



### **Vayetzei: Living, Learning, Accepting**

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It was the dawn of a new age. The era of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs paved the way for Twelve Tribes and the beginnings of the Nation of Israel. Together with his wives, Rachel, Leah and their maidservants Bilha and Zilpa, Yaakov continued to build upon the foundation of his father and grandfather. However, Yaakov's familial circumstances were far from idyllic. There was ongoing tension in the household. This was most clearly expressed in Leah's naming of her children:

*"And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me." And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Since the Lord has heard that I am hated, He gave me this one too." So she named him Shimon. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, for I have borne him three sons; therefore, she named him Levi (Genesis 29:32-34)."*

Leah desired to be close to Yaakov. She desperately pined to feel loved. She knew she was not the intended or desired spouse. She knew the intensity of the love shared between Yaakov and Rachel and yearned for that same level of marital connectedness. With the birth of each child Leah secretly hoped that this would be the event that would create marital closeness with Yaakov.

Yet something changed with the birth of her fourth son.

*"And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time, I will thank the Lord! Therefore, she named him Judah, and [then] she stopped bearing (Genesis 29:35)."*

It is interesting to note that Yehuda's name makes no mention of her pain or desire for Yaakov's attention. The first three children's names all reflected this anticipatory desire for greater spousal connection and yet now she utters just a simple statement of gratitude to God. What changed? Furthermore, why didn't Leah express her gratitude to God upon the birth of her older children?

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) explains this profound transformation in one word - acceptance. Leah spent the first few years of her married life in incredible pain over her second tier status. Yaakov loved Leah, as the Torah states, "... and he also loved Rachel more than Leah ... (Genesis 29:30)" – he just loved Rachel more. For there to be harmony in a marriage a wife must know that she is most important and a priority in her husband's life. Leah knew she was loved, she knew Yaakov cared for her, but she also knew she was not the most important person in his life. Leah's pain was so acute that it was reflected in the naming of her children. During what should have been a time of incredible joy, all Leah felt was pain. This pain overshadowed and eclipsed the feeling of blessing that should have been present at birth of her children. But then something changed. Leah realized that the circumstances of her life were not going to change. Rachel was and would always be the love of Yaakov's life. And so, Leah *Imeynu* had a choice. Either use up all of her emotional energy yearning for something that would not come to fruition or devote herself to maximizing her current circumstances despite the fact that they were not optimal. Leah chose the latter. Leah chose to accept her circumstances and realized that although, she may not be the primary wife, she would become the dominant matriarchal influence within the Abrahamic family. The future *kehuna* (priesthood from the tribe of Levi) and monarchy (from the tribe of Yehuda) would emanate from her. When Yehuda was born, Leah had already accepted the reality of her circumstances and her new role. As a result of this acceptance, Leah was finally able to appreciate the beautiful life blessings God had conferred upon her.

We start out with a vision of how we expect life to turn out. We have dreams and aspirations and when we close our eyes we can even see how each of these dreams will materialize. Sometimes, they do. But more often than not, life does not turn out the way we expected. Life does not always go according to plan. Whenever possible we must exert incredible effort to bring our dreams and life vision to fruition. However, there are moments when we must accept that the life we want is not the life that we have. We must sometimes accept that some dreams do not and will not come true. And it is in those very moments we must make a decision. Will I spend all of my energy lamenting that which is not or will I devote myself to maximizing that which is?

Even if the story doesn't have a fairy tale ending we must endeavor to find happiness, meaning and fulfillment in the ever after.