

## Parshat Vayitzei 5776

**The Beauty of Leah**-As the first Yahrzeit of my mother לאה בת יצחק ע"ה approaches this week on 11 Kislev, it seemed apposite to research sources on the meaning in Bereishis 29:17 of - ועיני לאה רכות - 'Leah's eyes were tender'.

**The Gifts of Leah were Greater**-Bava Basra 123a dismisses the idea that this could be referring to the shortcomings of a צדקת. Rabbi Elazar derives רכות from the phrase שמתנותיה ארוכות ('greater gifts'). Notwithstanding that רכות is literally translated as longer, Rabbi Elazar's interpretation is that the gifts given to Leah by Hashem were greater. Interestingly and in a similar vein, Leah is described as the older sister, גדול - also this word can be understood as 'greater'.

**Principal Matriach**-Leah enjoyed 'greater gifts' in that she was the principal matriarch, אמהות. She was the mother of six of the twelve tribes - indeed she was destined to bear seven, but her compassion ensured that Rachel did not give birth to less tribes than the handmaids (i.e. through Leah's davening, Rachel had a second son, instead of Leah being blessed with a seventh son). The verse in Shmuel 1 2:5 applies to Leah 'while the barren woman bears seven', because she was first of all barren and then bore 7 children (Dinah being the seventh).

**Mother of Royalty, Priesthood & Moshiach** -Further, 'greater gifts' can be interpreted from the Gemara in Bava Basra 4a which states that the word רב, from רכות, connotes royalty. Two such lines emanated from Leah: the royal family of Yehuda from whom came King David ('kingship'), and the spiritual line of Levi from whom came Moshe, Aharon and the Kohanim and those that therefore served Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash ('the priesthood'). Leah will also be the mother of Moshiach through Yehuda.

**Prophetess and Ho'oda'ah**-Leah was also a prophetess and the names she gave her sons alluded to their future and that of her descendants. Yehuda is derived from *ho'oda'ah*, thankfulness, demonstrating Leah's gratitude. Her descendants emulated Leah's *hakoras hatov*, for example, David said 'Offer praise to the Lord for He is Good' (Tehillim 107:1). The Midrash states that from the day Hashem created the world, He was not praised by anyone as greatly as by Leah who stated 'This time I will praise the Lord' (Bereishis 29:35).

**Why the Connection to Eyes?**-The reason that such 'greater gifts' are implied in connection with Leah's eyes (which may seem strange) could be because the

leaders of the nation are referred to as 'the eyes of the congregation' (Bamidbar 15:24) i.e. these institutions of leadership that were destined to come from Leah were greater than those of Rachel (ironically, the Gemara in Taanis 24a compares a weak national leadership to a bride whose eyes are weak!).

**Literal Meaning – Weak Eyes**-Another interpretation in Bava Basra 123a according to Rav is that רכות is to be taken literally, that Leah did have weak eyes from crying until her eyelashes dropped (Rashi quotes this). This however indicated a positive character trait, because she did not want to be married to the rasha, Esav - and her davening saved her from such a fate. Her eyes therefore testified to her high moral standards and her yearning to marry a righteous person. The Gemara concludes its explanation stating how this action of Leah merited that she give birth before Rachel. וירא ה' כי שנואה לאה (Bereishis 29:31) 'And Hashem saw that Leah was hated' can be interpreted to mean ששנואין מעשה עשו בפניה 'that Esav's behaviour was hated by her (Leah)'. A further merit was that Leah was the only one of her husband's wives to be buried next to him, and this was as a result of a request from Yaakov (yet another irony as it was the less tearful Rachel who wept for her children on the road to Yerushalayim where she was buried - Jeremiah 31:14-16).

**Rachel and Leah equally beautiful?**-The letter 'vav' before רחל can be interpreted as conjunctive not disjunctive in the פסוק 29:17- ועיני לאה רכות ורחל היתה יפת תאר ויפת -מראה 'Leah's eyes were tender, and Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.' According to some meforshim therefore (and in contrast to Rashi), Leah had beautiful eyes (see Targum Onkelos and Rashbam). Also, using a pun on words, the Hebrew word for "two" (sh-t-y) and for "equal" (sh-ww-t from the root letters sh-w-h) are sufficiently similar to allow a Midrash to explain that Leah was as beautiful as Rachel, because it stated in פסוק 29:16 that Lavan had two (ShTY) daughters. They were equal (ShWWT) in beauty, loveliness and stature (Midrash Tanhuma Vayetze 7:12).

**Yemos HaMoshiach**-The sibling rivalry, being a major theme of Sefer Bereishis, continues with Leah and Rachel. Their progeny have often been in conflict, and we daven for Moshiach so that they will become a single nation no longer divided into two kingdoms again (Yechezkel 37:22). This is notwithstanding that Rav Kook states, even in the messianic era, the divide between Rachel and Leah will continue with two Messianic leaders: Moshiach ben Yosef, a descendant of Rachel, and the final redeemer, Moshiach ben David, the descendant of Leah. דבר תורה לפרשת השבוע לעילוי נשמת אמי מרתי מרת לאה בת יצחק ע"ה ביום היארצייט לפטירתה יא כסלב