



Vayetzei: Love and Loss

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These are difficult days for Am Yisroel. These are inspiring days for Am Yisroel. At first glance these may seem like contradictory sentiments – but as we see, they are both true. Our collective heart is broken. We carry the pain of those we have lost, we feel the burden of those whose lives have been changed forever, and we lie awake at night thinking of our precious brothers and sisters held hostage. We feel overwhelmed by the torrent of antisemitism in this country in which we once felt so at home. We feel hurt by the silence and indifference of so many around us. And yet, we are inspired. We are inspired by the unity and chessed which have always been and continue to be the hallmark of our people. We are uplifted by the bravery of our soldiers, and we are in awe of the resiliency, fortitude, and optimism of the holy Jews of Eretz Yisroel. We are heartbroken and uplifted. And now, this week, another piece of our national saga unfolds – a hostage exchange. Fifty Jewish lives for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, a temporary ceasefire and fuel. And the debate begins, does this make sense? Aren't we playing into the hands of our enemy? What will Hamas do during this ceasefire? My goal here is not to weigh in on these questions or to offer a personal opinion – I believe in the leadership in the State of Israel to make the right decisions. I won't offer an opinion but will put forward a thought.

And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he raised his voice and wept. (Bereishis 29:11)

It's a dramatic story. Yaakov had run away from home to escape the wrath of Esav and went to his mother's hometown to seek refuge and find a wife. He comes upon the well and meets Rachel. As the verse explains, he kissed her and cried. The kiss, the commentaries explain, was a kiss of kinship, a kiss of familial connection. But why did Yaakov cry? Rashi comments, "*He saw prophetically that she would not be buried with him.*" Rachel was buried in *Beis Lechem* while Yaakov was buried in Chevron in *Me'aras HaMachpeyla*. Seems like a strange confluence of events – in the moment they first met, before they have a life together, Yaakov is crying over how that life will end.

Perhaps Rashi is teaching us a tremendous lesson. In life there is always loss. In that moment at the well, Yaakov recognized that in every life affirming moment there is something you have to be willing to give up. If you want to love someone, you have to accept that one day you may have to deal with the overwhelming pain of losing them. The alternative is to refrain from creating any meaningful and lasting relationships; this way you never have to suffer the pain of loss. But as the poet, Alfred Tennyson wrote, "*It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.*" Love always has a cost. There is a cost during life, in the changes or accommodations we need to make for our loved ones, and there is a cost in death, as mentioned above, in the pain we experience when we suffer loss.

The greatest love that exists in this universe is the love we, Am Yisroel, have for one another. There is no nation, no people who look after one another like we do. There is no nation who would move heaven and earth to help ease the pain and suffering of the other – like we do. There is no nation in this world who values life like we do. The love we have for one another has never been more visible and palpable than in the last six weeks. These weeks have been a mixture of unbridled sadness and love. The walls that so often divide us have come down. And even when there are disagreements, like we saw last week (regarding participation in the rally) amongst different streams within our community, the dispute is about how to best help Am Yisroel. There is absolute agreement on the love for our nation and the need to do something – there are just different opinions about what to do. But the love is present in each of these opinions and approaches. And so, when an opportunity to bring our children home is presented, our love for one another takes over. We are fully cognizant like Yaakov, that love comes with loss. And I have no doubt that our leadership is fully cognizant of the potential loss that this display of love, bringing home our hostages, can create. But what choice do we have? We are a nation who loves each other in a way the world will never understand. We are a nation who values life in a way the world will never understand. The world doesn't understand us – but it's okay – because we have each other.

We have been davening for the day our precious hostages will come home – it appears that this day is arriving soon, and IYH we will witness the kissing and the crying.

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