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Learning to See Leah

Why Ya'akov Needed to Become Yisrael

We learned in last week's *The Shoemaker Report* that Rachel never told Ya'akov the true story behind the events of his wedding night. She believed that if Ya'akov was meant to know, Hashem would have to reveal it to him, not her. She chose to wait, to trust, and to let the truth come out in its own time, in a way that would not hurt Leah.

Was her strategy effective? Did Ya'akov learn the truth on his own as Rachel believed he would, or did he not?

The Ya'akov of *Vayeitzei* is not the Ya'akov of *Vayishlach*. In *Vayeitzei*, Ya'akov is running, surviving, building a family, longing for Rachel, blind to Leah, and trapped in Lavan's web. But in *Vayishlach*, Ya'akov is wrestling with a *malach*, confronting Esav – confronting *himself* – becoming Yisrael, saying goodbye to Rachel, and ultimately seeing the world – and Leah – with fresh eyes. How did this transformation take place?

Although Ya'akov didn't understand it at the time, it began in the morning when he realized that he had married Leah (*Bereshit* 29:25): וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וַיֵּאמֶר אֵל-לָבָן מַה-זֹּאת וְהִנֵּה-הוּא לְאֵה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל-לָבָן מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרַחֵל עַבְדָּתִי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רָמִיתָנִי (And in the morning, behold, she was Leah! And he said to Lavan, What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why did you deceive me?) The Torah does not record him saying anything to Leah. Why did he confront Lavan instead of Leah? Because he saw that *she too* was shocked – not by being married to him, but by watching his shock at *her*. And that shook him. Although he couldn't understand it at the time, her reaction seemed authentic to him. She wasn't acting arrogantly. She looked hurt and confused. And that wasn't the reaction of a manipulator or a usurper.

Over the years, Ya'akov witnessed something else he could not ignore. Leah never tried to explain herself or justify her position – something guilty people typically do. Instead, what did he see? Child after child, she gave names reflecting her yearning for her husband's love (*Bereshit* 29:32-35): Reuven – maybe now my husband will love me; Shimon – Hashem sees that I am hated; Levi – now my husband will accompany me instead of Rachel. And then, with Yehudah, she thanked and praised Hashem! This was not the profile of a trickster. This was the voice of a woman yearning for love, carrying deep pain, yet sustained by her *emunah*.

But there was more. Ya'akov also personally experienced Lavan's deceptions – not ten times but one hundred times (see *Bereshit Rabbah* 74:3 on 31:7). So naturally he would have wondered: "If Lavan's nature is this deceptive, maybe he deceived Leah as well." And he saw that Leah never flaunted her position, never used it against Rachel. She remained humble, longing, and vulnerable. "Could this be the person who stole another woman's rightful place?" And finally, Ya'akov could not ignore Rachel's own conduct – her kindness toward her sister, even giving her the *simanim*.

Then came the night that forced pieces of the puzzle into place. Leah went out to meet Ya'akov in the field and said (*Bereshit* 30:16): אֵלֵי תָבוֹא כִּי שָׂכַר תִּכְרְתִּיהָ בְדוּדָאִי בְנִי (You must come to me, for I have surely bought you with the *duda'im* of my son). How humiliating for Leah – yet she was willing to say it. Ya'akov saw this – and it pained him to see it – that Leah had to resort to buying the privilege of being intimate with her husband. Her humility and *shiflut* were overwhelming to behold, but undeniably pure. That much he could see. He could see her vulnerability and the depth of her heart – and he also could see how much she loved him.

We know this moment humbled Ya'akov because this was the night when the soul of Yissachar was conceived – the tribe destined for Torah. All three of them aligned in supreme humility and *bitul*. Leah: "Although I am not loved, I yearn and am grateful. I will even humiliate myself for the sake of Heaven." Rachel: "Although I bear the suffering of barrenness, I will continue to sacrifice for my sister.

I will not demand anything or correct her misunderstanding." And Ya'akov: "Although my heart is with Rachel, I will act with compassion toward Leah in the face of Hashem's *hash-gachah*." Only such complete *shiflut* could draw down the soul of Yissachar. And this new humility in Ya'akov is what opened his eyes to ask the deeper question: "Why would Rachel do this? Why would she give up intimacy with me for *duda'im*?" And then he heard an echo from his wedding night – "Is this the same thing she did that night? Has she always put her sister above herself? If so ... then Leah might truly be innocent. Have I mis-



Ya'akov Becoming Yisrael at Beit-El

judged her for years?"

Now we reach *Parashat Vayishlach* and Ya'akov's wrestling with the *malach*. When the struggle ends, the *malach* announces (*Bereshit* 32:29): לֹא יִקְרָב יֵאמָר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעַם-אַנְשִׁים וְתוֹכָל (Your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov, but rather Yisrael, because you have overcome angels of Hashem [*Targum Yonatan*] and men, and prevailed). Why did the *malach* announce a name change he had no authority to make? And why did Hashem delay ratifying it?

The *malach* could see what now existed within Ya'akov. He had overcome Lavan, Esav, and even the *Yetzer ha-Ra*. The *malach* perceived the inner transformation, but he couldn't seal it. Only Hashem could do that. But why did Hashem wait?

The answer is stunning. Ya'akov had become Yisrael internally, but he had not yet embodied it *externally*. Something essential was missing. What? Ya'akov had not yet learned to see Leah.

He had defeated Lavan and Esav, but he still hadn't yet integrated the deepest demand of Yisrael – to see hidden greatness, especially in the one person he understood least. The transformation from Ya'akov to Yisrael was meant to be more than a name change; it was meant to be a new vision. And that vision was not yet com-

plete.

When did the vision finally crystallize? At the moment he put Leah and her children in front of Rachel and Yosef (*Bereshit* 33:2). It all came into focus. He now knew – deeply – that Leah had walked under that *chuppah* believing she was loved, believing she was the chosen one, and believing that her prayers had been answered. And Ya'akov realized how profoundly he had misread her. He could no longer put her behind Rachel. Not because he loved Rachel any less – but because he finally *understood* Leah. To place Leah behind Rachel now would have reinforced the same wrong stance he had held toward her for years. So he put Leah and her children first – not as human shields, but as an act of restored dignity to *his wife*. He was signaling that Leah was not the byproduct of Lavan's manipulation, but the foundational pillar of his home.

Yet Hashem still didn't call him Yisrael. Why not? Because Ya'akov had not yet accepted the full mantle of fatherhood. He needed to step into spiritual leadership for his sons – and that could only happen in the crucible of Shechem. Only after Ya'akov's passivity at Shechem nearly tore the family apart – the violence of his sons, the family's reputation in tatters, his own fear and paralysis – did Hashem summon him to Beit-El (*Bereshit* 35:1). Ya'akov had to return to the place where his exile began. And only there, with the inner turmoil resolved, could Hashem seal his identity (*Bereshit* 35:10): וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹקִים שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב לֹא-יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל (And G-d said to him, Your name Ya'akov – Your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov, but rather Yisrael will be your name, and He called his name Yisrael).

What happens *immediately* afterward? Rachel goes into labour, dies, and is buried on the roadside (*Bereshit* 35:16-20). Not at the border; not as they enter the land. But *right after* Hashem renames Ya'akov Yisrael. This is no coincidence. This is *hash-gachah*. Rachel must step aside – *one final time* – so that Leah can step forward. Not as a rival, but as Ya'akov's destiny.

So we return to the question: Did Ya'akov learn the truth on his own, as Rachel believed he would? Absolutely. And that is the deepest confirmation of Rachel's *emunah* – that truth does not need to be forced; it only needs to be placed in the hands of Heaven.

And that becomes our personal *avodah* as well. We do not need to try to convince others of our innocence or force others to understand us. Like Rachel, we are asked to place truth into Hashem's hands. In time – perhaps long after we have passed from this world – the truth will rise. Even if we do not live long enough to see it.

And of course, none of this is the end of the story. We have not yet touched the moment that reveals Ya'akov's heart more clearly than any other – his choice, at the end of his life, to be buried beside Leah in *Ma'arat ha-Machpelah*. That single decision testifies to a vision that had fully ripened, a truth that only Yisrael could see: Rachel and Leah were not rivals, but embodiments of two worlds – the revealed and the hidden, exile and home. But that belongs to *Vayechi*, and *b'ezrat* Hashem, we will explore it there.

Prayer for Inner Strength

Master of the Universe, Almighty One, from whom no plan is withheld, grant me the merit to be strong and steadfast in my studies of Torah and Judaism, and to strengthen myself and prevail in complete *emunah* in *ha-Kadosh*, *baruch Hu*, and in true *tzaddikim*. And may I merit, Merciful Father, to draw into the world the soul of *Melech ha-Mashiach*, and may the *pasuk* be fulfilled in me: 'For the sake of Tzion I will not keep quiet, and for the sake of *Yerushalayim* I will not be silent, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness and her salvation burns like a torch.'



Simply Walking

Weekly insights from Rebbe Nachman's tale,
The Clever Man and the Simple Man

The Two Men Within

The Torah says (*Bereishit* 32:8): וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרָר לוֹ (And Ya'akov was very afraid, and it distressed him). Rashi explains that he feared two opposite possibilities: that he might be killed, or that he might have to kill others. These fears are not contradictions. They arise from a *tzaddik's* moral clarity – two righteous instincts pulling painfully at a single heart. Outwardly, Ya'akov's response is perfect *hishadlut* – diplomacy, preparation for war, and prayer, as *Chazal* point out. Inwardly, the Torah reveals a profound split between the compassion of a brother and the grave responsibility of self-defense.

This inner division appears in R' Nachman's story *The Clever Man and the Simple Man*. The *Chacham* and the *Tam* are not merely two neighbors; they are two modes of being. The *Chacham* stands for the over-analyzing, self-doubting, hyper-vigilant state that collapses under its own thinking. The *Tam* stands for *emunah* *peshutah*, warmth, and the instinctive movement of a trusting heart.

At one of the story's most illuminating moments, the *Tam* rushes out to greet his old friend: וְרַץ הָתָם גַּם כֵּן לִקְרָאוֹ: בְּשִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה ... בְּאַהֲבָה בְּשִׂמְחָה אֲחֵי חֲבִיבִי (And the *Tam* also ran to meet him with great joy ... with love, with happiness: My beloved brother!). His heart does not calculate tension. It races after connection.

In Ya'akov's moment of dread, the contrast is striking. Deep within, he surely wishes he could meet Esav with that same *Tam*-like joy: *My beloved brother!* But he cannot. Reality does not permit it. The danger is real, and Ya'akov cannot ignore it. And so a different kind of split emerges inside him: the yearning to embrace, and the fear of what such an embrace might cost.

This is the *Chacham* and *Tam* within one soul – a true challenge of our *avodah*. The *Tam* within us longs for simplicity, trust, and healing. The *Chacham* within us collapses into fear and overthinking when it

tries to carry life by itself. When the Torah says that Ya'akov was afraid and that this distressed him, it is revealing a heart caught between these opposite states: the grounded, open place of *emunah*, and the trembling instability of a mind pushed beyond its limits.

Ya'akov becomes Yisrael only after he walks through this inner conflict with honesty. He does not deny his trembling; he brings it into the light of *emunah* and moves forward anyway. This is courage – not the absence of fear, but the willingness to act in alignment with Hashem while the inner world wrestles.

Every one of us knows these two inner figures – two very different states of the soul. The *Tam* is the self that is rooted, trusting, joyful, and clear. The *Chacham* is the part of us that breaks under the strain of overthinking. Our task is to recognize when the anxious mind has taken over – and to let the *Tam's* wholeness restore it. We walk forward when the heart of the *Tam* steadies the trembling of the *Chacham*, and teaches it again how to stand, how to trust, and how to move with Hashem in the gentle path of *simply walking*.

תפילה לחוסן פנימי

רבונו שֶׁל עוֹלָם כֹּל יָכוֹל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִצְרָר מִמֶּךָ מְזִימָה, וְכִנִּי לַהֲיוֹת חֹזֵק וְאֵיתָן בְּלִמּוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה וְהַיְהוּדוּת, וְאַתְחִזֵּק וְאַתְגַּבֵּר בְּאַמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּבְצַדִּיקִים אֲמִתִּיִּים, וְזִכְנִי 93 אֵב 3 הֶרְחַמְן לְהַמְשִׁיךְ 405 לְעוֹלָם 176 אֶת 401 נְשָׁמַת 790 מְלֶךְ 90 הַמְּשִׁיחַ 363 = 2321, וְיִתְקַנֵּם בִּי הַפְּסוּק "לִמְעַן 190 צִיּוֹן 156 לֹא 31 אֲחִישָׁה 314 וְלִמְעַן 196 יְרוּשָׁלַיִם 596 לֹא 31 אֲשַׁתּוֹק 807 = 2321 עַד יֵצֵא כְנֻגָה צְדָקָה וִישׁוּעָתָה כְּלָפִיד יִבְעֶר."