

# **“Refrain Your Voice from Weeping” – Rachel Imeinu**

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***The 11th day of Cheshvan is the day of the death of our mother Rachel. Stories from the Torah and sages' articles praising the righteous mother and her good deeds that constitute a beacon and a wonderful heritage for her children.***

The 11th of Cheshvan is the day when Rachel Imeinu (our foremother) passed away. Like every year, thousands will ascend to prostrate themselves on her grave and prayer wholeheartedly to G-d to save the Nation of Israel. We will quote stories from the Torah and the words of our Sages and the Tzaddikim throughout the generations who praise Rachel Imeinu for her righteousness and good deeds, that she should

be an advocate for us and for the entire Nation of Israel.

Rachel Imeinu was the daughter of Lavan, the brother of our foremother Rebecca. Rebecca asked Jacob to go to Haran to marry Rachel. Lavan agreed to give his daughter Rachel to Jacob, but Jacob had to work for him for seven years in order to marry his cousin Rachel. Since it was known that Lavan was a deceiver and a crook, Jacob felt it was advisable to clearly specify the terms of his employment for his uncle Lavan: "I will work for you for seven years for your youngest daughter Rachel," meaning, "Don't replace Rachel with Leah." Lavan assured him that this would be so. Knowing that Lavan was a trickster, Jacob gave over secret signs to Rachel to insure that Lavan wouldn't be able to switch Rachel with Leah.

When the day of the wedding arrived, Lavan blatantly violated the agreement. The Gemara says that when Rachel saw Leah being brought in, she said: "'Now my sister will be disgraced.' So, she went and gave the signs over to her sister" (Megillah 13b). Thus, when Jacob asked to be told over the signs that they had agreed on in advance, Leah was able to say them without hesitation. (According to the Midrash, Rachel hid there, and she whispered them instead of Leah.) Jacob did not suspect anything. Only in the morning did Jacob realize that Lavan had tricked him, and he had to work an additional seven years to marry Rachel as well.

*When Rachel saw Leah being brought in, she said: "'Now my sister will be disgraced.' So, she went and gave the signs over to her sister"!*

The Midrash describes that at the time of the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, our holy forefathers entreated G-d and asked Him why He had gone ahead and destroyed the Temple without paying the slightest attention to all the suffering they had gone through in serving Him. Each one described his particular devotion. Abraham described his dedication to G-d

when he faced the trial of the binding of Isaac. Isaac described his own self-sacrifice during this trial. Moses wept and described his devotion to the Nation of Israel throughout the time that he led the nation. Then Rachel got up to pray. We will bring the story of Rachel's relinquishing her claim on Jacob to her sister and her prayer as they are presented in the Midrash:

At that time, Rachel Imeinu pleaded before the Blessed One and said: "Master of the World, You know that Jacob your servant's love for me was boundless and that he worked for my father for seven years for me. And when he completed those seven years and the time arrived for me to marry my husband and my father had the idea to exchange me for my sister, it was extremely difficult for me. I knew of the matter, and I informed my husband and gave him signs so that he would be able to distinguish between me and my sister so that my father would not be able to exchange us. Afterwards, I consoled myself and bore my desire. I had mercy on my sister that she shouldn't be disgraced. That night we were exchanged, and my sister was given to my husband instead of me. I gave my sister all the signs that I had given over to my husband so that he would think that she was Rachel. Not only that, but I even hid under the bed when he laid with my sister, and when he spoke to her, she was silent. I answered everything he said, so that he would not recognize my sister's voice. I did this kindness for her, and I was not jealous of her and did not allow her to be disgraced."

(After Rachel told of her sacrifice, she claimed to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*): "And what am I, for I am flesh and blood, dust and ashes, that I did not have envy due to this pain. I did not allow my sister to suffer embarrassment and disgrace. And you are a Living and Merciful King. Why did You feel envy concerning those who practiced idolatry when there is really nothing to it, and You exiled my children, and they were killed by the sword of their enemies who did with them as they

wished'?!” Immediately, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* mercy was awakened, and He said, “**For you, Rachel**, I will return Israel to their place.”



*The tomb of Rachel our mother on Efrat Road near Bethlehem – a photograph from 1870-1880 by the photographer Felix Bonfil. (Photo credit: [PikiWiki website](#))*

The Midrash concludes that this is what it is written: “So says the Lord: A voice is heard on high, lamentation, bitter weeping. Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children for they are not.” It also is written, “So says the Lord: ‘Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work.’ Says the Lord, ‘And they shall come back from the land of the enemy.’” And it is also written, “And there is hope for your future, says the Lord, and the children shall return to their own border” (Jeremiah 31:14-16). (from Midrash Lamentations *Patichta* 24).

Rachel Imeinu was buried on the road to Efrat, near Bethlehem as is related in the Torah. Close to the time of his passing, Jacob asked his son Joseph to take him up and bury him in the *Ma’arat HaMachpelah* (the Cave of the Patriarchs), despite the

fact that when Rachel Imeinu passed away and Jacob was on the road to Efrat not far from the Cave of the Patriarchs, he did not bury her there. Jacob said to Joseph: "And although I am troubling you to take me to burial in the land of Canaan (to travel all the way from Egypt to the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron), and I did not do so for your mother who died near Bethlehem...And I did not take her even to Bethlehem to bring her into the Land (i.e., into the inhabited region of the Holy Land), and I know that you hold it against me; but you should know that I buried her there by Divine command, so that she would be of assistance to her children. When Nevuzaradan exiles them (the Israelites, when the Temple was destroyed), and they pass by there, Rachel will emerge from her grave and weep and beg for mercy for them." As it is said, "A voice is heard on high, [lamentation, bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children]" (Jer. 31:14). And the Holy One, blessed be He, answered her, "'There is reward for your work,' says the Lord... 'and the children shall return to their own border'" (Rashi on Genesis 48:7).

According to the Kabbalah, Rachel represents the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence). The *Shechinah* represents the collective soul of Israel. Every night at midnight, Rachel's weeping is reawakened as the verse says, "a voice is heard on high, lamentation, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children."

Rabbi Nachman reveals that the words: "**Rachel mevecha al baneha**" ("Rachel weeping for her children") have the *roshei taivot* (initial letters) which spell out **m'arav** (with the "b" and "v" being interchangeable in Hebrew) meaning the West (*Likutei Moharan* II, 67). Our Sages said that the *Shechinah* is to be found in the West (*Baba Batra* 25) and therefore, as is well known, they did not succeed in destroying the Western Wall, because the *Shechinah* never departed from the Western Wall (*Shemot Rabbah*, 2). Thus, "Rachel weeping over her children" is Rachel's weeping which represents the *Shechinah* and the collective soul of Israel.

For those who merit arising at midnight and weeping over the destruction of the Temple, in the aspect of the prayer of "Rachel weeping over her children" as is written in the Midrash, G-d promises them the promise He made to Rachel: "So says the Lord: Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is reward for your work, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy."

(Based on *Likutei Halachot, Hashkamat HaBoker* 1).