



Parashat Vayese

In this week's parasha we are introduced to Leah Imeinu. When we first meet her, the Torah says "ועיני לאה רכות" (Bereshit 29:17).

What is the meaning of this phrase? Literally, it could mean that Leah had weak eyes. But, Rashi helps us understand this unique description more deeply. Rashi explains that:

שְׁהִיְתָה סְבוּרָה לְעֹלוֹת בְּגוּרָלוֹ שֶׁל עֵשָׂו וּבֹכָה, שֶׁהָיָה הַכֹּל אוֹמְרִים שְׁנֵי בָּנִים לְרַבֵּקָה וְשְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת לְלֵבָן, הַגְּדוּלָה לְגָדוֹל וְהַקְּטָנָה לְקָטָן (בבא בתרא קכ"ג):

She thought she would have to fall to the lot of Esav and she therefore wept continually, because everyone said, "Rivkah has two sons, Laban has two daughters — the elder daughter for the elder son, the younger daughter for the younger son" (Genesis Rabbah 70:16).

Rashi attributes Leah's 'weak eyes' to her tears of prayer to Hashem. She was destined to marry Esav, yet turned to Hashem in a desperate plea to change her fate. Instead she begged Hashem to marry Yaakov, the *saddik*. Indeed, Hashem heeded her prayer and she married Yaakov.

The power of tefillah clearly emanates from this incident in Humash. Leah's tefillot completely changed her life. Let us dive deeper into the essence of prayer by taking a step back and asking a seemingly simple question. What is the purpose of prayer?

Let's first look at following statement of Hazal:

אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: מִפְּנֵי מָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ עֲקוּרִים — מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִתְאַוֶּה לְתַפִּלַּתְן שֶׁל צְדִיקִים (Yevamot 64:1)

In this Gemara, Rabbi Yitzchak asks why the Avot were barren. The answer is that Hashem desires the prayers of *sadikkim*. Hold on. Isn't tefillah for us, not for Hashem?

The Chovot Halevavot (Cheshbon HaNefesh 18) explains that tefillah is, in fact, for us. The purpose of tefillah is to transform ourselves, gaining a closer and more sincere relationship with Hashem. Hashem wants the best for us and knows that closeness to Hashem is the ultimate good. He therefore will sometimes give a person a struggle in order that they should pray and as a result become closer to Hashem. The struggle is merely a loving push.

This idea is the key to understanding the above Gemara. Hashem's caring nudge to the Avot took the form of the struggle of having children. This struggle caused the Avot to turn to Hashem and strengthen their dependence on Him. This dependence is the ultimate pleasure.

All the Avot experienced difficulty having children, besides for one—Leah. Why not, considering we just said that struggle is a loving push closer to Hashem? What was unique about Leah?

"וְעֵינֵי לֵאָה רְכוּת"

Through her tears, Leah already developed an intimate relationship with Hashem. Therefore, Hashem did not need to push her into a corner so she would turn to Him. She was *already there*. She was proactive in her relationship with her Creator.

So too, we should strive to become closer to Hashem every day. Tefillah should not be the last resort, rather the first stop when facing any endeavor in life. Let's push ourselves closer to Hashem so Hashem won't have to push us in the form of any struggle. Be'ezrat Hashem through the collective prayers of Klal Yisrael we will be *zoche* to see many *yeshuot* and the days of Mashiach!

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