

He loved Rachel even more than Leah. (29:30)

Obviously, the interpretation of this *pasuk* contains more than meets the eye. This is not a romantic tale. This *pasuk* is laden with profound meaning. First and foremost, when the Torah writes that Yaakov *Avinu's* love for Rachel *Imeinu* was greater than the love he had for Leah *Imeinu*, it certainly is not referring to an emotional attraction. I came across an interpretation by **Horav Moshe Leib Sassover, zl**, which I find especially meaningful. He quotes the well-known and often-used *pasuk*, *Tachas asher lo avadita es Hashem Elokecha b'simchah u'b'tuv lev*, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart" (*Devarim* 28:47). *Klal Yisrael's* lack of joy in serving Hashem is the catalyst for its ultimate punishment. They serve, but they are not excited, enthusiastic, filled with joy. As a rule, joy is a powerful barometer that indicates one's love for a person, endeavor, organization. If one drags his feet, it shows that he is neither happy, nor does he care for what he is doing.

Joy reflects a greater and stronger love of something than do tears. *Chazal* teach that *Shaarei demaos lo ninalu*, "The gates of tears are never closed" (*Bava Metziah* 59a). One's tearful entreaty will always penetrate the Heavenly Gates. Joy, however, breaks down, shatters, the gate; nothing stands in the way of joy. In other words, for tears to ascend and penetrate the Heavenly Throne, the gates must be opened. Joy is able to pass even through a closed gate.

Leah *Imeinu* merited her place in the Matriarchal hierarchy as a result of her weeping: *V'eini Leah rakos*, "Leah's eyes were tender" (*Bereishis* 29:17). *Chazal* attribute the tenderness of Leah's eyes to her incessant weeping, pleading with Hashem that she not be compelled to marry Eisav. People would say that Rivkah had two sons, and Lavan had two daughters. The elder daughter (Leah) would be married to the elder son (Eisav). So, Leah had a reason to weep. This is what is meant that Yaakov loved Rachel even more than Leah. Rachel achieved through joy what Leah accomplished through her weeping.

Chazal teach, *Shaarei demaos lo ninalu*, "The gates of tears are not closed" (*Bereishis* 32b). The **Yehudi Hakadosh, zl**, was wont to say, "If the gates would indeed be closed, the tears would not be able to enter. Tears are (usually) the result of a depressed feeling, thus, they find it difficult to penetrate a sealed door. With joy, however, one can make a hole (and penetrate) even through a closed door."

Ostensibly, the advantage of living a life filled with joy is obvious. Serving Hashem amidst joy is the way one manifests his profound love for the *mitzvah*. What about taking joy to the next level, such as in the most solemn and difficult moments of life: imbuing the process of death, the closing moments of life, with joy? This is the most remarkable test. I think it is a powerful indicator of a life that one has lived with "no regrets," a life of satisfaction, of gladness, a life totally connected with Hashem. The following vignette, which describes the last hours and final moments of the life of a giant of Torah, the founder of *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin* and the initiator of the *Daf HaYomi*, **Horav Meir Shapiro, zl**, is something to read over and over, allowing it to guide our lives. It shows how a

person should live – and die; more importantly, however, it demonstrates the sublimity of the human psyche and indicates the heights that it can reach.

On Tuesday, the fourth of *Cheshvan* 5695 (1934), the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rav Meir Shapiro, did not appear on time for his early morning *shiur*, lecture. This was highly unusual, since, normally, he was the first one to arrive. As the minutes passed, they realized that something was amiss. Their concern became stronger when he did not attend *Shacharis*, morning prayer service. Rav Meir was not merely a *Rosh Yeshivah*. Although he had not been blessed with his own biological children, the students of the *yeshivah* were his sons – and they felt he was their father. After *davening* they went to his home to inquire why he had not been to *davening*. They discovered him lying in bed with a bad cold. The doctor who was at his bedside said there was no reason for concern. The *Rosh Yeshivah* simply had a bad case of the flu.

The following day, Rav Meir's condition worsened; a swelling had developed in his throat, impeding his ability to breathe properly. Other doctors were summoned to his bedside, but they, too, concurred with his primary physician. There was no reason for concern. In a few days, the *Rosh Yeshivah* would be up and about. Rav Meir's body did not seem to agree with the doctor's prognosis. With each hour, he became significantly weaker. The doctors, nonetheless, felt that he would bounce back and recover.

Late Thursday night, it was evident that the doctors were grossly mistaken. It was clear that their beloved *Rebbe* had but minutes to live. On a piece of paper, he wrote an instruction to his *talmidim* standing around his bedside, "Everyone should drink *l'chaim*!" Immediately, a bottle and cups appeared, and the *bachurim* drank *l'chaim*.

As weak as he was, Rav Meir stretched out his hand and shook the hand of each and every student. After this, he motioned that they should sing one of his *niggunim*, tunes, to the words, *Becha batchu Avoseinu* ("In You did our ancestors trust"). In the middle of the song, he beckoned to them to form a circle around his bed, and then, on a scrap of paper, he wrote his last words: "*Rak b'simchah* – only with joy." This was his final epistle.

The students danced around his bed singing and crying. In the middle lay Rav Meir, his august countenance shining like an angel. With his hand, he beckoned them to go faster, to sing louder, until suddenly, he gave a shudder and his holy *neshamah*, soul, ascended Heavenward to meet the holy *Tanaaim* and *Amoraim* who were surely waiting to greet him.

As I write this, I attempt to imagine the scene. It must have been the most remarkable experience, as true joy overcame sadness, reality overshadowed illusion. To achieve such a death, one has to have lived such a life: "*Rak b'simchah* – only with joy!"