

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [46]

"Now My Sister Will Be Put to Shame" (Insights into Babylonian Talmud, Megilla 13b)



Background to Our Story

The Biblical Story (Genesis 29:16-27)

¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. ²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." ²² And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³ When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her. — ²⁴ Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid. — ²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" ²⁶ Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. ²⁷ Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years."

The Oldest Daughter Marries First



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

The Text: Babylonian Talmud, Megilla 13b

“ויגד יעקב לרחל כי אחי אביה הוא.” וכי אחי אביה הוא? והלא בן אחות אביה הוא! אלא אמר לה: מינסבא לי? אמרה ליה: אין. מיהו, אבא רמאה הוא, ולא יכלת ליה. אמר לה אחיו אנא ברמאות. אמרה ליה: ומי שרי לצדיקי לסגויי ברמיותא? אמר לה: אין, “עם נבר תתבר ועם עקש תתפל”.

אמר לה: ומאי רמיותא? אמרה ליה: אית לי אחתא דקשישא מינאי, ולא מנסיב לי מקמה. מסר לה סימנים. פי מטא ליליא, אמרה: השתא מיכספא אחתאי, מסרתינהו גיהלה. והיגו דכתיב “וידי בבקר והגה היא לאה”, מפלל דעד השתא לאו לאה היא!? אלא: מתוך סימנין שמשרה רחל ללאה לא הוה ידע עד השתא.

“And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother, and that he was Rebecca’s son” (Genesis 29:12).

It may be asked: **Was he**, Jacob, in fact **her father’s brother**? **But wasn’t he the son of her father’s sister**? Rather, it must be understood that when Jacob met Rachel, **he said to her: Will you marry me? She said to him: Yes, but my father, Laban, is a swindler, and you will not be able to** outwit him. He [Jacob] said to her: **I am his brother in deception.**

She [Rachel] said to him: **But is it permitted for the righteous to be involved in deception? He said to her: Yes**, it is permitted when dealing with deceptive individuals, as the verse states: **“With the pure you will show yourself pure, and with the perverse you will show yourself subtle”** (II Samuel 22:27), indicating that one should deal with others in the manner appropriate for their personality.

Jacob then **said to her: What is the deception** that he will plan to carry out and I should be prepared for?

[Rachel] said to him: **I have a sister who is older than I, and he will not marry me off before her**, and will try to give you her in my place.

So Jacob **gave her** certain **distinguishing signs** that she should use to indicate to him that she was actually Rachel and not her sister.

When the wedding night arrived, Rachel **said** to herself: **Now my sister will be embarrassed.** So **she gave them [the distinguishing signs] to her.** And this is as it is written: **“And it came to pass,**

that in the morning, behold, it was Leah” (Genesis 29:25). Does this imply **by inference that until now she was not Leah? Rather, due to the distinguishing signs that Rachel had given to Leah, he did not know until now,** when it was light outside, that she was Leah.



Explaining the Story What’s going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension Questions

? From our story, how would you define the feelings between Rachel and Jacob?

? In which way were Jacob and Laban brothers?

? Why do you think a father would be opposed to his younger daughter marrying before his older daughter?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Analysis Questions

? What do you think about Rachel’s question to Jacob: But is it permitted for the righteous to be involved in deception?

? What do you think about Jacob’s reply to Rachel: “With the pure you will show yourself pure, and with the perverse you will show yourself subtle”?

? After reading the story do you feel that Rachel agreed with Jacob to use the distinguishing signs (the passwords) or not?

Bonus ? If the answer to the previous question is yes, then why did Rachel pass the signs to Leah?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? In most stories there is a pivotal moment, or phrase. Which one is in our story? Why?

“The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! The cost of doing what we know is right: When Rachel’s struggle is our struggle.



In the Talmudic reading of the biblical story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah, we still encounter Laban’s deception and the strong and mutual love between Jacob and Rachel, who devised a plan in which nobody would be able to come between them. The plan is a perfect one, with the exception that it doesn’t take into consideration Rachel’s silent inner struggle between what she desires and what is right. At the center of a powerful story, we are privy to Rachel’s inner thoughts: “Now my sister will be embarrassed.” In a beautiful moment of insight, Rachel understands that her happiness will come at the expense of her sister’s suffering and embarrassment, and in a transformative act, she gives her sister the identifying signs, thus making kindness, compassion, and doing the right thing, prevail over her own happiness.