

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [6]

Jacob's Wedding Insights into Genesis Rabbah 70: 19 Revised November 2020



Background to Our Story

The Biblical Story (Genesis 29:16-27)

¹⁶. Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷. Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel had beautiful features and a beautiful complexion. ¹⁸. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, "I will work for you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter." ¹⁹. And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than I should give her to another man. Stay with me." ²⁰. So Jacob worked for Rachel seven years, but they appeared to him like a few days because of his love for her. ²¹. And Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are completed, that I may come to her." ²². So Laban gathered all the people of the place, and he made a feast. ²³. And it came to pass in the evening that Laban took his daughter Leah, and he brought her to him, and he came to her. ²⁴. And Laban gave Zilpah his maidservant to his daughter Leah as a maidservant. ²⁵. And it came to pass in the morning, and behold she was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?" ²⁶. And Laban said, "It is not done so in our place to give the younger one before the firstborn. ²⁷. Complete the [wedding] week of this one, and we will give you this one too, for the work that you will render me for another seven years."

Dancing Before the Bride (Ketuvot 16b)

The Sages taught: How does one dance before the bride, i.e., what does one recite while dancing at her wedding? Beit Shammai say: One recites praise of the bride as she is. And Beit Hillel say: One recites: A fair and attractive bride.

Beit Shammai said to Beit Hillel: In a case where the bride was lame or blind, does one say with regard to her: A fair and attractive bride? But the Torah states: "Keep you from a false matter" (Exodus 23:7).

Beit Hillel said to Beit Shammai: According to your statement, with regard to one who acquired an inferior acquisition from the market, should another praise it and enhance its

value in his eyes or condemn it and diminish its value in his eyes? You must say that he should praise it and enhance its value in his eyes and refrain from causing him anguish. From here the Sages said: A person's disposition should always be empathetic with mankind, and treat everyone courteously. In this case too, once the groom has married his bride, one praises her as being fair and attractive.

The Tzaddik (Righteous Person) as a Source of Blessings

And Laban said to him, "If only I have now found favor in your eyes! I have divined, and the Lord has blessed me for your sake." (Genesis 30:27)

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, Pharaoh's chamberlain, chief of the slaughterers, an Egyptian man, purchased him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and whatever he (Joseph) did the Lord made prosper in his hand. And Joseph found favor in his eyes, and he (Joseph) served him, and he (Potiphar) appointed him over his house, and all he had he gave into his hand. Now it came to pass that since he had appointed him over his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the house of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of the Lord was in all that he had, in the house and in the field. (Genesis 39:5)

Arami – Rimah (Lashon Nofel al Lashon)

Words in the Holy Tongue are inter-related. In the story of the serpent Moses was bidden to erect to heal those who were bitten (Numbers 21:9). He fashioned it out of copper based on the fact that "nachash" (serpent) and "nechoshet" (copper) share a root. Our Sages of Blessed Memory say here as well that this indicates that the Torah was given in the Holy Tongue and that the world was created with the Holy Tongue.

Paronomasia is the use of words that sound similar to other words, but have different meanings.

Modesty in Sexual Relationships (Babylonian Talmud, Niddah 17a)

Rav Hisda says: It is prohibited for a person to engage in intercourse by day, as it is stated: "And you shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The Gemara asks: From where is this inferred? Abaye says: If one engages in intercourse by day, perhaps the husband will see some repulsive matter in his wife and she will become repugnant to him, which will cause him to hate her, and he will thereby violate this mitzva. Rav Huna says: Jews are holy, and they do not engage in intercourse by day.

Rava says: And if the house is dark, it is permitted to engage in intercourse by day there. And in the case of a Torah scholar, he may cause darkness with his garment and engage in intercourse even during the daytime, as he will certainly do so with modesty.

The Oldest Daughter Marries First

(See: Zlotowitz, Meir: Genesis. Mesorah Publications. 1986. Pages 1275 and 1276)

MARTHA STEWART
weddings By Jenn Sinrich

Sibling rivalry takes on a whole new meaning when there's a race to the altar. Whether or not siblings are close in age, it can be a particularly sensitive subject when an older brother or sister watches a younger sibling get engaged and married first. Fran Walfish, Psy.D., a family and relationship psychotherapist and the author of *The Self-Aware Parent*, admits that it's not uncommon for an older sibling to feel a

natural tinge of jealousy if a younger brother or sister experiences this major life step first. "An older sister may also feel a sense of public embarrassment or humiliation because family, friends, and well-meaning community members may talk about why the older one 'couldn't' get a guy first," she says. "The older sibling might also worry about being beat to the punch with carrying on the family tree by having babies first." These, she explains, are all normal feelings that should be acknowledged, paid attention to, processed, and accepted.

Paulette Sherman, Psy.D., psychologist, director of My Dating & Relationship School, and the author of *Dating from the Inside Out*, notes that not all older siblings will feel bad or jealous when a younger sibling marries. "Some may feel happy for them, but it is common to experience mixed feelings," she says. So, while the sibling may feel a little sad or disappointed for themselves, they're typically excited for their family member. Reconciling these conflicting emotions can be difficult.

The Text: Genesis Rabbah 70: 19

וַיֵּאסֹף לָבָן אֶת כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה (בראשית כט, כב)

כַּנֶּס כָּל אַנְשֵׁי מְקוֹמוֹ, אָמַר לָהֶם יוֹדְעִים אַתֶּם שֶׁהֵינּוּ דְחוּקִים לְמִים וְכִינּוֹן שָׁבַע הַצַּדִּיק הַזֶּה לְכָאן נִתְבָּרְכוּ הַמִּים, אָמְרִין לִיה וּמָה אֶהְיֵי לָךְ, אָמַר לְהוֹן אִין בְּעֵינֵי אַתּוֹן אֲנָא מְרַמֵּי בֵּיה, וְיָהֵב לִיה לֵאמֹה דְהוּא רַחִים לְהֶדָא רַחֵל סְגִי, וְהוּא עֲבַד הָכָא גְבָכוֹן שְׁבַעָה שְׁנִין אוּחְרִין. אָמְרִין לִיה עֲבִיד מַה דְהֵי לָךְ. אָמַר לְהוֹן הֲבוּ לִי מִשְׁכוֹן דְלִית חַד מִנְכוֹן מְפָרְסָם, וְיִתְבּוֹן לִיה מִשְׁכוֹנֵי, וְאִזֵּל וְאִתֵּי עֲלִיהוֹן חֲמַר מִשְׁחָ וְקוּפָר, הָוֵי לְמָה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ לָבָן הָאֲרַמֵּי שְׂרָמָה בְּאַנְשֵׁי מְקוֹמוֹ. וְכוּלֵי יוֹמָא הָוּ מְכַלְלִין בֵּיה וְכִינּוֹן דְעַל בְּרַמְשָׁא אָמַר לְהוֹן מַה הוּא כְּדִין, אָמְרִין לִיה אַתְּ גְּמַלְתָּ חֶסֶד בְּזַכוּתָךְ, וְהֵי מְקַלְסִין קוּדְמוֹי וְאָמְרִין הָא לֵיא הָא לֵיא, הִיא לֵאָה הִיא לֵאָה. בְּרַמְשָׁא אַתּוֹן מְעַלְתָּא וְחַפּוֹן בּוּצִינֵיא. אָמַר לְהוֹן מַהוּ כְּדִין, אָמְרֵי לִיה מַה אַתְּ סְבוּר דְאַנּוֹן דְכָרִין דְכוּתְכוֹן. וְכָל הַהוּא לִילֵיא הָוֵה צְנוּחַ לַה רַחֵל, וְהִיא עֲנֵיא לִיה. בְּצַפְרָא וְהֵוֵה הִיא לֵאָה, אָמַר לַה מַה רַמִּיתָא בַת רַמְאָה, לָאוּ בְלִילֵיא הָוֵה קְרִינָא רַחֵל וְאַתְּ עֲנִית לִי. אָמְרָה לִיה אִית סָפֵר דְלִית לִיה תְּלַמִּידִים, לֹא כֹךְ הִיָּה צוּנַח לָךְ אַבוּדָה, עֲשׂוּ, וְאַתְּ עֲנֵי לִיה.

[Laban] gathered together all the people of his place, and he said to them: You know that we were pressed for water, and that when the righteous [Jacob] came here, the waters were blessed!

[The people] said to [Laban]: Let us know what would help you get Jacob to stay, and we are willing to assist you in doing it.

[Laban] said to them: If you would like I will deceive [Jacob] and give him Leah as a wife instead of Rachel, and since he loves Rachel greatly, he will then agree to work here in your midst for an additional seven years in order to marry Rachel as well.

[The people of Laban's place] replied to [Laban]: "Do what you think would help you get him to stay!"

[Laban] said to them: give me a security to ensure that none of you will reveal our plan to Jacob; and they all gave him securities. [Laban] then went and in exchange for them he brought back wine, oil, and meat for Jacob's wedding feast. This explains why he was called by the name *Laban the Aramean* (הארמי) for he deceived (רימה) the people of his own place.

The Midrash describes what took place on the day of Jacob's marriage:

All day long [the people of Laban's place] helped to prepare for [Jacob's] wedding, and sang continuous joyous praise in honor of the bride and groom.

When evening arrived and there was no letup in the praises being sung, [Jacob] said to them: What is [the reason for all these praises]?

[The people] replied to [Jacob]: You bestowed kindness upon us, for in your merit the waters were blessed, so too we wish to bestow kindness upon you!"

And so they continued offering praises before him, saying "Ha laya, ha laya," by which they meant to convey to Jacob, "She is Leah, she is Leah."

In the evening, they prepared to bring in [the bride] and extinguished the candles.

[Jacob] said to them: What is this that you are doing, extinguishing the candles?

[The people] replied to [Jacob]: What do you think, that we are as licentious as rams, like yourselves? We are extinguishing the candles in order to enable the bride and groom to cohabit with modesty!"

That entire night, [Jacob] called out to her, calling her "Rachel" and she responded as if she were Rachel. Thus, it was only in the morning that Jacob realized who it was, as it states: *And it was in the morning that behold it was Leah!*

[Jacob] then said to her: What! A deceitful woman, the daughter of a deceitful man! For did I not call you "Rachel" and you answered me?

[Leah] responded to [Jacob]: Is there a teacher that does not have students? Did not your father call out to you by the name "Esau," and you answered him?



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

What was Laban's plan to deceive Jacob?

Bonus Why was Laban interested in deceiving Jacob?

Bonus Why were the people of Laban's place interested in going along with Laban's plan?

Bonus Why did Laban ask for securities from the people of his place?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Why did the people of Laban's place sing continuous joyous praise in honor of the bride and groom?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Why did Jacob inquire about the continuous joyous praise?

Extra Bonus Why did the people sing "Ha laya, ha laya" trying to convey to Jacob "She is Leah, she is Leah"?

Why didn't Jacob get the hint from the people of the place?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Extra Bonus Why didn't the people of the place tell Jacob directly that the bride was Leah?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Why did the people of the place extinguish the candles?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Extra Bonus Why did Leah reply to Jacob when he called her "Rachel"?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts

"Is there a teacher that does not have students?" or "When We Learn the Lesson the Hard Way"

Laban wishes cheap labor for another seven years, the people of his place desire water in abundance, and his daughter, Leah, mindful that she isn't as pretty as her sister, wants to make sure she gets married well. In our story, everybody plots to deceive Jacob, who is either too naïve or, after deceiving his own brother, too confident in himself.

"What goes around comes around" or "as you sow, so shall you reap" is the basic understanding of how *karma*, the law of cause and effect, works. Jacob learns this harsh lesson from Leah, an unlikely teacher, reminding all of us that there is no better teacher than life itself and the people we encounter along the way.