

This Week in Torah *VaYetze*

The opening verses of Chapter 30 reads as follow:

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die.” Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, “Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?” She said, “Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children.” So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, “God has vindicated me indeed, [God] has heeded my plea and given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan.

Infertility. It is more than a biological issue, when conception and gestation are challenges. Author Michael Gold wrote [And Hannah Wept](#) as a Jewish explanation to the problems of infertility. He noted that many yearn to become parents and when the dream goes unrealized, the heartbreak is tremendous. He also noted that it was not uncommon—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Hannah all experienced challenges of infertility. Sometimes science can provide a remedy to the issue. Sometimes surrogacy is an option or adoption. Prayer, Gold wrote, can voice the yearning of the heart but be careful to place too much hope in it as the answer to the problem. We know now from scientific explanation that infertility is not a result of transgression or a way of God punishing a person. Infertility is a biological problem with spiritual ramifications.

In our *parasha*, Rachel’s infertility is painfully apparent in her cries to her husband. And surrogacy provided by Bilhah eased that angst. A child arrived on Rachel’s knees just as Hagar did with Sarah, Rachel responded with a sigh as she proclaimed that God had “vindicated” her. Fifteenth/Sixteenth century Italian Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno saw this vindication as God being just and fair. But vindication means more than that!

Vindication. Hmmmmmm. Let’s explore that word— it means that she was cleared of some sort of blame or wrong doing. Thirteenth century scholar Chizkuni believed that her infertility was a response to her jealousy that her sister was able to conceive and deliver so easily. Should we be comfortable with that explanation? Author Michael Gold

does admit that stress and anxiety can hinder the ability to conceive, but that is more biology, dealing with hormone levels then Divine retribution.

But maybe it wasn't vindicating the past, but giving Rachel strength for the future.

Vindication. The RaDaK [Rabbi David Kimchi] who lived in the 12th/13th century in France, asserted that the vindication here was that Rachel was just as worthy as Divine favor as her sister, Leah. The surrogacy let Rachel share the joys of parenting alongside her sister.

Rachel's vindication was to become the close sister she once was who shared so much with Leah. Now the bond can be strong as they raised children together.

Vindication. In Hebrew, the text uses the word "*dinane'e*"—*dalet, yod, nun, nun, yod*--indicating a notion of law and judgement. The 12th century Spanish Rabbi ibn Ezra noted that there is a missing letter here, there is a dot [or a *dagesh*] in the second *nun*, indicating that there is a hidden third *nun*. Here is where it can get confusing--From a grammar point of view, the second *nun* closed the syllable and the missing third one opened that last syllable up]. Mystics played with ibn Ezra's teaching and wondered what was the hidden word at play here--- they deemed it to be *netzach* which means endurance, intensity, or eternity. They taught that was a virtue Rachel needed to assert in her life--endurance to follow thru on her dreams, intensity to raise children, and to know the eternal promise of a patriarch still awaits her as Joseph and Benjamin were not yet born.

As we read the *sedra*, let's take a hard look at the emotions that are hidden beneath the surface. Like ibn Ezra's missing or hidden *nun*, there are feelings not being identified that hover over these words that must be identified. These are expressed thru anger, fear and by prayer. But once they can be labeled by us, the narrative is more then expressing a story but a true tale of *netzach*--endurance, intensity, and eternity.