

Parashat Vayetze 5783, 2022:

Vayizkor Elokim et Rachel

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Vayetze informs us that Rachel, like Sarah and Rivka before her, was barren. Finally, after many long years, the Torah states, “*vayizkor Elokim et Rachel* (And G-d remembered Rachel), and G-d hearkened to her, and He opened her womb.” (*Sefer Bereishit*, 30:22, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach* with my emendations) The phrase, “*vayizkor Elokim*,” cannot be taken at face value. After all, how is it possible that the Creator and Master of the Universe would ever forget? Moreover, the great Mishnaic period sage, Rabbi Elazar HaKapor, said: “Blessed is He, for before Him there is no wrong, no forgetting (*v’lo shicha*), no favoritism, and no taking of bribes; know, that everything is according to the reckoning. (*Pirkei Avot* 4:22, translation, Rabbi Yosef Marcus) As such, many *meforshim* (Torah commentators) focus on the appellation, *Elokim* (*middat hadin*, the quality of judgment), and maintain *vayizkor Elokim* suggests that the Holy One blessed be He rendered a positive judgment, as we find in three other instances in the Torah:

Vayizkor Elokim Noach and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark... (*Sefer Bereishit* 8:1)

And it came to pass, when *Elokim* destroyed the cities of the plain, *vayizkor Elokim et Avraham*. (19:29)

And *Elokim* heard their cry (that is, the Jewish people’s cry), and *vayizkor Elokim* His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya’akov. (*Sefer Shemot* 2:24)

Midrashic literature presents two approaches as to why Hashem determined Rachel was *zochah* (merited) to receive a positive ruling. *Bereishit Rabbah* asks:

Vayizkor Elokim: What memory did [Hashem] remember (that is, what evidence did Hashem focus on) concerning Rachel? She remained silent concerning her sister [Leah] at the time Leah was given over to him [Ya'akov, on what supposed to have been Rachel and Ya'akov's wedding night]. Rachel maintained her silence, even though she was fully cognizant of what was taking place. Ultimately, *vayizkor Elokim et Rachel*, as was fitting, for Rachel knew full well she was bringing her *tzaratah* (rival) into her own home. (Parashat Vayetze 73:4, translation and brackets my own)

The second source, *Midrash Aggadah* (Buber), contains the explanation of our phrase that was employed by Rashi (1040-1105) in his *Commentary on the Torah*:

Vayizkor Elokim: The Holy One blessed be He remembered (that is, focused on) Rachel's [past] humility when she gave the *simanim* (unique signs between Rachel and Ya'akov) to her sister [Leah] to give to Ya'akov, as she [Rachel] could not bear the thought of her sister's [potential] abject embarrassment. (Parashat Vayetze 30:22, translation and brackets my own)

In addition, in his *Commentary on Sefer Yirmiyahu* 31:14, Rashi cites *Midrash Eichah Rabbah, Petichah* 24, on the celebrated phrase, "*Rachel m'vakah al banehah*—Rachel weeping for her children." This midrash combines Rachel's silence and her giving over the *simanim* to Leah and, in so doing, reveals the power of her advocacy on behalf of *b'nai Yisrael*:

Rachel m'vakah al banehah: An aggadic midrash states that the *Avot* and *Emahot* went to comfort the Holy One blessed be He when King Menashe [14th king of Yehudah, 7th century BCE] placed an idol in the *Beit HaMikdash*. Nonetheless, He refused to be comforted. Rachel then came before Him and said: "Master of the Universe, whose mercy is greater, Your mercy or the mercy of one comprised of flesh and blood? Is it not the case that Your mercy is greater? Behold, I brought my rival into my very home [and demonstrated my mercy]! And all the work that Ya'akov did for my father was only performed on my account, yet, when I was preparing to go to my *chuppah*, my father brought my sister to the *chuppah* in my stead! It was not enough that I remained silent, since I handed over my special *simanim* to her as well! So, too, in Your case, if Your children have brought Your rival [the idol] into Your house [the *Beit HaMikdash*], You should remain silent towards them [regarding this affront, and not destroy them]." He [Hashem] said to her: "You have learned well to be an advocate! There is reward for actions and righteousness, [especially since] you handed over your *simanim* to your sister." (Translation and brackets my own)

May we always be *zocheh* (merit) to receive merciful judgment from the Almighty. Moreover, even if we are undeserving of such, may *Rachel Emanu* ever be our *malitzah yesharah* (advocate) and help bring us *rachamim* (mercy) from Hashem. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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