

"And it came to pass as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called his name Ben-oni, but his father called him Binyamin." (35:18)

As Rachel was about to leave this world, she realized that the child she had longed for was about to be born. She named him Ben-oni. According to the most common interpretation, Ben-oni is Aramaic for, "the son of my grief." Yaakov called the child, "Binyamin," which in Hebrew means, "the son of my right hand."

The *Ramban* states that there are two contrasting views expressed by the father and mother of this child. Rachel, the dying mother, seems to have accentuated the pessimistic significance of the word *ut*, "a son of my sorrow". Yaakov, on the other hand, decided to substitute an optimistic perspective in order to protect the child from any evil omen. The interpretation one attaches to a given situation carries personal implications which might be counterproductive to ignore.

Horav Mordechai Rogov z.l., cites the *Midrash* which differentiates between the Aramaic and Hebrew definitions of *Ben-oni*. He employs the following analogy in an attempt to equate Yaakov's approach to his sons's name with that of Rachel's. A woman who had been childless for many years is blessed and finally becomes pregnant. As she anticipates the joyous moment she has waited for so anxiously, she becomes ill. The doctors determine that it is impossible for her to give birth to a healthy child and survive. They must either perform a surgical procedure which will sacrifice the life of the child, or if the child is to live, she herself will not survive. The choice is in the hands of the woman. She decides not to have the surgery, thereby sacrificing her life in deference to the unborn child for whom she had yearned so long.

All those gathered around her bedside entreat her to change her mind. Their words are to no avail. Although she will not live to see her child, she will, nonetheless, die knowing that she made the ultimate sacrifice for the child she had waited so long to have and to love.

In the last minutes before her passing, she tells her family and friends that she views her soon-to-be-born child as her link to the future. Although she will die, her child will live on. In the last few moments of her life she asks for one last favor, "When my son matures, please tell him about the mother he never saw. Tell him about my ultimate sacrifice so that he would live. Please relate to him that on my deathbed I asked only one thing -- that he repay my efforts on his behalf by being an observant Jew, dedicated to *Torah* and *mitzvos*. By conforming with my wishes, he will bring me much *nachas* and will truly be a living memorial to my name." When they assured her that her wishes would be fulfilled, she went to her death content and secure in the knowledge that her child would perpetuate her legacy.

This scenario, says *Horav Rogov*, likewise occurred before Rachel's death. As the labor pains intensified and she knew that she would die, she made one last wish. She named her son *Ben-oni*,

"son of my sorrow". This name was to remain with him his entire life, reminding him of his sorrowful beginning and the tragic end of his mother's life. This name inspired him to remember his mother and to acknowledge her sacrifice by continuing along the path of *Torah* forged for him by both of his parents. Rachel chose the Aramaic version of the name, which connotes the tragedy of her death as the harbinger of her son's birth.

Yaakov apparently understood Rachel's objective and chose a Hebrew name which would similarly inspire their son to pursue a positive path. He chose Binyamin, "the son of my right hand". This name implies strength and courage, fortitude and fearlessness, qualities their son would need to fulfill his mother's legacy. Yaakov focused on the positive goal which was demanded of his son. Yaakov and Rachel both had the same objective in naming their son. They only differed in their emphasis.