

## But as for me – when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me... and I buried her there on the road to Efras, which is Bais Lechem. (48:7)

*Rashi* explains that Yaakov *Avinu* was excusing himself for not having buried Rachel *Imeinu* in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*. Here he was asking Yosef to make a special effort to take his body out of Egypt in order to bury him in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah* – when he had not done the same for his wife – Yosef's mother. Apparently, Yaakov sensed that Yosef might have been harboring ill will against him for not making that extra effort to bury his mother in what he might have felt was her rightful place. Yaakov explained that the decision concerning Rachel's final resting place had been taken out of his hands by Hashem. The Almighty wanted Rachel buried by the side of the road, so that she would serve as a "mother" to the tormented, hungry and exhausted Jews being led into captivity by Nevuzaradan – following the destruction of the first *Bais Hamikdash*. Rachel emerged from her grave and pled for Hashem's mercy on behalf of the Jewish People. Her entreaty made a difference. As a result, until this very day, the gravesite of Rachel *Imeinu* -- the *Momma Rachel*-- serves as a source of comfort and succor for the tired, the hungry, the needy Jews who beseech her to intercede on their behalf during personal and national crises.

*Rashi* uses the words: *She'thei ezra l'baneha*, "So that she should serve as a (source of) support for her children." Throughout the generations, the Tomb of Rachel has been just that, a source of support. There are many "*Momma Rachel*" stories. The following incident was related by the *Minchas Elazar*, the *Munkatcher Rebbe*, *zl*, thus establishing its source as impeccable.

The Russian government, not known for its unabiding love for its Jewish citizens, imprisoned **Horav Mordechai Tchernobler, zl**. The judge was a rabid anti-Semite, and he refused to listen to the pleas of his friends and relatives to release the saintly *Rebbe*. After much pressure, he finally permitted them to bring him his *Tallis* and *Tefillin* and some kosher food. Furthermore, since it had been the *Tchernobler's* custom to disburse *tzedakah*, charity, to the poor before *Shabbos* (so that they could purchase the basic necessities for *Shabbos*), they allowed him to continue doing so from prison. The poor and needy would line up outside his cell, and he would pass money to each one by way of a small window in his cell. He would pass it to the men, and, for the women, he left it on the windowsill.

One time, a woman appeared at the *Rebbe's* window and said, "I did not come for money. I came to ask a question. *Chazal* relate (*Bava Kamma* 50a) that the daughter of Nechunyah *Chofeir Sichin* (he dug wells to provide water for the *Olei Regalim*, pilgrims who came to Yerushalayim for the Three Festivals) fell into one of the wells. The people notified Rabbi Chanina *ben Dosa*. He told them, 'She has risen' (in other words, she had been rescued). They asked him, 'Are you a *Navi*, prophet?' (How could he have known that she had been saved?) He replied, 'I am neither a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet I simply said (thought to myself) something for which that *tzaddik*, righteous person (her father Nechunya), goes to such trouble (digging wells is difficult

work, and it was done purely altruistically), should his offspring stumble over it? (How could Nechunya's daughter be hurt in the well that her father had dug for the sake of the pilgrims?)

"*Rebbe*, your holy father (*Rav Nochum Tchernobler, zl*) was heavily involved in *pidyon shevuim*, redeeming captives, and you also occupy yourself with this noble *mitzvah*. How could you be the victim of the *mitzvah* for which you and your father have sacrificed?"

*Rav Mordechai* replied, "You are asking a good question – one over which I, too, have ruminated." The woman declared, "I bless you (the royal you) that you be immediately released from captivity and returned to your *chassidim*."

That same day, the warden released the *Tcheznobler* from prison. The *Rebbe* was acutely aware that what he had experienced was not an ordinary occurrence. He prayed to Hashem for guidance concerning what had happened. Finally, he was told that the "woman" was none other than Rachel *Imeinu* who had appeared so that she could ask the question which served to arouse Divine compassion for the *Rebbe*. Her blessing (together with Divine compassion) catalyzed his release.