

But as for me, when I came from Paddam, Rachel died on me. (48:7)

Rashi explains that Yaakov *Avinu* was validating his burial of Rachel *Imeinu* outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, because it was Hashem's decree that she be "available" to assist her descendants. "When Nevuzaraden will exile them, they will pass by her grave and Rachel will go out and pray on their behalf."

There is a very telling story connected with this *pasuk*. Although the story has very little direct connection with the *pasuk*, it does give us insight into the mind and heart of a secular Jew who, for all intents and purposes, never had any exposure to real Torah learning and its effect on an individual - despite his youth. Dr. Max Nordeau, a psychologist practicing in Paris, France, at the end of the nineteenth century, was an enigmatic personality. Raised in a "mildly" observant home, he did receive somewhat of a Jewish education. Sadly, it was insufficient to protect him from falling into the clutches of the secular free-thinking movement which was prevalent at the time, especially in Western Europe. Like so many of his ilk, he had a disdain for Torah Judaism – quite possibly because he was clueless as to its meaning and beliefs. He related the following story.

"One day, in Paris, during reception hours at my office, a poor woman from the Jewish quarter (ghetto) came with her nine-year-old son to receive treatment. I saw the boy was clever, but I felt that his French was, at best, poor. I asked him what school he attended. He responded that he attended a certain *cheder*. His mother immediately interjected that he attended that school because her husband, his father, was old-fashioned in his ways and refused to let their son attend a secular school until he completed his course of studies at the *cheder*.

"I pondered angrily over this man who had prevented his son from receiving a European education, and, almost mockingly, I asked the boy what he had learned in *cheder*. Immediately the boy became animated and with astounding emotion, in *Yiddish*, began to expound on *Rashi's* explanation of why Yaakov did not bury Rachel in *Eretz Yisrael*.

"At that moment, all of my organs trembled and my heart muscle began to vibrate with a new song. I stood up and hugged the boy and kissed him on the forehead. In my heart I said, 'A nation like this who preserves such memories for thousands of years and roots them in the hearts of their children – such a nation cannot die. It is promised a life of eternity.' This occurred during the Dreyfus trial (an anti-Semitic libelous trial against a high ranking Jewish officer in the French army), when I had begun to doubt the gentile nations' 'justice' toward *Yisrael*. I can honestly say that this experience was one of the factors that brought about my return to Judaism."

Dr. Nordeau remained a secular Jew who fought passionately for a Jewish state, albeit secular. It took him a lifetime to realize what our young children know from the earliest stages: Torah is our life. Without it life has no purpose – no meaning – no value. The quality of life is determined by the

meaning supporting it. A life without values has limited quality.