

But as for me – when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the Land of Canaan on the road...and I buried her there on the road to Efras. (48:7)

Yaakov *Avinu* seems to be apologizing to Yosef for not having done for Rachel *Imeinu* as he was expecting Yosef to do for him. “Although I trouble you to bury me in the land of Canaan, though I did not do so for your mother, for, see now, she died near Beis Lechem”; “And I did not even take her to Beis Lechem, to bring her into the Land, and I know that there are hard feelings in your heart against me. But you should know that by the Word of G-d I buried her there so that she should be of aid to her children when Nevuzaradden would exile them, and when they would pass through by way of Rachel’s tomb, Rachel would go out and seek mercy for them.” (*Rashi*)

Despite the fact that he did not bury Yosef’s mother in *Chevron*, Yaakov asked his son to do for him what he did not do for his mother. Furthermore, this validation of Rachel’s burial is placed right in the middle of Yaakov’s blessing of Yosef’s two sons. He says: “Ephraim and Menashe will be to me like Reuven and Shimon ... But as for me...” He then continues with the designated blessings for Ephraim and Menashe. What is Yaakov intimating by what appears to be a disjointed conversation?

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, explains that when Yaakov asked Yosef to bury him in *Eretz Yisrael*, he was actually presenting his son with a powerful challenge. He was requesting that Yosef do something which he himself had not done for Yosef’s mother! Would Yosef refuse? Would he rebel? Not Yosef *HaTzaddik*. He stood there respectfully. He neither complained nor rebelled. Instead, he immediately promised his father that his request would be executed to the fullest extent.

Now, let us address the blessings and why Yaakov’s validation is placed in the middle of the conversation concerning the blessings. What happened to Reuven? Why did he lose the *bechorah*, right of the firstborn? Impetuosity. He criticized his father for not moving his bed into Leah *Imeinu*’s tent following the passing of Rachel. Reuven made the move, placing Yaakov’s bed in Bilhah’s tent. Reuven had *taanos*, complaints. One who cannot accept a challenge-- confront a situation with which he neither agrees, nor understands -- loses the birthright. He lacks the quality of *amidah b’nisayon*, staying the course, even when confronted with a difficult challenge. Yosef, however, was silent. He, too, had reason to perhaps express his *taanos*; yet, he remained silent. He stood strong in the face of challenge. Thus, he became the *b’chor*, firstborn.

Yaakov is now transferring the *bechorah*, saying that Ephraim and Menashe will be like Reuven and Shimon. Yaakov intimates to Yosef: Do you want to know why I am giving you the *bechorah*? It is because when I came from Paddan, your mother, Rachel, died and I was compelled to bury her on the side of the road – not in *Eretz Yisrael*! Yet, you did not complain! This is why you have become the firstborn – instead of Reuven.

How many times in life do we lose our cool – justifiably? How often do we lose something important as a result of our impetuosity? How often do we say to ourselves: “If I would have only controlled myself...”? Last, how often do we judge people negatively without giving them the benefit of the doubt, without asking ourselves: “Perhaps there is something about him that I am overlooking”? It all boils down to what the *Maggid* explains: Leadership goes to he who is able to rise above challenge. Some of the greatest and most powerful people have fallen because they could not overcome petty challenges. Challenge may be defined as a refusal to accept something as true or correct when our hearts do not coincide with this line of thought. In other words, if my “gut feeling” tells me that something is not right, the fact that my mind tells me there might be a reason, a validation for what our gut feeling is telling us is incorrect, we follow our heart and ignore our mind. Such a person has failed the challenge.

The following is one story where, indeed, an entire city fell victim to this gut feeling. The city of Krakow/Cracow, Poland, in the seventeenth century had a large Jewish population, many of whom were devout Torah scholars. A city is home to all types of people. Cracow was home to a wealthy Jew by the name of Yisrael who achieved infamy for his uncompromising stinginess. The local beggars had long since stopped coming by his house to solicit funds, knowing full well that it was a waste of time. The city’s trustees had followed suit, since every attempt at fundraising was met with polite, but adamant, refusal.

Seventeenth century European Jews were, for the most part, devoid of economic opportunity. Many lived lives of abject poverty, augmenting their meager “income” by begging from door to door. Thus, Yisrael’s utter heartlessness enraged the community. Here was a Jew who had so much and was capable of supporting the community; yet, he did not. As a result of their annoyance with him, they nicknamed him Goy, a *nom deguere* that stuck, despite its crude and vulgar connotation.

Time does not halt for anyone; the wealthy miser was no exception. He now lay on his deathbed surrounded by members of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Sacred Burial Society, negotiating for his burial and tombstone: “I have already had *tachrichim*, shrouds, sewn for me. I need a simple plot anywhere in the cemetery. Likewise, a simple stone to serve as a marker will suffice.”

“You understand that the money incurred from the sale of plots is used for charity,” the head of the *Chevra* began. “Each Jew pays according to his means. In your case, you are quite capable. In addition, you have hardly assisted the poor in the past.”

“As far as my non-relationship with the poor, Heaven will judge me. You, on the other hand, have no right to extract more from me than I am willing to give. I will give you one hundred *gulden*, and that is it. One more thing. I insist that the inscription on my head stone to read: Here lies Yisrael Goy.”

The members of the *Chevra* could not argue with the man. He was adamant. They completed the

paperwork and left his home in desperation. The latest act of miserliness evinced by Yisrael Goy duly annoyed the populace. “How low could a person get?” they wondered. Apparently, this man would leave the world a very lonely person – which is what he did. It took great effort to secure a *minyan*, quorum, for his funeral. There were no eulogies; people simply were not interested. [We are not allowed to judge, but, when someone is destitute and he has no food to give his hungry family-- with no hope for a solution other than the wealthy man who refuses to help him-- people will do strange things and often act out of character. We may not judge those who are in dire need.]

That Thursday evening there was a knock at the door of Cracow’s *Rav*, the distinguished *Horav Yom Tov Lipa Heller, zl*, author of the *Tosfos Yom Tov* commentary on *Mishnayos*. It was one of the community’s poor who asked for money to purchase the necessary foods for *Shabbos*. The *Rav* gave him a few coins from his discretionary fund. No sooner had the man left than someone else appeared at the door with a similar request. During the next hour, twenty men came to the *Rav*’s door asking for *Shabbos* funds. The *Rav* had never experienced such a sudden rise in the community’s poor. What had happened? He called an emergency meeting of the community’s *tzedakah gabbaim*, trustees. They, too, did not understand this phenomenon.

A few minutes into the meeting, another poor petitioner knocked on the door requesting funds. This time the *Rav* asked him, “Tell me, how did you survive until now?” “We bought on credit at the grocers. We had no money. He simply wrote it down in his ledger, and that was the last we heard of it. He never asked us for the money.” (Apparently, they were not going to look a gift horse in the mouth. They knew it was unreal to receive unlimited credit, but, regardless, they accepted it.) The *Rav* investigated and discovered that literally hundreds of families lived this way – receiving credit at the town’s grocers.

Now it was time to meet with the grocers. The *Rav* called them all together and said, “You will not leave this room until you share with me how you were able to give credit for hundreds of families each and every week.”

They hemmed and hawed until the truth finally came out. For years, Yisrael G. had sustained hundreds of poor families. Every week, when a merchant presented him with a bill, he immediately paid it in full. There was one condition, however: No one – absolutely no one- not even his closest family, was to be made aware of his practice of anonymous charity.

When the *Rav* heard this tale he was shattered that such a righteous person had lived in their midst, and the community, in their haste to judge him, had excoriated a Jew who stood on a much higher spiritual plane than any of them.

Rav Yom Tov Lipa immediately declared a public fast day on Yisrael G’s *sheloshim*, thirty days after his passing, to atone for misjudging and reviling a fellow Jew. They were to gather at the cemetery where they would all beg forgiveness from the deceased. The *Rav* followed their supplication with a fiery eulogy extolling the quality of he who gives charity anonymously, despite

the fact that it caused him extreme personal humiliation. Last, the *Rav* declared that, when his time to leave this world would come, he asked to be buried next to *Reb* Yisrael.

The *Rav* instructed that the community comply with *Reb* Yisrael's last wish to have Yisrael Goy engraved on his stone. He had them, however, add a word – *kadosh*. The stone now read *Yisrael Goy Kadosh* – a different meaning for a different person. Apparently, they had a never known the original person.