

Yaakov loved Rachel ... and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her. (29:18,20)

Targum Onkeles translates *va'yahav*, and (he) loved... *u'r'cheim*, and (Yaakov) was sympathetic towards (Rachel). The accepted translation of *ahavah* is love. *Onkeles* seems to equate love with *rachamanus*, compassion/sympathy. *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, explains that true love is derived from compassion/empathy. Furthermore, one whose love is not founded in sympathy loves only himself. He does not really love the other person. The well-known aphorism from the *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, comes into play here. A *chassid* once remarked to the *Rebbe* that he loved fish. The *Rebbe* countered that veritably he loved himself, and fish satisfied him. If he truly loved fish, he would not eat them, since he was causing them to die for his satisfaction. The *Avos*, Patriarchs, loved others due to their sympathetic feelings towards them. Thus, their *ahavah* was founded in *rachmanus*.

To better understand this, I quote from *Horav S. R. Hirsch's* commentary to *Bereishis* 43:14, *V'Keil Shakai, yitein lachem rachamim lifnei ha'ish*; "And G-d, *Shakai*, grant you sympathy, in the presence of the Man." He explains the term *rechein*, sympathy, as derived from *rechem*, womb. Familial love: parents to children, children to parents, and children to each other – is founded on the notion of the common womb from which they come. People confuse *rachamim*, sympathy with *rachamanus*, pity/compassion. This is an error, since pity is a far lower feeling than *rachamim*, sympathy. *Rav Hirsch* asks: "Which is rarer, which enables man more: to be moved to pity at another's sorrow, or to be moved to joy at their happiness? Very few people do not feel pity concerning their fellow's adversity, but how many also feel abundant joy when that same fellow wins the lottery and now has greater wealth than they have?"

Rachamim is derived from *rechem*, womb. One cares for another, because he feels a sense of oneness, of having emerged from the same womb. Thus, their relationship is of true empathy. As a parent is overjoyed with his/her child's success, so, too, is a friend filled with happiness when his/her friend is successful. This is true love, focused on the other, not simply on oneself.