

Ya'acov's Toil to Deserve His Wives

Haftorat Parashat Vayetze

Hoshea, Chapter 12:13-14:10

In my commentary on this week's haftorah I discuss the hard work of Ya'acov for his wives according to both the simple meaning (peshat), midrash and Kabbalah. According to the basic understanding, Ya'acov's toil for the sake of his wives was a great heroic deed that we should emulate. It may seem at first glance as if the mystical level contradicts this but in the end you will see that also according to Kabbalah, it was only through this hard, even excessive, work that Ya'acov was able to do a tikun (rectification) for Adam, and rescue his seed from the captivity of the serpent.

Willingness to Work Hard to Deserve His Wife

This week's *Haftorah* (according to the Ashkenazim) opens with a verse that pertains directly to women, "Ya'acov fled to the land of Aram, and [there] Israel worked for a wife, and for a wife he guarded" (*Hoshea* 12:13). Why does the prophet mention that Ya'acov/Israel both "worked for a wife" and "guarded" for a wife? According to the *peshat* (simple meaning), after Ya'acov had worked seven years for Rachel, but received Leah in her place, he had to continue to guard Lavan's flock for an additional seven years in order to "earn" Rachel. The fact that Ya'acov worked so hard in order to receive his wives, teaches us how high the woman is regarded in the Torah. A man needs to prove himself worthy to deserve a wife. Perhaps the archetypal killing of the dragon, for the sake of receiving the hand of the princess, derives from the story of Ya'acov, who with great *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) rescued Rachel and Leah from the evil Lavan. Also today, a man needs to appreciate the worth of his woman, and be willing to toil hard in order to deserve her. This is contrary to the attitude of certain men nowadays. A dating couple once came to me for advice. The man felt that in order to be ready to commit to marriage, he needed the woman to prove herself worthy, by helping him build up his business. This man ought to learn from Ya'acov, and regard the woman in a positive light, to the extent that he would feel the need to prove himself worthy of her. Women too, need to build up their self-confidence. Especially women, who have been abused, may have such a low self-image, that others can easily take advantage of them. Working on ingraining the self-image of a *bat melech* (princess) within themselves, will help them realize that they are entitled to a husband, who is willing to work hard for them. Being ready like Ya'acov, to go into hardship, and give up so much for the sake of meriting his bride, is a prerequisite for *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) as it helps the husband continue to appreciate his wife, throughout their subsequent marriage.

Keeping the Mitzvoth with the Help of His Wife

We find a homiletic interpretation of the above mentioned verse by Rabbi Avraham Shapira in *Sefer Ohr HaMeir*. He explains that working/serving (*avad*) refers to keeping the positive mitzvot while guarding (*shamar*) refers to avoiding (guarding oneself from) transgressing the negative mitzvot. The Hebrew prefix used in "for a wife" is the "beit" which also means "in" or "with." Ya'acov could only keep the mitzvot, both positive and negative, together with his wives, as it is the wife who enables a man to serve Hashem to the best of his capacity. In addition to those mitzvot, which are impossible to keep without a wife such as "be fruitful and multiply" (*Bereishit* 1:28), the wife also polishes the diamond of

her husband's character. She challenges him to reach his highest potential, becoming a more sensitive and caring person. She also guides him to leaving the old ways behind and encourages him to focus on his mission. For example, in this week's *Parashah* Rachel and Leah tell Ya'acov with one voice: "...now then, whatever G-d has said to you, do!" (*Bereishit* 31:16). Even today, most men need the support of their wives to keep the mitzvot, including the mitzvah of setting aside fixed times for Torah learning.

A Spark of Ya'acov's Spirit Guarded within His Wife

According to *The Gate of Reincarnation* by the Ariza"l, our verse includes a deep secret about soul reincarnations. Ya'acov, our father, worked fourteen years for Lavan "for a wife" – in order to marry his daughters. However, why did Ya'acov have to herd the sheep of this evil Lavan for so many years, rather than just trusting more in Hashem, who, had promised him, "I will never leave you..."? (*Bereishit* 28:15). According to Ariza"l's kabbalistic interpretation, the consequence of Ya'acov's subjugating himself to Lavan, and working so hard to marry his daughters, is alluded to in the last part of our verse, "For [In] a wife [he was] guard[ed]". As we mentioned, the prefix "beit" used in "for a wife" also means "in." Thus Arizal explains that a spark of Ya'acov's soul was guarded within his wife.

Avigail – Soul-reincarnation of Ya'acov's Spirit

The first time a man has relations with his wife, he places a spirit (אור) within her. Ya'acov, therefore, placed one spirit within Rachel and one within Leah. The spirit within Rachel was transferred to her son Binyamin, when she died in childbirth. Therefore, he was born the moment Rachel's soul departed. However, the spirit that Ya'acov had placed within Leah, was reincarnated in Avigail the prophetess, Naval's wife. This originally male spirit was transformed into a female, because Ya'acov worked so hard for Lavan, for the sake of a wife. Therefore, the spirit that Ya'acov deposited within Leah was guarded literally within a woman – Avigail. This is the secret of Avigail's speech to David, "Now this blessing which your maidservant has brought (*hevi*) to my lord..." (1 *Shemuel* 25:27). By not using the feminine form of the verb *heviah*, she alludes to the fact that the root of her soul was masculine rather than feminine. Her husband Naval, was the reincarnation of Lavan. Their names consist of the exact same letters, (*lamed*, *beit* and *nun*). As a consequence of Ya'acov working excessively for Lavan, part of his spirit was reincarnated in Avigail, who married Naval, in order to now serve him as a wife serves a husband. This was a replay of Ya'acov's serving Lavan for the sake of a wife in their previous reincarnation.

Rescuing Rachel, Leah and Avigail from the Primordial Serpent

The real secret behind all these reincarnations is that Ya'acov's soul emanated from Adam the first man (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 84a*). From Adam, two holy drops of seed, which were to become Rachel and Leah, fell into the captivity of the primordial serpent. Ya'acov needed to work guarding Lavan's sheep for all these years, until he was able to recover these two holy drops from Lavan, whose soul derived from the serpent. Only then, was he able to rescue Rachel and Leah, from the captivity of their serpent father. Ya'acov's hard work for Lavan had repercussions for many generations, and impacted King David, who was also a reincarnation of Adam. It was Ya'acov's work that empowered David to rescue Avigail from the power of the primordial serpent, personified as Naval, the reincarnation of Lavan. This was the completion of *tikun* for Adam to return his holy drops from the other side. (Ariza"l, *The Gate of Reincarnation*, Introduction thirty six). May we merit that our hard work too will engender *tikunim* (rectifications) and speed up our final redemption!