

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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10 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYETZEI

(Not) Together Forever

And it was when Yaakov saw Rochel...Then Yaakov kissed Rochel and he raised his voice and wept (29:10-11).

Yaakov Avinu, having traveled quite a distance to meet his future wife, reacts in a very unusual manner upon first seeing Rochel: He begins to cry in a very loud voice. Rashi, noting that this seems rather odd, explains that Yaakov cried because he saw through the divine spirit that Rochel would not be buried alongside him (29:11).

But why would Yaakov be preoccupied by the idea of not being buried together on the day he first meets his wife? It would seem that Yaakov Avinu had far more pressing issues to overcome in the immediate future: he was destitute, had a devious Uncle Lavan, a brother who had proclaimed his intent to kill him, etc. So why was Yaakov worrying about their separate burial locations - events far removed in the future - at this time?

Perhaps even more perplexing: Rashi, in *Parshas Vayechi* (48:7), relates how Yaakov explains to his son Yosef that he should not be upset with him for not burying his mother Rochel in Beis Lechem because he buried her there at the direction of the divine word of Hashem: "So that she should be of aid to her children when the Nebuzadran would exile them; (as they are leaving Eretz Yisroel) they would pass by her grave and Rochel would emerge from her grave and cry and seek Divine mercy for them..."

Thus, it was necessary for Rochel to be buried by the side of the road in order to come out and daven as her descendants passed by her grave. But if this is the reason she needed to be buried there

then why did Yaakov cry - Rochel was obviously never intended to be buried next to him in Chevron anyway! Furthermore, Rashi, on the words "He shall not live" (31:32), explains that Yaakov inadvertently cursed Rochel and this is what caused her to be buried by the side of the road. But this seems to be a direct contradiction to the reason that Yaakov gave his son Yosef!

The Jewish view of marriage is one of an eternal union

The answer to these questions lies in the fundamental understanding that the Jewish view of marriage is one of an eternal union. As explained in earlier editions of INSIGHTS, the primary method of how a woman becomes betrothed to a man is learned from the story of how Abraham acquired a burial plot for his deceased wife Sarah. He wasn't buying one plot, he was plots for both of them. In fact, the Torah calls the city Kiryat Arba because of the four couples that are buried there (Rashi on 23:1). It isn't eight individuals; it's four merged couples. This is the Jewish view of what a marriage is supposed to be.

Yaakov was devastated when he saw through *Ruach Hakodesh* that he wouldn't be buried together with his soulmate Rachel because this indicates that their union wouldn't be perfect. A defect in their union would be very painful and obviously have repercussions throughout



the marriage.

We find a fascinating concept by Yaakov Avinu. Rashi, in *Parshas Vayechi* (49:33), quotes the Gemara (*Taanis* 5b) that Yaakov never really died. In fact, according to the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 92:2), Yaakov was actually standing there when Bnei Yisroel left Egypt. Even though the Torah explicitly says that he was embalmed and buried in Chevron, apparently he wasn't physically bound by his death. In all likelihood, if Yaakov and Rochel would have had a perfect merged identity, it seems very possible that Rochel could have had the same quality of not being really dead. In other words, she could have been buried in Chevron and still gone out to the side of the road to pray for her children when they needed her.

This is why Yaakov Avinu was sobbing loudly when he first met Rochel. He understood from the outset that they would not share that eternal bond. Their brief marriage, which ended upon the sudden death of Rochel, also ended their connection and the potential for an eternal relationship. This is why Yaakov was exceedingly distraught when they first met.

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Family Matters

And Yaakov said to his brethren “gather stones...” (Bereishis 31:46)

Rashi (ad loc) comments, “this refers to his sons who were as brothers to him, standing by him in his troubles and wars.” Rashi’s explanation seems a little difficult to understand; if the Torah meant to say his sons why are they referred to as “his brothers”?

Rashi is highlighting how Yaakov interacted with his children. Often parents treat their adolescent children as employees they can order around—and that’s on a good day. On a bad day, they tend to treat them as indentured servants (“take out the garbage!” or “get me a beer!” etc.). Rashi is telling us that Yaakov Avinu treated his adolescent children as

one would treat siblings: in other words, as equals. This is what spurred them to stand by him during his troubles and throughout wars. It’s no wonder then that Yaakov’s legacy was considered complete (see Rashi 35:22) and all of his children were righteous. This also explains Rashi’s comment in *Parshas Vayechi* (49:24) on the words “*even Yisrael*” – foundation of

Israel. There Rashi says that the word “*even*” is a contraction of the words “*av*” and “*bonim*” – “father and sons.” In other words, the foundation of the Jewish people is built on the strength of the relationship between Yaakov and his children; that of a healthy relationship between a father and his sons.

Did You Know...

In this week’s *parsha*, Reuven brings his mother Leah *dudaim*, a special plant (30:14-15). Rochel desires to have it and so she offers to trade her right to be with Yaakov that night in exchange for the *dudaim*, which Leah readily accepts. What exactly was this plant, and why was it so desirable?

While Rashi (ad loc) intimates that this is an herb, perhaps jasmine, both *The Living Torah* (by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan) and the *Midrash Rabbah* (72:2) indicate that this plant is the mandrake. The mandrake is a very interesting plant; here are some facts (and different opinions) about it:

1. It was called this because of its use as a fertility potion (*Zohar* 1:156b).
2. Its roots resemble a person, ranging from a head and arms, to just the legs.
3. The Ibn Ezra writes that they smell really nice (*Shir Hashirim* 7:14).
4. In the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 99a), they seem to argue whether he brought home its violet flowers, the fruits, or the roots.
5. According to one source (*Tzava’as Yissachar* 2:6) Rachel didn’t eat the mandrakes, but offered them to Hashem. Well it turns out that it’s a

good thing she didn’t because...

6. All species of mandrakes are narcotics and contain, in particular the root and leaves, poison. This poison includes an anticholinergic (which can lead to asphyxiation), a hallucinogenic, and can even cause a hypnotic effects. If a large amount is taken, it can also cause delirium and madness. However, used properly, it can be used to treat certain ailments.
7. The variety found by Reuven was a rare, extinct species that gives off a smell that kills anyone when pulled from the ground (*Midrash Aggadah* and *Toldos Yitzchak* on 49:14)
8. Alternatively, lore says that if you pulled it from the ground it would scream, killing anyone who heard it. This depiction of them appears in many ancient sources, including Josephus (*Wars* 7:6:3) who states that “it refuses to be taken quietly” and explains how to remove it properly without dying.
9. This might sound familiar to fans of the Harry Potter series, as the author seems to have taken every aspect of this unusual plant, without practically changing anything about it, and incorporated it into her second book.



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