up together as the branches of the same tree, we know each other so deeply. Over the years, we have been the greatest support for one another through thick and thin. We both admire and respect each other greatly and are able to mutually learn and grow from one another. My relationship with my sister is everything to me. I would move mountains for her and change myself 180 degrees. The relationship with my sister as two equals is especially important to me since in my role as mentor and teacher, most of my relationships are with women who come to me for help and guidance. Therefore, it is essential for me to have an equal relationship with my sister where we work things out even when we disagree. Like Rachel and Leah, my sister and I are in many ways opposite personalities who complement each other. Whereas I'm more of an outgoing leader type, the wisdom of my sister, which I hold in such great esteem, is more inwardly meditative and reflective. I have a favorite knitted sweater, which I call my Rachel-Leah sweater because half of it was knitted by my sister, and the other half by me. This sweater symbolizes for me the most rectified relationship of sisters enacted by Rachel and Leah who bridged the source of divisiveness in the world – the division between heaven and the earth, between the waters above and the waters below. Rachel and Leah affected each other to the greatest extent. Leah, who originally cried her eyes out in her inner world of prayer, became revealed in the world as the endeared wife of Yisrael and the happy mother of sons, whereas, Rachel the outgoing leader who originally embodied the physical external world, learned to cry internal tears from Leah. These heartfelt tears will ultimately return the exiles to the land, as it states, "Rachel cries for her children...they will return to their boundaries" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:14-16).

#### Women are Masters of Relationships

We women are masters of relationship. Connecting to others on the deepest level is most women's highest aspiration, as sisters, wives and mothers. The spiritual energy created by true loving bonds generates spiritual unifications, which in turn reflect their light on the physical reality within our land. According to Arizal, everything that takes place in the world and especially in connection with the Land of Israel is a reflection of underlying spiritual relationships. Blessings come into the physical world as a result of unifications in the spiritual world. There are endless spiritual relationships interconnected with relationships we experience among ourselves.

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

These relationships are both reflected on a national level within our people, on a personal level as mothers, daughters and sisters and within our marital relationship – a reflection of our relationship with the Divine. Redemption takes place in the merit of the righteous women who strive toward perfection in relationship. This explains how the Jewish women are praised for bringing about the redemption from Egypt. A deeper understanding of the underlying feminine spiritual forces connecting us to the Land of Israel will with Hashem's help enable us to find our own place in the unfolding of redeeming the Land.

### Allowing Your Sister to Change You

The opposing personalities of Rachel and Leah, and their incredible teamwork in overcoming the obstacles of jealousy and competition while each allowing her sister to ultimately change her, gives us the clue to repairing the spiritual root of the rift between the people of Israel and our land. Rachel and Leah in their soul-work and spiritual struggle, allowed themselves to be affected by one another and reverse their natural tendencies "He loved Rachel – the revealed world, but Leah was the hidden world" (Arizal, *Sefer Etz Chaim* 38:2). Both Rachel and Leah met each other in the middle ground halfway between hidden and revealed. We as women can tap into the *tikun* of Rachel and Leah in order to rebuild the land of Israel. The greater each partner in the relationship is able to change herself toward the other, the greater the relationship. If you are naturally outgoing, strong and opinionated while your sister is quiet and shy, in a rectified relationship you learn to tune down your own voice and become more reflective and understanding of your sister's perspective. Likewise, she will learn from her outspoken sister how to articulate her feelings and express herself clearly.

### Building the House of Israel through Rectified Relationship

The process of overcoming internal emotional struggle between Rachel and Leah was not easy. Rachel and Leah had very different and opposite natures from the very beginning. Rachel was outgoing, beautiful and strong. She was used to getting her way and having others cater to her needs. Leah was more introverted and eager to please. Through her difficult relationship with her sister Leah, Rachel was able to perfect her nature. In her love for her sister, Rachel overcame her own tendency of jealousy and handed over the secret signs she had with Ya'acov to Leah, thus sacrificing everything that clearly was coming to herself. (*Metzudat David, Yirmeyahu* 31:15). Rachel hadn't expected then this situation where she remained barren while her sister enjoyed motherhood and the stronger connection with Ya'acov through her children. This test was harder than she could bare, stretching her beyond the limit, and she succumbed to a tinge of jealousy. When Leah bares one child after the other to Ya'acov, Rachel is overcome by her old jealousy that she seemingly had conquered when she allowed Leah to become Ya'acov's wife (*Bereishit* 30:1). Rachel felt that she was on the brink of death unless she too would bear Ya'acov sons (*ibid.*). However, she was able to do a *tikun* to the extent that she went to the other extreme by not being jealous even at her maidservant. After being admonished by Ya'acov, she looked into herself and rectified her tinge of jealousy by giving Ya'acov her maidservant Bilha as a wife (*Bereishit* 30:3-4). The birth of Bilha's second son Naftali completed this rectification process. This explains the rather obscure exclamation with which Rachel named Naftali.

## Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

**בְּרַאשֵׁית לַיַּחַד וַתִּאְמַר רַחֵל נִפְתְּוֹלִי אֱלֹהִים נִפְתְּלָתִי עִם אָחֹתִי גַם יָכַלְתִּי וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ נִפְתְּלִי:**  
 “With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister and I have prevailed” (*Bereishit* 30:8).

The inner struggles that Rachel had gone through by means of her sister Leah ultimately refined her nature. All the difficulties she has experienced through her relationship with her sister thus serves the purpose of making Rachel overcome herself in order to reach perfection of character. The more difficulties we may have relating to another person, the more opportunity we have to grow specifically through this very relationship. It is this insight that prompted Rachel to call Bilha's second son Naftali – I became strengthened through my sister, like two people who wrestle and help each other thereby. Like a string that is made up of two strings, it becomes stronger when it is twisted. (Radak, *Bereishit* 30:8) Going through the process of overcoming the difficulties between them enabled the sisters to connect with holy connections (Rashbam, *Bereishit* 30:8). This spiritual work laid the foundation for the offspring of the two sisters to become one unified nation of Israel. As in the case of Rachel and Leah, the underlying problem between most sisters is some kind of deep-seated jealousy, which can only be overcome by profound self-awareness, deep emotional work, followed by rectified action. This is why, “it is impossible to build the house of Israel except through both Rachel and Leah”... (*Arvei Nachal, Parashat Miketz* based on *Ruth* 4:11).

### Rectifying Relationships by Meeting in the Middle

“The feet of Leah ensconce (is clothed) within the crown of Rachel” (*Etz Chayim, Sha’ar* 38, Chapter 3). The complete building of the relationship with the Land of Israel is a relationship with both Leah and Rachel simultaneously – including both the hidden spiritual world and the revealed physical world. The spiritual relationship of hidden Torah and inner thoughts must unite with the physical relationship of working and building the land. Without going into the scope of the difficult topic of polygamy in the Torah, I want to venture to explain why Ya’acov, our father, was meant to marry the two sisters, Rachel and Leah. From all our holy fathers only Ya’acov retains two names. The reason for this is that Ya’acov corresponds to the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, which has two aspects. The upper aspect of *Tiferet* corresponds to Yisrael, while the lower aspect to Ya’acov. Matching each of these aspects of himself, Ya’acov needed to marry both Rachel and Leah (*Imrei Noam on the fifth day of Chanukah*). Before Ya’acov became Yisrael he was unable to relate to Leah but connected with Rachel in the deepest way. After struggling with Esau’s arc angel and receiving the name of Yisrael he rose to the level of Leah. The relationship that needs the greatest work is always the holiest. Therefore, the rectified relationship between Yisrael and Rachel corresponds to the generation who enters the Land of Israel. The land is the embodiment of Rachel, and Israel is Yisrael (*Arizal, Sefer HaLikutim, Parashat Beshalach* 18). The only way Yisrael who stands on the top of the ladder would be able to connect with Rachel at the foundation of the ladder would be through her relationship with Leah whose feet touches the crown of Rachel. In order for the *zivug* of Yisrael and Rachel to be complete, Rachel must approach Yisrael by extending herself into the point where she and Leah was able to meet. Likewise, Yisrael must approach Rachel by extending himself into the point of his *zivug* with Leah where Leah meets Rachel. In this way, the unification of Yisrael and Rachel is the highest unification because it includes the sisterly relationship of Rachel and Leah within it.

## Overcoming Spiritual and Physical Enemies in the Merit of Rachel and Leah

In these redemptive times, we lack neither physical nor spiritual enemies. Our spiritual enemies who want to strip us of our true belief and culture, by enticing us to exile and assimilation correspond to Leah, whereas our physical enemies who threaten our very lives correspond to Rachel. Moav, the antithesis to the Jewish people, includes both Bilam and Balak, and thus represents both kinds of enemies. בִּלְעָם/Bilam and בָּלָק/Balak together makes up the accumulative *gematria* (numerical value) of רַחֵל/Rachel and לֵאָה/Leah, which is 274 עֵדֶר/eder – flock (the flock of Israel). Rachel 238 + Leah 36 = 274 Balak 132 + Bilam 142 = 274. This concept is alluded to in the following Torah verse,

ספר שמות פרק טו:טו אַז נִבְהָלוּ אֱלֹופֵי אֲדוֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֶאֱחָזְמוּ רַעַד נִמְגּוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי כְּנָעַן:

“Then the chiefs of Edom shall panic; the mighty men of Moav, trembling (רַעַד/*ra'ad*) shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away” (*Shemot* 15:15).

Moav wages war with Israel both through the spiritual and physical weapons. This corresponds to the two kinds of service in Israel, the aspect of action – Rachel and the aspect of thought/speech. – Leah. Balak's deeds was in physical warfare from the other side of Rachel. Whereas, Bilam wanted to curse Israel in thought, and speech, the other side of Leah. In Moav both Balak and Bilam joined together to stand against Israel. However, they were unable to prevail due to the eternal bonds of Rachel and Leah which preceded them. Because Balak and Bilam consist of the *gematria* of עֵדֶר/eder, their punishment is through letters trembling – רַעַד/*ra'ad*, with the exact same letters (*Agra d'Kalah*, 179b).

## Expressing True Love in Relationships on All Levels

Through the rectified relationship between Rachel and Leah, none of our archenemies will be able to attack us as they each only have the ability to overcome us either physically or spiritually. When our Torah learning and spirituality is united with our physical mitzvot in the Land, then our spiritual enemy will be deterred by our physical strength, while our physical enemy by our spiritual shield. The foundation of *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) within the Jewish people as a whole, is reunification of the two main tenants of the *bayit* of Israel – the children of Rachel with the children of Leah. Redemption depends on repairing the schism within the Jewish people, rooted in the division between the sons of Rachel and Leah. The character building work of rectifying our relationship with our sisters has repercussion toward repairing the breach between the different factions of our people, between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, *Chareidim*, and “settlers,” religious and non-religious, Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora. We will be able to bring peace to Israel when we are able to perfect and express our relationship to others on the deepest level as sisters, wives and mothers. Any kind of relationship where we express pure love enacts rectification beyond boundaries. The spiritual energy created through this pure love generates spiritual unifications that elicit the Divine flow effecting shalom in our Land. Therefore, redemption will take place in the merit of the righteous women who overcome jealousy, indifference, anger, power-struggle and fear to express true love in relationship on all levels.