

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES

Parshas Toldos

November 27, 2003

In Loving Memory of
Simcha Chaiya Bat Dada a'h
May Her Nishamah Have an Aliyah

Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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The Linkage between the Demise of Sarah our Matriarch and the Akeidah

The Focus of Avraham and Sarah

One's Questions are a Reflection of One's Perspective

The Consequence of Spiritual Blockage

One's Behavior is a Reflection of What One Understands

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Yad Avraham Institute
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B"H

Parshas Vayeitzei

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*
Dean

1. Truth Defined by the Torah

The Torah tells us that in order for Yaakov to receive the blessings from his father Yitzchak, he had to present himself as Esav. Yitzchak had intended to give the blessings to Esav; however, because Yaakov had initially legally purchased the birthright from Esav, he was the one who was deserving of them. Yaakov was instructed by his mother Rivka to receive the blessings from his father Yitzchak. Yaakov was concerned that he would be discovered by his father and seen as a “deceiver (*misateiah*).” Thus, he would receive a curse and not a blessing.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin explains that the word “*misateiyah*- (deceiver)” is the same word that identifies an idolater. The Gemara states, “Whoever twists his words (lying) is considered to be an idolater.” Thus when one speaks falsehood, it has (to a degree) the severity of idolatry, because idolatry is innately false. Because of the severity of lying, Yaakov was concerned that he would be cursed. Rivka reassured him not to be concerned saying, “**Your curse will be on me. My son; only heed my voice (to take the blessings)...**”

When Yaakov was instructed by his mother to take the blessings, he initially resisted her suggestion. Even after Rivka had reassured him that he should not be concerned, she reiterated to him that he must heed her voice. Why was Yaakov so reticent to take what was rightfully his? Yaakov’s difficulty was not receiving the blessing that was rightfully his, but rather, acquiring it in the guise of falsehood. In fact, we find that even when Yaakov presented himself to his father as Esav (the first born), the words that he had chosen to communicate with his father regarding his identity were not false. He was meticulously careful that his words were not untrue. For example, when he was asked by his father, “Are you my son?” He replied, “I”- meaning “I am, Esav is your first born.” Although Yitzchak’s understanding of Yaakov’s response was that he was Esav (his first born);

nevertheless, the words that were articulated by Yaakov were not words of falsehood.

Yaakov was the Patriarch who personified Torah study. The Torah refers to him as, “Yaakov, *ishe tam* (not adept in deception) who sits in the tent (of Torah).” King Solomon in Proverbs refers to the Torah itself as “truth” – as he states “Truth, you shall acquire – and do not sell it.” In order for Truth to be considered “Truth” it cannot be compromised to any degree. Thus, Yaakov who personified Torah/Truth, which is G’d’s wisdom, had difficulty of compromising his standard of truth even as much as an iota. Since Yaakov embodied truth, he had difficulty presenting himself as Esav.

Avraham, our Patriarch personified *chesed* (kindness). Yitzchak represented *din* (justice). Yaakov coalesced *chesed* and *din*, which creates the composite of *rachamim* (mercy). Why did Yaakov, the patriarch who personifies Torah/Truth assume the posture of *rachamim* (mercy) and not *din* (justice)?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that one is permitted to alter his speech in three instances – If one asks a Torah sage (who had studied many tractates), “Is it true that you have studied so many tractates?” The Torah sage is permitted to respond that he had not for the sake of humility. If one is hosted in an exceptional manner and is subsequently asked about the degree of hospitality, he is permitted to minimize the host. He is permitted to alter his words for the sake of this host – not to bring upon him the hardship of being inundated with guests. If an individual had a seminal discharge while sleeping in bed and caused the bedding to be soiled, when he is asked if he had slept there, he is permitted to respond in the negative. The Torah permits this so that he should not be embarrassed. Why is one permitted to alter his words if in fact what is being said is not true?

Truth is defined by the Torah. If the Torah permits or dictates a specific response or mode of behavior, then by definition it is correct because it

emanates from truth. Thus, if the Torah tells us that one is permitted to alter his words in certain circumstances, then it is not considered as something which is false. Thus, in order for Yaakov to attain the blessings, which were legally acquired, it is not considered engaging in falsehood when he presents himself as Esav before his father. Although Yitzchak was unaware that he was blessing Yaakov, Yaakov's actions (because they were justified and correct) were not considered false. Nevertheless Yaakov had to be compelled by his mother in this trickery because factually he was presenting himself in context of untruth.

Although Yaakov personified Torah, which is in its essence *emmes* (truth) and absolute truth connotes *din* (justice); nevertheless, Yaakov was the Patriarch who embodied *rachamim* (mercy). How do we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory concepts?

Justice is absolute and unwavering. However, Torah, although it is unadulterated Truth, dictates in many situations that *rachamim* (mercy) should be applied. Based on the Attribute of Justice/Din, one who is liable deserves to be punished without delay. However, the Torah dictates that there should be a stay of execution or other forms of Divine retribution in order to give the individual the opportunity to repent. This application of *Rachamim* emanates from Divine Understanding, which is G'd Himself who transcends the human intellect. Thus Yaakov, who was the embodiment of Torah, assumed the posture of *Rachamim/Mercy*. The Torah tells us that when Yaakov initially met Rachel, she had told him that her father, Lavan, was a charlatan and cannot be trusted. Yaakov responded to her, "I am his brother (in deceit)." Meaning, if Lavan deals with him deceitfully, he will respond in kind. If Yaakov's characteristic was Truth, who could he make such a statement? The Torah determines that one may assume a position which may seem contrary to Truth, but in reality it is an application of Truth as defined by the Torah. The Torah dictates that when one deals with a person such as Lavan, one is permitted to interact with him in a deceitful manner.

There are many instances where one may not appreciate basis for legal ruling rendered by a Torah sage. He may in fact consider the ruling unintelligible. However, it is important to understand that the basis and the context of that ruling is unrelated to the rational context of the human mind.

2. *The Subliminal Forces of Good and Evil*

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak re-dug the wells that had been dug by his father Avraham, that had been sealed by the Philistines. As a result of Yitzchak's digging new wells, conflict arose between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of Gerar.

The Torah states, **"Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Yitzchak's herdsmen saying 'The water is ours,' so he called the name of that well Esek because they involved themselves with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called its name Sitnah. He relocated from there and dug another well; they did not quarrel over it, so he called its name Rechovos, and said, 'Hashem has granted us ample space, and we can be fruitful in the Land.'"** One would think that the reason the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled over the wells was because it was typical to engage in battle over water in the Middle East, since water is scarce. The Torah speaks in a lengthy manner about the discovery and naming of new wells by Yitzchak in order to communicate a more profound understanding of the situation.

Ramban explains, "There is something that is concealed here. The Torah is revealing to us something that will take place in the future. The living wellspring of water (*be'er mayim chayim*) refers to the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) that will ultimately be built by the children of Yitzchak." It is interesting to note that Ramban does not say that the Temple will be built by the children of Yaakov. One would think that since Yaakov, the son of Yitzchak, fathered the Tribes of Israel, the building of the Temple should be attributed to him. Nevertheless Chazal associate the building of the Bais HaMikdash to the children of Yitzchak. How do we understand this?

Yitzchak is referred by the Torah as "*Ba'kol*-everything" (G'd blessed Avraham "*Ba'kol*"). He embodied the spiritual potential of the Jewish people for all time. While Yaakov was the Patriarch who actually fathered the Tribes, he was only able to do so because of the spiritual development, which manifested itself in Yitzchak, who was "*ba'kol*- everything." Thus, Chazal attribute the building of the Temple to the children of Yitzchak.

Ramban continues, "It is written in Yirmiyah, 'Hashem is the source of the living wellspring. Why was the first well called "Esek (involvement)"? It is because

there was much quarreling surrounding the First Temple until finally it was destroyed. The second well was called "Sitnah (hatred)" because the struggles and quarreling were more intense during the Second Temple period until it was destroyed. As it is written, "Achoshverosh (Persian Emperor) sent out letters of hate (sitnah) against Jerusalem/Jewish people through out the world. These letters of "sitnah" (hate) resulted in intense anti-Semitism and hatred of the Jewish people until the Romans ultimately destroyed the Second Temple. The exile which resulted from this was more severe than the first. The third well was called "rechovos (broadness)" because the Third Temple, which should be built speedily in our day, will come about without quarrel. Hashem will broaden the boundaries of the Jewish people." Why were the herdsmen of Gerar so intent about sealing the wells of Avraham and Yitzchak?

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh had summoned the midwives, Miriam and Yocheved, who were the sister and mother of Moshe. Chazal explain that the purpose of the summoning was to cohabit with them because after a man engages in sexual relations with a woman she becomes attached to him and can thus be influenced by him. Pharaoh wished to influence Miriam and Yocheved to kill the newborn Jewish children. They rejected his advances. Maharal of Prague zt'l asks, "Did Pharaoh actually wish to cohabit with the midwives with the intent to influence them? Was he aware of the fact that cohabiting with a woman causes her to be subject to the influence of the man? Pharaoh definitely did not have this in mind. He made advances towards them because of his own attraction to them. However that attraction was driven by the forces of evil, which are the undercurrent for the continuous struggle with the forces of good. In an attempt to destroy the Jewish people and negate holiness the evil forces compelled Pharaoh to desire the midwives to influence them to bring about the destruction of the Jewish people. He was driven by his evil essence and not his conscious mind.

The Gemara tells us that the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) is identified as the "*even ha'shesiya* – the sustaining stone" because the entire world is nourished and sustained through the Bais HaMikdash. All blessing emanates from there. In fact if the nations of the world understood this, they would have protected the Temple and not destroyed it.

The herdsmen of Gerar were motivated to want to fill in the wells of Yitzchak by the same evil influences that fueled Pharaoh's desire for the midwives. Water is the life source of physical existence. The simple

understanding is that the herdsmen wished to take control of the water for its physical benefits. However, from a spiritual perspective, water represents Torah and kiddusha (holiness). The Bais HaMikdash was the wellspring from which all kiddusha emanated. Thus, the Philistines sealed the wells in an attempt to eradicate and suppress holiness. Unbeknownst to them, their actions were to eradicate the Jewish people and the source of all blessing in the world on behalf of the evil forces. They did have hatred towards Yitzchak; however they did not understand the root of that hatred.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was told to destroy Midian, he told the Jewish people that they should "avenge G'd's vengeance in Midian." G'd said to Moshe, "what does the destruction of Midian have to do with My Vengeance? It is the vengeance of the Jewish People." Moshe responded, "Before the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, the nations of the world did not have this degree of animosity towards the Jewish people. It was only after we received Your Torah that they increased their level of hatred towards us because of our relationship with You. Thus, the basis of their hatred is our representation of G'd in the world. Thus it is the Vengeance of G'd against Midian."

The hatred for the Jewish people and their constant struggles with the nations of the world are rooted in the battle between Good and Evil. It is because the Jewish people represent G'dliness that we are the subject of intense hatred. However, when the building of the Third Temple will occur, it will come into existence without conflict or struggle because all mankind will accept upon themselves the dominion of G'd. My it be built speedily in our day.

3. The Balance Between Good and Evil

The Torah tells us that Yaakov our Patriarch had a prophetic dream on Mt. Moriah. He had seen angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven. Each of the angels that ascended and descended the ladder represented one of the exiles that the Jewish people were going to experience in the future. The Midrash states, "Rav Shmuel Bar Nachman says, 'These are the angels of the nations of the world. Yaakov was shown the archangel of Babylon. He ascended 70 rungs of the ladder and then he descended. (Indicating that the Babylonian exile was going to be 70 years). Yaakov was then shown the archangel of Persia (and Modai) which ascended 52 rungs before descending. The archangel of the Greeks ascended 100 rungs and then descended.

However, when Yaakov saw the archangel of the Edomites (Esav/Rome) it continue to ascend without any indication of descending. Yaakov upon seeing this was frightened. He said to G'd, "Is it possible that this angel will ascend without ever descending? (Indicating that the exile of Edom/Roman will be forever)." G'd responded, "My servant Yaakov, do not fear. Even if you will see him (the archangel of Edom) ascending up to the point that is next to Me, from there I will bring him down." As it is written, "If they rise like an eagle and perch among the stars, from there I (G'd) will bring them down." Meaning, G'd gives the nations of the world the capability to ascend even to the point where it appears that they are empowered to a degree that is no less than He is. G'd reassured Yaakov that this is only a perception but not a reality because G'd is the One who Wills their existence.

We read in the Torah that all humanity joined to build the tower (the Tower of Babel) in order to ascend to the heavens and engage G'd in battle. They actually believed they would be able ascend to a point where they could unseat topple G'd from the heavens. How could this even be considered? When G'd created existence, He Willed that the archangels representing the nations of the world should be able to ascend to a point where it would seem that they have parity with Him. This invariably led to a misconception that G'd was actually vulnerable and could be undermined.

The Gemara in Tractate *Yomah* tells us that the inclination for idolatry was such an overwhelming force at one time that it consumed most of humanity. The inclination for idolatry ravaged the spirituality of the Jewish people during the First Temple Period. It was even greater than the sexual drive. The Men of the High Assembly, fasted and prayed to G'd to allow them to destroy this inclination. The Gemara tells us that G'd responded to their prayers and thus a lion composed of fire exited from the Holy of Holies. They took this fiery lion that represented the inclination for idolatry and destroyed it. It is interesting to note that the Holy of Holies, the location of G'd's Presence, should be the location from which the inclination for idolatry should emanate. How does one understand this?

The Torah at the beginning of the Portion of Terumah enumerates the materials that were needed for the building of the Mishkan, "**Gold, silver, copper...and ram skins that are dyed red**". The *Yalkut* explains that gold is a representation of the Babylonian Empire. Silver represents the Persian Empire. Copper represents the Greek Empire and the ram skins, that were dyed red, is an

allusion to the Roman Empire (*Edom*) – as the Torah refers to Esav as "**red skinned**". Why do the four exiles need to be represented in the holiest location in existence –the Mishkan, which is the "dwelling place" of G'd's Presence in our midst?

Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah that the state of "tzaddik"/devoutly righteous and "rasha"/evil is not predestined but rather one has the ability to choose between good and evil. One is put at the equidistant point between the two extremes to be able to make the choice. Thus, man is pulled equally in both directions. In order to maintain the proper balance between good and evil, at whatever level "good" is represented, "evil" must have a similar level of representation. The Holy of Holies of the Mishkan, although it was the location of the Divine Presence, just as all "good" emanates from the holiness of that location, identically "evil" must be represented there. Thus, when the Men of the High Assembly prayed that the evil inclination should present itself to be destroyed it exited from the Holy of Holies.

The Egyptian people made the mistake, believing that the Jewish people were meant to be enslave forever because it was manifested in the stars/Zodiac. They believed that their deities paralleled the G'd of the Jews. This understanding was based upon the fact that G'd allows the archangels of the nations of the world to ascend even to the point that is parallel with Him. It was this misconception that ultimately led to destruction of the Egyptian people.

4. The Ramifications of Opportunities that Were Missed

The Torah tells us that Yaakov, our Patriarch experienced a prophetic dream on Mt. Moriah in which G'd showed him angels ascending and descending a ladder that extended into heaven. The Midrash explains, "G'd showed Yaakov the archangel of Babylon, Persia (Modai), the Greeks, and the Edomites ascending and descending. G'd said to Yaakov, 'You see all of them ascending – why do you not ascend?'"

The Midrash continues, "Yaakov was frightened saying, 'Just as the angels ascended the ladder they ultimately descended. Every ascent is accompanied with a descent. G'd said, 'Do not be concerned, if you ascend you will not descend.' Yaakov did not believe and he did not ascend. Because he did not believe, it was considered a failing. G'd said, 'If you would have ascended and believed (that you would not have fallen), you would have

never had a decline from that special level; however since you did not believe your offspring will be subjugated to the four exiles, taxes, and oppressions.” Yaakov asked, “Will this suffering be forever (because of my failing)?” G’d responded, “Ultimately, the Jewish people will be redeemed.”

It is interesting to note that the Midrash states that Yaakov “was afraid” and “he did not believe.” Thus, “he did not ascend.” Indicating, that the basis for his fear was due to his lack of faith. If Yaakov had trusted G’d, there was not reason to be frightened. How do we understand this?

The Torah tell us that when G’d told Avraham that he would have a son, “He believed” and it was considered a “righteousness.” How do we understand that a man such as Avraham, who had withstood many difficult tests and had succeeded, not believe G’d if He told Avraham that he would have a son? In addition, what is more difficult is that Avraham’s believing is considered a “righteousness.”

When the Torah tells us that “Avraham believed” we are not referring to his intellectual understanding of G’d’s promise of having a son, but rather, he internalized it to a point that it the equivalent of a reality for him. Thus, it was considered a “righteousness.” It was expected that Yaakov, when he was told to ascend and have no fear, was that he should have internalized G’d’s guarantee as being a reality. If that had been the case, there would have been no basis for him to be fearful of the future. Yaakov was concerned that he may fail because every human being is susceptible to spiritual failure. Regardless of what level of spirituality one attains, as long as he is alive, there is always a reality of spiritual decline. As we read in Pirkei Avos, “One should not believe in himself until the day that he dies.” Meaning, one cannot be assured that his spiritual status will remain permanent.

Regarding Yaakov, G’d had assured him not to be concerned about failure. However, Yaakov did not believe – and that was his failing. Had Yaakov believed, he as the Patriarch of the Jewish people, would have established a level of spirituality which could not be compromised. Thus, the Jewish people would have not been subject to the four exiles.

Similarly, the Torah tells us that despite the fact that G’d promised the Land of Canaan to Avraham and his offspring, he questioned and asked, “**Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit it?**” Avraham was concerned that perhaps G’d’s promise was contingent on the worthiness of his children. What would be if his children

were to sin? Would they not inherit the Land? This question was considered a lack of faith. Thus, the Jewish people were destined to be enslaved in Egypt. Had Avraham not questioned G’d, the Jewish people would not a purging in Egypt because their spirituality would have been intact.

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was in the desert shepherding the flocks of his father-in-law, he came upon a burning bush. Although it was burning, it was not consumed. As Moshe approached the bush, an angel told him not to come close. When Moshe realized that it was the Shechina (Divine Presence) he covered his face. Baal HaTurim states, “If Moshe had gazed upon the radiance of the Shechina and prayed for Mercy for the Jewish people, they would have not been subject to exile ever again. Because the bush symbolizes “I (G’d) am with them (the Jewish people) in their time of strife.” G’d had presented Moshe with a unique opportunity that would have guaranteed the future of the Jewish people. However, because he did not take advantage of it, by choosing to hide his face, the Jews were subject to all future exiles. The basis for Moshe not gazing upon the Divine Presence, was that he felt that he was not sufficiently worthy to gaze upon the Shechina.

Avraham’s own spirituality was at a level that if he had not questioned G’d, the Jewish people would have been at a more advanced level of spirituality – not requiring exile. However, because he was concerned that the Jewish people would sin, he created a deficiency in his own spirituality. Thus, causing his progeny to go into exile. Yaakov was told to ascend, but he was frightened that he would fail and therefore did not do so. Thus causing the Jewish people to be subjugated through the four exiles. Moshe was presented with the opportunity to gaze upon the Divine Presence and pray on behalf of the Jewish people. Because he felt that he was unworthy he did not. Thus causing the Jewish people to experience the exiles.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Ovadia the Prophet is referred to in a more praiseworthy manner than Avraham, our Patriarch. Ovadia is referred to in the verse, “He feared G’d very much.” However regarding Avraham he is referred to as- “He feared G’d.” How did Ovadia demonstrate his greater level of fear – “very much?” Ovadia was a courtier in the court of Achav, who was evil. His wife Ezevel had killed all of the prophets of G’d. Ovadia had risked his life by hiding and sustaining 100 prophets during this period of time. He had divided them into two groups of 50 – hiding each group in a separate cave. It was because of Ovadia’s selfless

sacrifice that prophecy was able to continue. Thus he merited to be acknowledged as a person who had an unusual level of fear of G'd. Ovadia had taken advantage of the unique opportunity that G'd had presented to him, despite all the danger. Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman z'tl (the Baltimore Rosh HaYeshivah) had said- "Similarly we must be continuously cognizant to take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves during our lifetimes because there are certain opportunities, which only present themselves once."

5. Yaakov's Initial Feelings Towards Leah

The Torah tells us that Yaakov worked seven years in the service of Lavan for the hand of Rachel in marriage. After Yaakov completed his seven years of dedicated labor, Lavan deceived Yaakov by switching his older daughter Leah in the place of Rachel. Yaakov only realized that he was deceived in the morning after he had consumed the marriage. Yaakov agreed to work an additional seven years for his father-in-law, Lavan, in order to marry Rachel. Although he was deceived, Yaakov retained Leah as his wife.

When Yaakov realized that it was Leah and not Rachel he did not dissolve the marriage. There is a principle in Jewish law that is known as "*mekach ta'us – an acquisition based on false pretenses*". The law dictates that under these circumstances a transaction/marriage is considered null and void. If this is the case then why did Yaakov retain Leah as his wife? It is even more difficult when we read that in fact Yaakov "disliked" Leah.

The Torah in the Portion of *Vayichi*, before the passing of Yaakov, he blessed his sons. Yaakov said to Reuven, his eldest son (from Leah), "**You are the first of my strength.**" Rashi in his commentary explains that although Yaakov was 84 years old when he married Leah, he had not ever during his lifetime wasted even a droplet of his semen. Therefore Reuven is referred to as, "**You are the first of my strength.**"

Despite the fact that the marriage to Leah was consummated under false pretences, Yaakov retained her as his wife. He understood that as a person who had never wasted his seed, G'd would not allow a situation to arise where he would cohabit with a woman who was not meant to be his wife. Therefore Yaakov did not send Leah away because he understood that this was the Will of G'd.

Regardless of Yaakov's understanding that his marriage to Leah was pre-destined, he nevertheless was displeased with her because she was agreeable to

participate in the deceit of her father. The Torah tells us that she was "despised by Yaakov."

Yaakov being the "*ish Emmes* – the man who personified Truth," had an aversion to anything that was not truthful. Truth cannot be compromised to any degree. He understood that the Jewish people needed to emanate from person who does not engage in falsehood. If the Matriarch, who would be the mother of the Jewish people, was deficient in the area of Truth, it would ultimately impact upon the spirituality of the Jewish people. As it states in the Gemara, "The signet of G'd is Truth." Therefore in order to establish a secure and proper relationship with Him, the Jewish people needed to descend from people who embody unadulterated truth. Since Leah entered into the marriage under false pretences, as a Matriarch, Yaakov despised her. He did not despise her as a person, but rather he despised her as the person who would be the cause of the spiritual future of the Jewish people to be compromised. G'd saw that Leah was despised and He wished to demonstrate to Yaakov that not only should she not be disliked, but rather, he should understand that she would be the primary Matriarch of the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that G'd allowed Leah initially to conceive because she was unloved by Yaakov. Upon the birth of her first three children, each of them was named by her in a manner which reflected her relationship with Yaakov, her husband. Upon giving birth to her fourth child, Yehudah, she had said, "**This time let me gratefully praise Hashem...**" Rashi cites Chazal who tell us that it was known to the Matriarchs that Yaakov would have twelve sons who would be the composition of the Jewish people. Yaakov, having four wives who would mother his children, believed that each would give birth to three sons. However, when Leah gave birth to a fourth son, it indicated that she was given "more than an equal portion." Thus, Leah gave special praise to G'd.

After giving birth to Yehudah, her fourth son, Leah took on a new dimension of value in Yaakov's eyes because he understood that she had greater worthiness than the ordinary Matriarch because she had taken more than her share. Although initially Yaakov's marriage to Leah came about under deceptive circumstances, G'd demonstrated to Yaakov that he should not be concerned because it was through Divine Providence that the events unfolded as they did.

6. Yosef the Son of Rachel

The Torah states, “...When Rachel had given birth to Yosef, Yaakov said to Lavan, ‘Grant me leave that I may go to my place and to my land...’” Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Rachel gave birth to the antagonist of Esav – Yosef, “Fire without a flame cannot affect something that is at a distance. However when Yosef was born, because he was the extension of his father Yaakov, who is compared to fire, he would be able to consume Esav, who is compared to straw. As the verse states, “The house of Yaakov is fire, the house of Yosef is a flame, and the house of Esav is straw.” At this moment Yosef was only a newborn child. How as an infant could Yosef be considered the “flame” that would consume Esav? Evidently his mere existence was sufficient to incapacitate and vanquish Esav. How is this so?

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra states, “The progeny of Esav could only fall by the hands of the progeny of Rachel.” The Gemara continues to explain that the Jewish people never engaged with Amalek (descendants of Esav) unless the progeny of Rachel were involved. For example, the first encounter with Amalek, who attacked the Jewish people in the desert (after leaving Egypt) was led by Yehoshua bin Nun, who was from the Tribe of Ephraim (which is Yosef). King Shaul, who was from the Tribe of Binyamin, fought in the second battle against Amalek, which took place in the Land of Israel. Why is the progeny of Rachel uniquely qualified to defeat the progeny of Esav?

The Torah describes at length the beauty of Rachel, our Matriarch. This is not to contrast her with Leah but rather to communicate to us a more profound understanding. Yaakov’s interest in Rachel as a wife was unrelated to her physical beauty. It was only her spiritual makeup that caused Yaakov to be attracted to her. If so, then why does the Torah discuss her physical beauty?

Despite the fact that she was uniquely beautiful – as the Gemara tells us that she was one of the four most beautiful women to ever live in existence- Rachel was the Matriarch of the Jewish people, which is functioning purely in a spiritual context. Although she had exceptional beauty, she was totally dedicated to her spirituality/G’d. Her physicality was only a means to a spiritual end. Yosef, her son, also had exceptionally beauty. His intellect transcended the human capacity – as Pharaoh had said, “The spirit of G’d is upon him.” As the Viceroy of Egypt, he dominated the most advanced civilization at the time. Despite his beauty and power he is identified as “Yosef ha’tzaddik (Yosef the righteous).” His totality of

existence was only a means to a spiritual end. He prepared the way for the Jewish people embark on their extended exile in Egypt. He engaged in the physical for the sake of the spiritual.

Esav personified physicality at the most exaggerated level. The Torah refers to him as, “the man of the field.” The Torah tells us that Esav, the physical being, could never have enough. As it is stated, “Esav said, “I have much” not as Yaakov had said, “I have it all.” If the focus of one’s life is the material one’s quest for physicality will always be short of its goal. He was the consummate hedonist who had no relevance to spirituality to any degree. Thus, his involvement in the physical was an end unto itself.

Yosef and Rachel both epitomized the ultimate in physical beauty and perfection. However, rather than succumbing to vanity and living a life of hedonism, they consecrated that exceptional beauty and physicality to the service of G’d. Yosef and Rachel subjugated and subordinated their beauty to spirituality. The fact that Rachel was able subjugate her beauty, which was unequaled in existence, indicated that she had the ability to dominate, subjugate and subordinate anything within the physical realm. This is why Esav, who represents the ultimate in physicality, is dominated and subjugated by the progeny of Rachel. Yosef was able to dominate Egypt, as its Viceroy, because he subordinated his own physicality to his spirituality. Thus, Egypt being the epitome of the physical, was dominated by him.