

Devorah, the wet-nurse of Rivkah, died, and she was buried below Bais-Kel, below the plateau; and he named it Allon-Bachus. (35:8)

One expects the Torah to record the lives of the Jewish nation's most distinguished, intriguing figures. Indeed, the *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, were individuals without peer. Their lives represented the Jewish mission; their enduring legacy is the Jewish nation, who are their progeny. Understandably, their lives obscure the lives of those whose impact on the future was less compelling. We are rarely introduced to one of those "obscure" individuals, a person whose impact on the future of the nation, while not as significant as that of the *Avos* and *Imahos*, still left an impression. In this *parsha* we read about such a person, concerning whose existence we are informed of only at the time of her death. The Torah does not record anything about her life. We find this in the various *Midrashim*.

Devorah, the wet-nurse of Rivkah, is introduced to the reader via her obituary. In fact, the reason her passing is noted is that she happened to be with Yaakov *Avinu* at the time. Why she was there and why the Torah records her passing, engender a debate between *Rashi* and *Ramban*.

Chazal teach that, while the Torah only mentions the passing of Devorah, the place where she is buried is called Allon Bachus, which *Chazal* perceive to mean the plateau of double weeping. They explain that Rivkah *Imeinu* had also died. The Torah does not mention her death explicitly, because she was buried secretly. Rivkah's funeral was very sad. Her husband, Yitzchak *Avinu*, was blind and could not attend. Her son, Yaakov, whom she loved, was away from home, for fear of his life at the hands of his brother, the wicked Eisav. Eisav would not attend, because he blamed his mother for all of his problems. It was through her machinations that he lost out on the *brachos*, blessings. Thus, Rivkah was buried by her neighbors in a quiet, sad ceremony. The Torah writes about Devorah's passing, but by referring to her burial place as the place of double weeping, the Torah alludes to the passing of Rivkah.

Rashi contends that Rivkah had sent the elderly Devorah to notify Yaakov *Avinu* that it was finally safe to return home. *Ramban* posits that when Yaakov left Lavan, he took Devorah with him. Apparently, she had returned to Padam-Aram following Rivkah's marriage. Out of respect for his mother, Yaakov supported her wet-nurse in her old age. In any event, Devorah had been around for quite some time, having been witness to the glory of the building of the House of *Yisrael*. According to *Ramban*, she probably played a role in raising the *Shivtei Kah*. According to *Rashi*, she probably raised Yaakov. Yet, all of this time, she remained in the background. Clearly, she had had an influence on the children and, by extension, on *Klal Yisrael*.

These are two women whose lives were intertwined almost from the onset. Both had long and troubled lives. Rivkah raised Yaakov, but she never had the chance to see the *nachas* of her grandchildren. Devorah led an obscure life. She was always present, but the Torah does not

identify her until her passing – and that is only in order to conceal the sad, covert, late-at-night funeral of Rivkah.

Both of these great women gained distinction for their motherly function. Rivkah gave up experiencing the *nachas* for which every parent pines, so that Yaakov could be safe. Devorah remained in the background all of her life as a wet-nurse and then as the mentor of the *Shevatim*. The world around us venerates the public person and pays homage to the superstar. What about, however, the fellow who goes through life faithfully executing his daily tasks without complaint and without fanfare; the fellow who sits in the back of the *shul* and spends every spare moment learning, without publicizing his presence; the one who only achieves recognition posthumously? These two women attest to their distinction. It is about what you do – not about who knows about it.

Some people are truly recognized posthumously – in fact, no one is aware of their true greatness while they are living. I recently heard this story from a *Rav*, who heard it directly from *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl*. Even if it is not a “seamless” fit with the above *dvar Torah*, it is worth relating to the reading public.

Horav Aryeh Levine, zl, would visit Shaarei Tzedek hospital every *Shabbos*. One *Shabbos*, he was there when an elderly patient had a heart attack. A few hours later, when he was about to leave the hospital, he went to check up on that patient. He walked into the room and was shocked to see the man sitting up in bed, as if nothing had ever occurred. Sensing *Rav Aryeh's* incredulity, the man said, “I actually died and my *neshamah*, soul, went up to Heaven. It was not yet ready to leave this world, and I begged for a reprieve. The Heavenly Tribunal replied that I had lived out my allotted time in this world. The subject seemed closed, when suddenly, the *neshamah* of a great *Rav* entered. ‘Let him go back,’ the *neshamah* pleaded. ‘For twenty-five years he was a *gabbai tzedakah*, charity solicitor and received no recompense.’ I was allowed to return, but my *neshamah* did not know to connect back with my body. It began to flounder around, when suddenly, out of ‘nowhere,’ another *neshamah* came over and showed ‘me’ how to return.

“I asked this *neshamah* why he was doing this for me. He replied that he had once been visiting my town in western Europe on a *Shabbos*. The custom would be that all the guests lined up single file by the door of the *shul*, and, when the congregants would walk by, they would invite them one by one. ‘I was last in line. Because of my oversized girth, no one wanted to invite me. You were a little boy of nine years old,’ he said. ‘Your father quickly walked by, taking you with him. I was left alone in *shul* – depressed, dejected and hungry. A short while later, you returned and invited me to your home. Apparently, when you came home, you created a ruckus by crying and begging that I be invited. This is why I came back to help you.’”

One never knows whom he is actually helping when he helps someone; it might even be himself.