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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA
מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת ויצא

וַיְהִי בַבֹּקֶר וְהִנֵּה הִוא לֵאָה, וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל לָבָן מַה זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי הֲלֹא בְרָחֵל עָבַדְתִּי עִמָּךְ וְלָמָּה רִמִּיתָנִי. וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא יֵעָשֶׂה כֵן בִּמְקוֹמֵנוּ לָתֵת הַצָּעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה. (בראשית כט, כה-כו)

And it was in the morning, and behold, it was Leah! So, he said to Lavan, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rochel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?" Lavan said, "Such is not done in our place, to give the younger before the elder." (Bereishis 29:25-26)

In this week's *Sidrah*, we learn about the marriages of Yakov Avinu. After fleeing from his wicked brother Eisav, he arrived in Charan and spent many years in the home of his uncle, the infamous swindler Lavan. After working for Lavan by tending to his flocks, Lavan wanted to negotiate terms for payment. Yakov responded that he did not require financial compensation; instead, he wished to marry Lavan's righteous daughter Rochel. After seven years of devoted work, Yakov requested Rochel as his wife, as they had agreed. However, Lavan deceived Yakov and gave him his older daughter, Leah, instead. The morning after the wedding, Yakov confronted Lavan about his deceit, and Lavan cunningly replied, "It is not the custom in our place to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder!"

Earlier in the *parshah*, when Yakov first met Rochel, the *possuk* states: וַיַּגֶּד יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל כִּי אֲחִי אָבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן רִבְקָה הוּא, *Yakov told Rochel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rivkah's son* (29:12). The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 123a, *Megillah* 13a) questions why Yakov described himself as "her father's brother," when it would have been more accurate to refer to himself as "the son of her father's sister." The Gemara explains that when Yakov initially asked Rochel to marry him, she agreed but cautioned him that her father was a trickster and would likely refuse. Yakov inquired about this, and Rochel informed him about her older, unmarried sister, who would need to marry first. Yakov responded, "כִּי אֲחִי אָבִיהָ הוּא," implying that he was Lavan's brother in deceit. By mentioning that he was "her father's brother," he indicated that he, too, could be cunning to avoid Lavan's tricks.

The Gemara continues by citing the *possuk* that states: עִם נָבָר תִּתָּבָר וְעִם עִקֵּשׁ תִּתַּפָּל, *With a pure person, you act purely, and with a crooked person, you act crookedly* (*Shmuel II* 22:27). This illustrates that one can respond in kind to a dishonest individual. To avoid being deceived, Yakov arranged for secret signs that Rochel would use on the night of their wedding.

The Meforshim famously question how Yakov planned to circumvent the custom of marrying the older sister before the younger one, especially in light of the fact that the Shulchan Aruch (*Yoreh Deah* 244:18, *see Bach*) codifies this custom into practical *halachah*. How was Yakov intending to override this *halachah*?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita*, references the Mesoras Hashas, which presents a different version of the account that resolves the question. He writes that when Yakov asked to marry Rochel after working for her for seven years, part of the agreement was that Lavan would first arrange for Leah to be married before Rochel. Lavan had plenty of time to find another match for Leah, which would have allowed Yakov's agreement to take effect without conflicting the accepted custom of not marrying off the younger sister before the older one. However, this was all part of Lavan's deception; he failed to find a match for Leah and, as a result, sought to force Yakov into marrying her.

This notion is also reinforced by the Seforno, who explains that when Yakov referred to Rochel as בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה, *your younger daughter* (29:18), he was indicating that although she was the younger sister, there was ample time - seven years before the wedding - during which to marry off the older sister.

With the above, we have explained that Yakov's arrangement with Lavan did not conflict with the accepted custom because Leah had ample opportunity to marry before that. However, ultimately, at the time that Yakov wished to marry Rochel, Leah was still unmarried. This raises the question: why was Yakov not concerned about the *halachah* of not marrying the younger sibling when an older sibling is still unmarried?

The answer for this can be found in a halachic ruling presented by the Teshuvos Maharsham (3:136). The Maharsham recounts a situation where an agreement was made to marry a younger sibling, even though the older sibling remained unmarried. Citing Tosafos (*Kiddushin* 52a), he ruled that the significance of fulfilling a prior agreement takes precedence over the custom of marrying the older sibling first. Therefore, he *paskened* for the marriage to proceed. Similarly, in Yakov's case, there was a contract with Lavan to marry Rochel after seven years of work. As a result, he was not required to retract this agreement to avoid violating the accepted custom.

The Gemara (ibid.) explains that Yakov, seeking to avoid Lavan's trickery, gave Rochel secret signs to identify herself when it was time for their marriage. To prevent her sister from being discovered and shamed, Rochel passed these prearranged signs to her sister. As a result, Yakov only realised the deception the next morning.

The Meforshim note that these signs pertained to three specific *mitzvos* for women: Niddah, Challah, and Hadlakas HaNer. Simply put, these three concepts served as a secret password between them. However, the Rosh Yeshiva cites a novel explanation: Yakov did not merely provide Rochel with three code words; rather, he taught her the *halachos* of these *mitzvos*, and these served as a sign between them.

With this explanation, we can shed light on an interesting insight from Chazal. The Gemara (*Megillah* 13a) teaches that in the merit of Rochel's צְנִיעוּת in revealing the secrets to Leah to spare her embarrassment, she was rewarded with the modest Shaul HaMelech as her descendant. The Meforshim (*See Rashi and Rashash*) question how the term צְנִיעוּת accurately describes Rochel's noble deed.

According to the above understanding, there was another dimension to Rachel's transmission of the prearranged signs. Rachel never explicitly told Leah that she was giving her *secret* signs; instead, she simply taught her the *halachos* she had learned from Yakov. As a result, Leah did not realise the extent of Rochel's selflessness! This illustrates the immense humility displayed by Rochel, as she gave up her husband for her elder sister without even disclosing her self-sacrifice.

Let us take inspiration from Rochel Imeinu as to the extraordinary efforts one must make to spare another from embarrassment. We learn not only about her remarkable self-sacrifice, but also about her incredible humility in not revealing to her sister the great deed she had performed to help her!

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