

(כט: לה) ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את יקוק על כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמד מלדת:  
 (ל:א) ותרא רחל כי לא ילדה ליעקב ותקנא רחל באחתי ותאמר אל יעקב הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנכי  
 (ב) ויחר אף יעקב ברחל ויאמר התחת אלהים אנכי אשר מנע ממך פרי בטן:  
 (ג) ותאמר הנה אמת בלהה בא אליה ותלד על ברכי ואבנה גם אנכי ממנה):  
 (ד) ותתן לו את בלהה שפחתה לאשה ויבא אליה יעקב:  
 (ה) ותהר בלהה ותלד ליעקב בן:

(Leah) became pregnant again and bore a son; he said: "This time I will *odeh*/acknowledge Hashem", so she called his name Yehudah". She then ceased giving birth.

Rachel saw that she had not borne for he then ceased giving birth.

Rachel saw that she had not borne for Yaakov; Rachel was jealous of her sister; she said "Give me sons, and if not I will be dying."

Yaakov's anger burned against Rachel; He said: "*Hatachat Elokim anokhi*, Who denied you fruit of the womb?"

She said: "Here is my maidservant Bilhah; go to her, and she will birth on my knees, and I too will be built/have sons through her.

She gave him Bilhah her maidservant as a wife; Yaakov went to her.

Bilhah became pregnant and bore to Yaakov a son.

Why does Yaakov get angry at Rachel, and is his anger justified?

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein Shlita famously establishes the poles of traditional interpretation as "relevance" and "reverence", meaning that we must find a way to be able to learn from the Avot without reducing them to our level. A possible nuancing of that issue is to ask whether our degree of reverence needs to be the same at every stage of their careers, or whether we can read Torah as relevantly describing their ascent toward reverence-worthiness.

Here specifically, we can ask: Should we

- a) Learn from Yaakov that anger is, at least under some circumstances, a proper response to a childless wife's plea for children (Reverence and Relevance)? Or
- b) Justify Yaakov's anger on the ground that he, on his exalted level, was capable of delivering *mussar* without personal involvement, and that Rachel was capable of receiving it in the same way, but state explicitly that we, on our level, would never be justified in behaving that way toward anyone (Reverence over Relevance)? Or
- c) Learn from Yaakov how easy it is for even great people to react with defensive anger to what seems like a personal attack (Relevance over Reverence)?

Another broad theoretical question, with less explicit but nonetheless significant theological overtones, is whether we assume that participants in a Biblical dialogue understand each other, and respond to each other's intent, unless the text explicitly says otherwise, or rather that, as in most actual human conversations, participants at least in part talk past each other, and respond to projections of themselves.

Here specifically we can ask:

- a) Is Yaakov angry because he understands Rachel, or because he misunderstands her?
- b) Is Rachel's subsequent offering of Bilhah as surrogate childbearer a response to and acceptance of Yaakov's critique, or rather an act of despair?

Bekhor Shor writes that

Yaakov hurried to respond to Rachel, and did not allow her to complete her words, as he thought she was demanding that he place a child in her womb, and so he was angered. But Rachel said: "Here is my maidservant Bilhah" – I wasn't asking that, rather that you go to my maidservant, and perhaps . . .

In other words, Yaakov did not understand Rachel, but his misunderstanding had no consequences. I suggest that for Bekhor Shor, Yaakov's line is included so we can learn from his error.

Akeidat Yitzchak, in a beautiful reading made famous by Nechamah Leibowitz z"l, suggests that Yaakov was angry because Rachel described her life as purposeless without giving him children, whereas he saw her as having a whole gamut of human religious responsibilities; he concretizes this as a reading of Bereishis that gives women roles as both Chavah (mother of all life) and Ishah. It is not clear how we should take Rachel's response in this reading – whether we should see her offer of Bilhah as an acceptance that her fulfillment lay elsewhere than birthing, or as a complete rejection of Yaakov's vision leading to a decision that vicarious parenthood was the only way to give her life any meaning at all.

Ralbag offers two readings, each radical in their own way.

- 1) Rachel suspected Yaakov of *deliberately* failing to impregnate her. Ralbag does not explain what motive she attributed to Yaakov. We could combine this with Alshikh's suggestion that Rachel thought that Yaakov resented her for acceding to the trick which forced him to marry Leah, but I think it is more likely that Rachel suspected that Yaakov was afraid that pregnancy would deprive him of her beauty, as the Midrash describes Lemakh and the Flood Generation "They kept one wife for beauty and the other for procreation". Yaakov's anger is his response to being falsely accused.
- 2) Rachel thought that Yaakov was a learned man who could give her medical fertility techniques. One can support this reading by noting that we learn shortly that Yaakov is in fact capable of manipulating the reproduction of sheep, and the analogy between Rachel=ewe and sheep is all - but-explicit in 29:10-11, where Yaakov first "vayashk"s the sheep and then "vayishak"s Rachel,

It seems to me that the following three literary signals in the text should heavily influence our reading of this section, but I leave it to you to decide where they should lead us, and look forward to your suggestions:

- 1) The connection between Rachel's "Hava li banim" and Yaakov's "Hava et ishti v'avoah eileha" in 29:21, which Rashi notes (but then excuses – reverence over relevance) seems crude. I wonder whether it isn't Yaakov's tone and failure to use Rachel's name that emboldens Lavan to pull off the switcheroo.
- 2) The connection between Yaakov's "hatachat Elokim anokhi" and Yosef's "hatachat Elokim ani" in 50:19. (Note tangentially that many kabbalistic commentators read the phrase here as "Because I am indeed directly underneath G-d" rather than as "Am I in place of G-d?")

- 3) Leah's first four children are born after G-d sees that she is less-loved by Yaakov, and they are each described simply as born, while the first three names express a yearning for closeness to Yaakov. In 30:1, however, Rachel is jealous because she has not born a child *for Yaakov*, and all the subsequent male children – hers, Bilhah's, Zilpah's, *and Leah's* – are born to Yaakov. (Note that this seems problematic for Akeidat Yitzchak's reading and for Keli Yakar's wonderful suggestion that Rachel gave Bilhah to Yaakov as a form of atonement for her jealousy of Leah, and directly against Netziv's reading that Rachel thought Yaakov considered himself childless as well because she was his only true wife (and that she was asking him to pray for both of them), whereas Yaakov in fact saw Leah's children absolutely as his (and so responded that G-d had denied *her* children. Perhaps note also Malbim's suggestion that Rachel thought that she was childless *because* Yaakov loved her more, which has physical consequences deleterious to fertility: was she trying to antagonize him to get past that hurdle?)

Shabbat Shalom

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## **בכור שור**

התחת אל-הים אנכי – מיהר יעקב להשיב לרחל, ולא הניחה לגמור דבריה, סבור שיתן לה בבטנה ולכן חרה לו ותאמר הנה אמתי בלהה – כלומר – לא זאת אני שואלת, אלא שתבוא אל אמתי, ואולי אבנה . . .

## **רלב"ג**

וספר אחר זה שכבר קנאה רחל באחותה ותאמר ליעקב הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנכי ואחשב שרחל חשבה שיהיה זה הענין תלוי ברצון יעקב, שלא ישכב עמה משכב עושה פרי, כאלו תאמר שהיה דש מבפנים וזורה מבחוץ או מה שידמה לזה, ולזה חרה אף יעקב בה כי יהיה בלי ספק עון פלילי והודיע כי אין שם מונע מצדו אבל המונע הוא מצד הש"י שמנע ממנה פרי בטן, ואפשר שנאמר, והוא יותר נכון, שכבר חשבה רחל שלגודל מעלת יעקב יהיה בכחו ליתן לה עצה בזה על צד החכמה בדרך שתלד והא כעס עליה מפני זה והודיעה שכמו זה הענין לא יוכל עליו כי אם ה' יתברך אשר מנע ממנה פרי בטן כי עם היה זה בידו לא היה נמנע ממתחנת העצה לה

## **ספורנו בראשית פרק ל**

(ב) ויחר. על אמרה הבה לי כאלו היה בידו לעשות זה וכעס בקנאתו לכבוד קונו ולא הביט לאהבתו אותה בזה: אשר מנע ממך. שיצר אותך עקרה שהכיר בה סימני אילונית:  
(ג) בוא אליה. ובזה אמרתי הבה לי לא שחשבתי שיהיה בידך רפואה של עקרה: