

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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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 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 buying plots for both of them. In fact, the Torah calls the city Kiryat Arba because of the four couples who 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 indicated that their union wouldn't be perfect. A defect in their union would be very



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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.

A Fate Worse Than Death

[...] and he [Yaakov] cried (29:10).

Rashi relates that Yaakov was saddened by the fact that he came searching for a wife empty handed in contrast to Eliezer who, when he went to find a wife for Yitzchak, came bearing many gifts. This was because Elifaz, the son of Eisav, pursued him on the orders of his father to kill Yaakov. But Elifaz, who was “raised on the lap of Yitzchak,” did not want kill Yaakov. As Elifaz was conflicted, he asked Yaakov, “What should I do about my father’s command?” Yaakov responded, “Take all my possessions, I will be impoverished and a poor person is considered as if he is dead.” Obviously, Elifaz couldn’t return to his father and outright lie by saying that he killed Yaakov because the truth would come to light eventually. This being so, even if

technically he didn’t violate his father’s command, how could this scheme possibly satisfy Eisav?

There is a well-known maxim in Judaism; “He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed his blood” (*Baba Metzia* 58b). The Gemara continues, “all who descend into *Gehenna* eventually leave. Except for one who publicly shames his neighbor.”

This is quite remarkable. The ultimate punishment for embarrassing someone is worse than the punishment received for killing him! How is this possible? Rabbeinu Yonah in his famous work explains that the pain of shame is even worse than death itself (*Shaarei Teshuva* 3:139).

The reason is quite obvious. When one kills someone the pain caused, while severe, is temporal. In contrast, when one suffers a deep humiliation the pain is replayed in their mind constantly and endured for a lifetime. This, in effect, causes a much greater emotional trauma to the victim than the pain of non-existence and therefore merits a much greater punishment.

This fact is demonstrated as Yaakov was so pained by the fact that he was penniless and had nothing to offer as a gift to his future wife that he cried. Clearly, Elifaz felt that Eisav would be satisfied with the continuous humiliation of Yaakov.

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 Yisroel” – 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.



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