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VIDEO OUTLINE

TISHA B'AV:
THE POWER OF RACHEL'S TEARS

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◀Segment 1: Rachel's Reward – Video Outline▶

In the first video of the series, Rabbi Fohrman uses Rachel as a model to introduce the concept of effective mourning. Rabbi Fohrman draws our attention to the verses in Jeremiah which explain that Rachel's actions merited rewards; but what do we really know about Rachel that merits rewarding?

- I. What are we supposed to do on this day?
 - a) We read a book called Lamentations
 - b) We sing laments
 - c) It seems pretty clear what we are supposed to do
 1. We are supposed to mourn
 2. We are supposed to cry
 3. Is that enough?
 - d) Mourning and crying are what you do as an instinctive reaction to loss, but it doesn't change the loss
 - e) Maybe this year you come home from hearing Lamentations, and you have your bare feet, and then read some laments in the morning to make yourself feel a little more sad
 1. Maybe you'll watch Schindler's List
 2. Then, if you can cry a little bit, have you done what you're supposed to do on Tisha B'Av?
 3. Or is there more to do?
 4. And, if there's more, what more would that be?



- II. What does effective mourning look like? Is there such a thing as effective mourning?
 - a) Mourning that doesn't just mourn loss but does something too, something restorative in some way
 - b) There may be a model for that in the Torah - Rachel, mother of the people
 1. That is, at least, how Jeremiah seems to see it
 2. Referring to perhaps the most famous verses in the entire Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:14-16)
 3. Jeremiah actually portrays the afterlife of the Biblical figure
 4. We are given a vision of Rachel weeping on high in the realms of heaven
 - "There is a voice heard on high that's crying bitter tears; it's the voice of Rachel, crying for her children."
 - She is crying over her children being led into exile
 - Jeremiah lives through the first exile and destruction of the Temple
 - This is a prophecy that is describing all of these hundreds of thousands of children of Rachel, leaving the land of Israel and being led away into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar's troops



5. That's what's happening on earth, and in heaven, Rachel is crying
 - "She refuses to be consoled for her children, for they're not there."
 - She is desolate

6. And then Jeremiah gives God's response to Rachel:

- "Thus says God, 'Hold back your voice from crying, and dry your eyes from the tears. For there is reward for what you've done, and they will return from the land of their enemies. There is hope for you in the end; your children will return to their rightful borders.'"
 - That's a pretty comforting prophecy



7. If on Tisha B'Av we mourn exile, here's the promise that exile will be over
 - Rachel's tears were really effective
 - If somehow we could do what Rachel did, if we could be answered the way she was answered, that would be amazing

III. On the one hand, we might try to emulate Rachel to whatever extent we can

- a) It's a double-edged sword, though, because maybe it's completely impossible to emulate her
 1. She, after all, was the mother of our entire people
 2. She was crying over them like only a mother can
 3. There is no more poignant an image than that of a mother crying over her lost children
- b) We might say that if that's what it takes for God to lift the exile, then only Rachel can do it
 1. She's the mother of our people, and we're not
 2. We cannot possibly evoke the same response from God
 3. Maybe it's completely impossible to emulate her
- c) Does this picture of Rachel that Jeremiah gives us lead us nowhere but a dead end?

IV. This portrayal of Rachel from Jeremiah has much to teach us

- a) If you look carefully at what Jeremiah is saying, yes, Rachel is successful (Jeremiah 31:14-16)
- b) But she is not successful simply because she cries
 1. She is not successful simply because she is a mother in anguish
 2. There is a hidden secret to her success
- c) In God's response to Rachel, He gives her reason for consolation
 1. Why should she dry her tears?
 2. Because there is reward for her actions
- d) You usually get listened to or get compassion if you cry; you don't usually get rewarded
 1. Jeremiah doesn't say that there is reward for your tears; he says that there is reward for what you've done
 2. What were her actions beyond crying that merit reward?

- V. Jeremiah is doing something remarkable here
- Yes, God listens to Rachel
 - No, not out of compassion or a great sense of mercy
 - He listened to her because she deserved to be listened to because of something she had done
 - Something that was so powerful, so heroic, that this act lay hidden for centuries until it burst forth and was rewarded with the return of hundreds of thousands of Rachel's children to the land
 - What was that thing that she did?
 - The videos ahead will explore the verses that we just read in great detail because they hold great insight into many things

VI. First, what does it mean to cry before God? To mourn successfully?

- Who was this woman whose actions made such a difference to God?
 - We know so little about her
 - On the one hand, she's a very compelling figure in our imagination - the grave of Rachel is one of the most visited sites in Israel today
 - Lots of people go there each year to pour out their hearts, probably because of the verse in Jeremiah that portrays Rachel as a carrying mother who pours out her heart to God on our behalf
 - But that's in the Book of Jeremiah
- In the Book of Genesis that actually tells the story of Rachel, we know so little about her
 - We know that Jacob fell in love with her, but what was it about Rachel that made him so in love with her?
 - We know that Jacob worked for seven years for her, but that's about him
 - We know that she was locked in rivalry with her sister - they both married the same man
 - We know she stole some idols
 - We know that she died in childbirth
- Why is the text so maddeningly silent about this woman who is the mother of the nation?
 - But maybe the text isn't silent
 - Maybe Jeremiah is teaching us about that text in Genesis
 - If we look carefully at the verses in Jeremiah, we will find nothing less than a grand re-reading of the life of Rachel
 - We will understand deeply who she is, why she should matter to us, and why her actions mattered so deeply to God
 - We will be able to learn from those actions so that our actions might matter deeply, too



◀ SEGMENT 2: UNDERSTANDING RACHEL – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman delves deeper into the narrative concerning Rachel by showing how the verses in Jeremiah walk us through, in reverse order, what we learn in Genesis. He demonstrates the connections between the two texts and leads us to the birth of Issachar as the puzzle yet to be solved.

- I. When Jeremiah is talking about Rachel crying in heaven, it wouldn't be the first time that Rachel was crying in heaven about lost children
 - a) Long before the Babylonian exile, way back in the Book of Genesis, just after Rachel's tragic, early death, Rachel had a lost child too
 - b) That child was Joseph
 - c) If you listen carefully to the language that Jeremiah is using here, you will discern an elegant pattern
 1. Every step forward that you take in Jeremiah is a step backward through the history of Rachel's tears
 2. The journey concludes with those mysterious words we talked about earlier - reward for what you've done
 - We didn't know what that meant
 - As it turns out, we will find at the end the hidden heroism of Rachel
 - We will find why she is the recipient of such an astonishing reward



- II. The journey Jeremiah takes us on begins with the words "A voice is heard on high"
 - a) From where did Jeremiah get those words?
 1. Aside from the Babylonian exile, if you go backwards in Biblical history, when would have been the last time that Rachel would have been crying over a lost child?
 - You might say when Joseph was sold
 - But after Joseph was sold, things got even worse for him
 - Yes, there was a brief moment when he was elevated to a position of power in Potiphar's home
 - But that came crashing down when Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him



- Joseph slips out of his coat and runs outside
- She gathers together all of the members of the household and accuses Joseph of forcing himself on her (Genesis 39:14-15)
 - At this point, you don't know that Joseph is going to be sent down into a dungeon
- Once everyone sees his coat, it's like evidence that he was wrong
- That's where, if you were his mother, you'd cry

2. But look at the words used when she produces this false evidence: when he heard that I raised my voice

- If you read them backwards (because we are proceeding backwards), they are "a voice on high is heard"
- It's where Jeremiah got the words from



b) As you proceed forward with Jeremiah, it's like you are proceeding backward through the Joseph story

1. If we keep proceeding, we'll find reference to a second time that Rachel would cry in the Joseph story, not just when Potiphar turns on Joseph, but earlier when Joseph's own family would have turned on him

- When Jeremiah starts talking about "a bitter cry"
 - Regular bitter is מר, *mar*
 - מרר, *marar*, is really bitter
- Have you ever heard this kind of word anywhere in the Five Books of Moses? Anywhere in Genesis?
 - It appears once in Genesis - in Jacob's blessing to Joseph while on his deathbed (Genesis 49:23)
 - When he tells him that they embittered his life
- Rashi expounds midrashically upon the specific wording, suggesting there were two 'they's, two moments when Joseph's life was unfairly embittered by others
 - One was the story of Potiphar
 - The other was when Joseph's own family turned on him and threw him into the pit
 - At the end of his life, Jacob seems to recognize both

2. Now Jeremiah echoes this word, suggesting that Rachel is not just crying bitterly over the exile, but she is also mourning two terrible points in the life of one child

- Not just Joseph's downfall in Potiphar's house
- But Joseph's downfall in his own family's house, too; the sale of Joseph

III. Now as we keep reading Jeremiah, we'll hear the details

- a) Rachel is crying for her children, but what do those words remind you of?
- b) We do hear about a parent crying over a child in Genesis
- c) It was Jacob when the bloody coat was shown to him, and he concluded that Joseph was dead (Genesis 37:35)
 1. It's almost as if Jeremiah is saying, "You



- think that Jeremiah was the only one crying?"
- 2. Only father, but not mother?
- 3. The mere fact that Rachel was no longer alive would have stopped her from crying?
- 4. Rachel was crying for her children just like Jacob

IV. Now, going a bit further in Jeremiah's words is where we meet the words "she refused to be consoled"

- a) What does that remind you of?
 - 1. If you go one step backwards in Genesis, Jacob refused to be consoled, saying he'd go down to his grave mourning Joseph
 - 2. Jeremiah is saying that, yes, Rachel was mourning for the Babylonian captives, but she was also mourning over a kidnapped child
 - 3. She will not be consoled
- b) It's just one more step along the backwards journey

V. Now, taking one more step forward in Jeremiah's words and one more step backwards through Genesis - Why won't Rachel be consoled?

- a) Jeremiah tells us because her children are gone
- b) The word *אֵינֶנּוּ*, *einenu*, when Joseph is first missing, Reuben goes to the pit to try to save him and bring him back to his father, only to discover an empty pit
- c) He comes back and tells his brothers that the child is gone (Genesis 37:30)
 - 1. It's the first discovery of the loss of Joseph
 - 2. The first time someone discovers that Rachel's child is lost



VI. As you go further in Jeremiah's words, will you continue to go back in Genesis to earlier times when Rachel may have cried?

- a) The problem is that we seem to have reached the end
 - 1. We're now at the very beginning of the story of the sale of Joseph, when Reuben discovers he's gone
 - 2. That would have been the first time that anyone could mourn the loss of Joseph
- b) Are there any earlier times when Rachel might have been mourning for her children?
 - 1. Earlier in life, Rachel was childless
 - 2. She was infertile and didn't have children for the longest time
 - 3. She was wracked by pain over her childlessness
- c) As we continue reading Jeremiah, would we hear any references to those pains?
- d) What did Rachel do? Why would she be rewarded? (Jeremiah 31:15)
 - 1. Jeremiah will provide the answer
 - 2. Hidden in the promise of reward is the heroic act itself
 - Saying those words over and over again will help you see it - *יש שכר - לפעלתך*, *yesh sachar lifulatech*
 - What do those words remind you of?
 - *יששכר*, Issachar - Leah's fifth child
- e) You want to know why Rachel gets a reward centuries later for her hidden heroism?
 - 1. Look at the birth of Issachar, and you will know

2. Jeremiah seems to be telling us that this is Rachel's finest moment



- VII. Jeremiah seems to be taking us on a journey back through Rachel's life until we meet a crucial moment in the birth of Issachar
- That leaves us with a puzzle
 - What did Jeremiah see in the birth of Issachar that is cause for Rachel to be rewarded?
 - That's is the great puzzle that Jeremiah presents to us
 - He is challenging us to read the story as he read it
 - Come back in the next video and read through this part of the Rachel story and try to see it as Jeremiah

◀ SEGMENT 3: RACHEL'S HARDSHIPS – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman focuses on the hardships of Rachel's life, exploring the misfortunes that came her way and led to her feelings of jealousy towards her sister. The names that Rachel and Leah give their sons are examined as a window into their thinking. Rabbi Fohrman then introduces a Midrash that seems contradictory to the messages of text, which we will return to in a future video of this series.

I. Jeremiah seems to suggest that there was something about Rachel's actions surrounding the birth of Issachar that was a source of enduring merit for her. What was that?

- a) Seemingly, when you read this story, all you hear about is a painful battle between sisters
- b) That all seems to get played out in the names that these children get
 1. It seems like the least inspiring, least heroic story
 2. It's a story of jealousy
- c) But maybe Jeremiah is leading us to a closer look at that story
- d) Go through that story carefully and see if we can see what he did



II. Rachel has had a difficult life

- a) She thought that she was destined to marry Jacob
 1. He had worked for seven long years for her
 2. Only to be deceived on the night of the wedding by the treachery of her father, Laban
 3. Laban switches Rachel for Leah under the chuppah
 4. Jacob ends up marrying Rachel's sister instead of Rachel
- b) That's the first misfortune that Rachel suffers, but it doesn't stop there
 1. She then watches as her sister gives birth to child upon child while she stands by and cannot conceive



2. She is childless
3. After Leah gives birth to child after child (Genesis 29:31-35), we are brought to Chapter 30
 - Rachel becomes increasingly jealous of her sister and says without children, she's as good as dead (Genesis 30:1)
4. There is a problem that many of us have reading this story
 - The picture we're getting of Rachel is a very unfamiliar picture of her
 - Rachel was jealous of her sister and was desperate for children
 - But the picture that most of us have of Rachel was a more sanguine picture based on a Midrash



- Way back on the night that Rachel and Leah were first switched under the chuppah, Rachel had anticipated that some sort of deception like that might happen
 - The Midrash goes so far as to say that she made Jacob aware of that possibility, telling him that he father is going to deceive him
 - In order to avoid that possibility, she gives him signs so that he will know if it is her under the chuppah
 - Laban, then, won't be able to deceive them
 - Jacob thought it was a great idea, but at the very last minute, Rachel reconsidered the plan
 - She didn't want to put her sister through the embarrassment and shame
 - She gives her sister the signs
 - Leah makes it through the night without the public humiliation of being found out in front of everyone
 - That is the story that the sages tell
- One of the things we need to do before the end of this story is to come back to this story because there are a number of questions that arise out of this story
- Yes, it makes us feel all warm and fuzzy towards Rachel
 - But doesn't that lesson fall a little short?



5. Once you read a few more verses in the Bible, you get to this very clear statement about Rachel being jealous of her sister

- Then, out of this great sense of desperation, she comes to Jacob and says she'll be dead if she doesn't have children, and it's jealousy that is fueling it
- The text tells us it's jealousy
- Here is wonderful, non-jealous Rachel becoming really jealous just a few verses later
- This story of the signs is a very challenging Midrash to understand
- Before we are finished with this series, we will seek to understand it . Now is not that time - let's go back to the simple meaning of the text



III. What is the Torah telling us here? What was Jacob's response when Rachel comes to him, begging him for children?

- a) He tells her that God is holding her back from having children (Genesis 30:2)
 1. He tells her to take the matter up with God

2. Rachel, then, gives him her maidservant through whom to have children (Genesis 30:3)

- Bilhah conceives, and Rachel names the child Dan - God has judged me (Genesis 30:6)

- There seems to be a tension in the name between justice and compassion

b) The phrase "God has listened to my voice" has the sense that God is reaching out to me in compassion

1. He has listened to my cries and anguish and responded to my sense of pain

2. But she also says, "God has judged me," indicating that justice has finally been done

- Her position has been vindicated by God
- After all of the unfairness to which she's been subjected
- Finally, a little bit of justice



c) Life really was a little bit unfair for Rachel

1. She had waited for seven long years while the man she loved worked for her hand in marriage

- If that sounds romantic, what happened in the end wasn't very romantic at all
- Her sister got switched under the chuppah for her while Rachel was alone in her room, and everyone is dancing for her sister, and no one knows that Rachel isn't even there and isn't even part of it

2. It didn't get any better than that when finally she's married, and the sister who usurped her has child after child when she doesn't have children

3. And, finally, a little bit of justice

- She may not have a child, but she has Dan, a child she can raise
- Finally, a little bit of justice and fairness

4. But it's really more than this

- If this child is named Dan - "God has judged me"
- If there was really a court case, who was the other party involved? Who was the one with whom she was struggling?
- It would have to be her sister

d) How did all of this begin?

1. The text tells us that Rachel was jealous of her sister

2. Her sister was living the life with Jacob that she was supposed to live

- Having child after child while Rachel remained bereft
- It just doesn't seem fair, but now it's beginning to be set right

3. Here is finally a child for Rachel

- And yet, if that is where Rachel was coming from



- If there was an uneasy mix of justice and compassion in Rachel's perception of God's response to her and the first child of Bilhah, what about the second child?
- When Bilhah has a second child, Rachel names him Naphtali - "The struggles of God I have struggled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (Genesis 30:8)
 - The names means "my struggle" - That name is a little darker than the first one
 - It seems decidedly like a step towards the justice side
 - And that, it seems, comes with some risks
 - What if Rachel is wrong in her perception?

IV. All of these names that the sisters give their children are recorded in the Torah

- a) The Torah doesn't, necessarily, endorse their meaning
- b) What if Rachel was wrong? What if it was all compassion?
- c) What if she thinks that God has vindicated her in court, but what if that perception was wrong?
- d) Here's the problem: If I see myself as locked in a struggle with my sister, and God has vindicated my position, what does that say about the possibility of ending the struggle with my sister?

1. It's a holy war
2. And the problem with holy wars is how do you ever put down the sword?
 - I'm going to compromise with you?
 - God has vindicated my position, and if I compromise with you, I let God down



V. That leads us to the next verses in Genesis

- a) Leah saw that she hadn't had children for a while, so she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob and gave her to Jacob
- b) Zilpah has one child and then a second
- c) Listen to the name Leah gives that second child - "Lucky am !! Every woman who hears will call me lucky" (Genesis 30:13)
 1. For Leah, everything is wonderful, life couldn't be better
 2. If you were Rachel, and you saw yourself locked in a divine struggle with your sister, vindicated because your maidservant just gave you two children, that God has somehow come down on your side - What would you say now?

- Leah's maidservant has given her two children of her own, and Leah's so happy
- She doesn't even mention any sense of conflict
- For her, Rachel doesn't even matter



- What now?

- d) For Rachel, it would have to have been the most crushing moment imaginable
 - e) If you're Rachel, how do you see things now?
- VI. That brings us straight to one of the most mysterious episodes of the entire Book of Genesis:
The story of the wildflowers for Reuben
- a) That story is the story of the birth of Issachar
 - b) Somewhere hidden in that story is an act of Rachel's that resonated for centuries
 - c) We are now in a position to see what it was

◀ SEGMENT 4: UNDERSTANDING LEAH – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this video, Rabbi Fohrman delves into the story of Reuben giving his mother, Leah, some wildflowers, and Rachel asking Leah for some of the flowers. Through deeper examination of the text, Rabbi Fohrman shows that, in this scene, Rachel is able to empathize with Leah and understand the anger and frustrations Leah has been harboring all of these years.

I. The next element we have in our unfolding story of Rachel and Leah, and the last element before the birth of Issachar, is a story that seems trivial involving some sort of flowers

- a) It turns out that Reuben, Leah's child, has been hanging around on the field and finds some flowers and brings them back to his mother
- b) These flowers are very precious; both Leah and Rachel want them very much
- c) Eventually they work out some sort of bargain
 1. Rachel gets the flowers
 2. Leah gets a night with Jacob that she wouldn't have otherwise
- d) Very strange story - Why is it even here?
- e) What would the Torah want us to learn from this story?
 1. The truth is that it's not just a trivial story
 2. It's actually a little bit upsetting
 3. For example, look at what Leah says after this trade for the wild flowers
 - She goes and tells Jacob that he will be with her tonight because she has rented him in exchange for these wild flowers (Genesis 30:16)
 - How do you talk so cavalierly about the business arrangements of intimacy?
 - Rachel is not much better as she is the one who came up with this idea
 - It's just a very uncomfortable story. What is going on here?



II. What kind of wildflowers were they? What was their significance?

- a) Maybe if we could decipher that, we'd understand the story
- b) There are all sorts of debates about these flowers
 1. Were these flowers so prized because they were aphrodisiacs or maybe fertility granting?
 2. Suggest that the wildflowers are actually a red herring

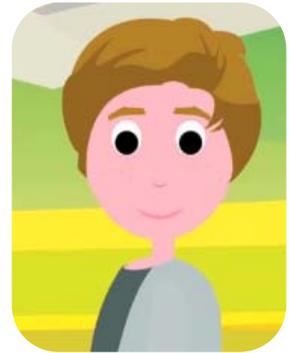


- You will not decipher the mystery of the wildflowers by figuring out exactly which kind of flower it was and then talking about its supposed significance to these women
- The Torah knows you don't know what the flowers were
- The word used for flower here is unique and only appears here

- If the Torah doesn't explain exactly what the flowers are and gives no way to figure out exactly what the flowers are, other than our own speculation, what does that really mean the Torah is telling you?
- c) It doesn't matter what the flowers were
 1. For all you know, they were worthless wildflowers
 2. That is how Rashi understood what they were
 - Nobody cared about them
 - If we buy that interpretation and accept that the flowers really didn't matter for their intrinsic value, the question is: Why were Rachel and Leah so keenly interested in them?
 3. The significance of the flowers doesn't lie in their own inherent value and what they were - It lies in who brought them and why

III. Who brought the flowers?

- a) It was Reuben, and he brought them from the fields to his mother
 1. The text goes out of its way to emphasize that fact (Genesis 30:14)
 2. That's the point that really matters
- b) Who was Reuben, and why would these wildflowers have mattered so much to Leah?
 1. Here is little six year old Reuben, Leah's first-born child, coming back from the fields with this little bouquet of dandelions
 2. He brings them to his mother
 3. Why do these flowers mean everything to her?



- If you stand back and think about what it means to be a parent, your kid spends the afternoon scribbling together a card and then gives it to her mother with a big smile
 - These are the first fruits of your child's independence
 - You have been giving and giving to them, and finally they have taken this first fledgling step and have given something back to you
 - It really is like first fruits
 - If you think about the Torah's idea of first fruits, it's very similar
 - There's this command that a farmer is supposed to bring the first fruits of the season to a Cohen in the Temple
 - A cynic would say that the first fruits aren't the best of the season, and no one wants to eat the first fruits
 - Why would God want the first fruits?
 - It's not about how the strawberries taste - It's because they were the first
 - God's done so much for us; took us out of Egypt, led us through the desert, brought us into the land

- God gave and gave and gave to Israel, and we were never really in a position to give back
- Until they finally got into the land
- They started to farm the wheat
- Finally, here was this farmer with the very first fruits of independence
- Something to give back
- Those fruits mean everything to God

IV. So it is with Reuben

- Here is Leah's first-born, giving something back to her
 - It's that first wondrous moment in the life of a parent
 - Rachel sees this and asks for some of the wildflowers
- We often mistake what it was that Rachel asked



- She wanted some of the flowers from Reuben (Genesis 30:14)
- She didn't want all of them, and she seems to ask very nicely
- What's happening here?
 - Rachel has no child
 - Years have passed, and she still has no child
 - Leah has two more children
 - She names her last child for happiness and joy
 - There Leah is, finally experiencing the first joy of a child's first fruits
 - Rachel looks at this, and she doesn't know what life has in store for her, and she asks for some of Leah's flowers
 - She wants to share some of Leah's joy of motherhood
 - Maybe, then, it would be enough for her
 - She doesn't want to resent Leah's children
 - She wants to be able to share in Leah's joy
- It was a kind of peace offering from Rachel

V. If that's what Rachel was asking for, Leah's response is not in line

- She asks her if it was not enough that she took her husband away from her (Genesis 30:15)
- If you were Rachel, and you heard that from your sister, how would you react?
 - Rachel is the one who took Leah's husband? Didn't Leah take Jacob on her wedding night?
 - Rachel agrees to Leah's terms and agrees to have Jacob with Leah that night
- In that moment, Rachel begins to see a whole different way of interpreting history



1. From Leah's perspective (according to Chizkuni and Seforno), she didn't have any choice but to marry Jacob when her father told her to do so
2. It was terrible that it happened, but it wasn't Leah's fault
 - After that, for good or bad, Leah was Rachel's wife, so why did Rachel agree to marry him too?
 - Leah didn't have a choice, but Rachel had a choice
3. At that moment, Rachel hears that and allows herself to understand a whole different way of seeing things
 - There was a time that Rachel saw herself as being locked in struggle and God coming down and deeming her position the correct one



- Now she knows there is another way of seeing things - her sister's way of seeing things
- If Rachel's way of seeing things is valid, then so is Leah's
- All of this time, Rachel has seen it as so unfair that Leah has these children, but Leah sees it as so unfair that she hasn't had the love and companionship of her husband
- Leah thinks Rachel has taken that from her
- How could she ask her if she would share in the joy of her child without her sharing something with her
- Therefore, she gives Jacob to her for that night, a gift of companionship with him
- So Rachel was given some of the flowers, and Leah was given a night with Jacob
- That night, Leah conceived Issachar

VI. In the words of Jeremiah, "There is reward for your actions" (Jeremiah 31:15)

- a) The reward does not come immediately
 1. In the short term, Rachel remains childless
 2. Leah has yet another child - Issachar
- b) One day Rachel will have children - Hundreds of thousands, and she will see those children in the domain of a rival and enemy
- c) But Rachel will get those children back, the children will come home



VII. We understand a great deal now, but there is one thing that we still do not understand - the Midrash about the signs that Rachel gives Leah on the wedding night

- a) Earlier we were puzzled by what the sages were trying to say about that story
- b) It didn't seem to fit with what the Torah itself says



- c) Now, having seen something of the meaning behind Jeremiah's remarkable words, we can unlock the secret of the sign story
- d) We'll tackle that in the final video of the series

◀ SEGMENT 5: REWRITING HISTORY – VIDEO OUTLINE ▶

In this final video, Rabbi Fohrman revisits the Midrash about the signs Rachel gave Leah on her wedding day, showing how the story is actually based on the words in Jeremiah. Through her actions, Rachel tried to rewrite history and forge a new future for herself, Leah, and Jacob. It is through these actions that Rachel merited reward centuries later.

- I. We mentioned earlier the story of the night that Laban switched Rachel for Leah under the chuppah
 - a) It doesn't seem to contain any sort of clue to the signs that Rachel exchanged with Leah
 - b) It seems to contradict what happens later
 - c) Rachel doesn't seem to be this person who happily gives Leah the signs so that she can happily marry the man of her dreams
 1. It just doesn't seem like it when you read the text
 2. Where were the Sages coming from?
 3. Are they just trying to whitewash Rachel?
 4. What about everything we've seen in Jeremiah?
 - Did the Sages see that, too?
 - Why do they tell such a different story in the story of the signs?

- II. Suggest that the story of the signs is consistent with the view taken of the Rachel story by Jeremiah

- a) Not only is it consistent with the version of the story, but Jeremiah's Rachel story was the source that the Sages had for their story about the signs
- b) If you look at the story of the signs, it actually appears three major places within Rabbinic literature



1. Babylonian Talmud - Baba Batra 123a
 2. Babylonian Talmud - Megillah 13b
 3. Eicha Rabbah - Petichta 24
- c) Eicha Rabbah seems to be the most expansive version of the story, but the Sages are not trying to explain the verses back in Genesis
 1. The verses they are trying to understand that bring them to the story are the verses in Jeremiah - What is the reward?
 2. They tell a story that at the time when the kingdom of Judah is being exiled, Jeremiah came and pled and begged with the Almighty that the children should come home, but God said "no"
 3. Jeremiah went to each of the forefathers and asked them to stand up and beg for their children
 - And God said "no" to all of them, including Moses himself until Rachel stood up to make her case

- God told Rachel that He would listen to her because of her previous actions (Jeremiah 31:15)
4. The Sages ask what was so special about Rachel
- Then they tell the story of the signs
 - She did a great kindness to her sister
 - This kindness seems to materialize out of thin air
 - Rachel makes the case to God, saying that He knows that her husband loved her most and worked for seven years
 - And when Rachel found out that her father was going to switch her and Leah, she could have foiled it with the signs
 - It was so hard for her, but, at the last minute, Rachel gave Leah the signs so that she wouldn't be publicly humiliated
5. The Midrash starts from the same place where we started - the words of Jeremiah
- We saw this glorious unfolding story that seemed to point directly to the birth of Issachar
 - Did the Sages see that?
 - And if they did, why do they seem to be ignoring it?
 - Why do they seem to be telling us something different?
 - Do the Sages know about *יש שָׂכַר*, *yesh sachar*, and its connection to Issachar?
 - It turns out that they did know



III. Another Midrash brought to Rabbi Fohrman's attention by Rabbi Eli Meyerfeld - Midrash Tanchuma - Parshat Shemot, Section 3

- a) All of the names of the various tribes - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, etc - were all named in a way that foreshadows some sort of redemptive occurrence later on in the Torah
1. Reuben's name comes from the word "see," and that foreshadows where God says that He has seen the suffering (Exodus 3:7)
 2. Simeon's name mean's to hear, and that foreshadows God's hearing their cries (Exodus 2:24)
 3. Levi foreshadows other nations joining God (Zechariah 2:15)
 4. Judah foreshadows thanking God (Isaiah 12:1)
- b) What redemptive moment is foretold by Issachar's name? The redemption of Rachel described in Jeremiah

IV. What, then, do the Rabbis mean when they tell the story of the signs?

- a) Maybe they are two Midrashim, and one tells about one thing, and the other tells about another
- b) Maybe it's all one story
- c) Need to know that Midrash is different than Peshat
1. Peshat is the simple meaning of the text, the basic way of looking at Biblical text

2. Midrash doesn't explain what happened; it's there to explain the significance of what happened
 - If you want to know what happened, look in the text
 - If you want to know what it means, Midrash tries to give an answer
3. If you try to apply that model here, what would it even mean to say that?
 - The story of the signs seems to be the Sages taking a stab at adding information to the text
 - The night that they were switched, something else happened
 - They are adding information
 - Are we saying that the story of the signs is an explanation of the significance of the story of the switch?
 - Not quite; the story of the signs is an explanation of the significance of the Jeremiah story
 - It's an attempt to understand the words of Jeremiah
 - It's an attempt to understand Rachel's act with Issachar
4. The Sages are saying that in order to understand Jeremiah and to understand the meaning of the night Rachel gave to Leah, you have to go back to the story of the night when they were switched

V. A cynic would make the following counter argument: so Rachel was very nice and gave her sister one night. Poor Leah has no sense of companionship, and one night is going to make a difference? It was a very nice gift, but what's the big deal?

- a) How would you answer that?
- b) Perhaps what the Sages are saying is that Rachel didn't just give her a night - she gave her the night

1. Rachel said that there was a night that she was supposed to be with Jacob, but instead she wanted Leah, her sister, to be with him
2. Does that remind you of anything?
3. Was there any other night when Rachel was supposed to be with Jacob, but her sister was with him instead?
 - That's the night they were switched
 - Rachel is reengineering that night

4. The first time, Rachel was victimized and didn't have a choice
 - Her father had engineered it the first time
 - This time, however, she is not the victim of her father



- She is proactively giving Leah that night
- What is the significance of that?
- She is replaying the night and retroactively giving Leah the permission to be in a relationship with Jacob that should have been Rachel's exclusively

VI. After all of these years, Rachel is finally giving Jacob to Leah

- a) She is saying that they should replay that night
- b) One more time, Leah will be with Jacob on a night when Rachel should have been, but Rachel is the one who is making that happen
 1. Neither of them are the victims of Laban
 2. Looking at the situations of these two sisters, it wasn't just the case that Rachel was plagued by infertility, and Leah was plagued by lack of companionship from her husband
 3. It wasn't that two things came between these women; it was really one thing
 - It was that terrible night that haunted them
 - That was really the source of both of their troubles
- c) Imagine what would have happened if you took that night out of the mix
 1. So Rachel couldn't have children, which is tough, but it's not as tough as it actually was
 - She was jealous because she had to watch her sister in a relationship with her husband that should be hers
 - It's not just regular infertility that she's facing
 2. What about Leah?
 - If it were just an issue of companionship between her and her husband, they'd work it out, but she's the one who got in the way between Rachel and Jacob
 - The poisonous night of the switch makes it impossible to climb out of the mess
 - That is what Rachel tries to fix now
 - Once they fix that, they can banish the ghosts who live between them
 - Once Rachel can give this night to Leah, she is not haunted by the jealousy born from the original poisonous night anymore
 3. She has healed that and given Leah permission to be in the relationship. That is what the Sages mean

VII. The Sages say that Rachel's argument to God is that Rachel healed the past and gave Leah permission to be here

- a) There is no difference between the original night and the night Rachel is giving Leah now
- b) Yes, in the simple events, they were switched, and that was terrible
- c) Now that Rachel has given Leah a night, what is the significance of that night?
 1. Not anger or jealousy - that Rachel could have kept Leah out of this, but she didn't



2. Rachel brought Leah in
3. The significance of Rachel's act is that she gave her the signs
4. Rachel allowed her in

VIII. That night was cathartic for Rachel and Leah

- a) Remember how we thought Leah's actions seemed so strange?
 1. She dances out to Jacob, meets him in the field, and says she's renting him
 2. She is telling him that they are going to replay that night, too
 3. That night haunted Leah because she deceived Jacob even though it wasn't her intention, and she got in the way between Jacob and his beloved Rachel
 - Leah also unintentionally got in the way of the transaction of Jacob's working for seven years in return for Rachel
 - Because of that, Leah has suffered with anger and a sense of not being loved



- b) On that original night, Jacob wanted his wife so that he could be with her (Genesis 29:21)
 1. Now Leah is using those same words so that Jacob and Leah can be together (Genesis 30:16)
 2. Way back when Jacob bargained for Rachel, Laban said seven years, and now Leah is telling Jacob that she paid the price for him for tonight
 3. There is a new barter between Rachel and Leah without deception
 4. They are replaying the whole thing without deception

- c) If Jacob is with Leah tonight, he, too, has to banish the ghosts of that terrible night
 1. After that night, we don't hear that Leah is a hated wife
 2. History has been rewritten
 3. The poisonous night has lost its power to infect the family of Jacob
 4. Rachel and Leah have unburdened themselves of its poison
 - They are now able to let go and to move on in life
 - As sisters, they have found a new beginning



IX. Therein lies the real significance of Rachel's act

- a) That, seemingly, is what the Sages are telling us
- b) The Sages aren't telling you what happened
 1. They are telling you about the significance of what happened
 2. Rachel could have foiled the plot, but she chose not to use those signs
 3. She chose to hand them over to her sister
 4. That's the significance of the gift of that night, the replay of that night
 5. The resentment is gone

X. On Tisha B'Av, we mourn for exile

- a) We mourn for loss
 - 1. Rachel is a great teacher
 - 2. She teaches us how to mourn
 - 3. She storms the gates of heaven with her tears
- b) Perhaps she teaches us something even deeper than how to mourn
 - 1. In the end, when God listened to her, God did not listen to her because of her tears
 - 2. God listened to her for her actions
 - 3. When she was consumed by pain, at the moment when she could have lashed out at her sister, she convinced herself that she would be doing so justifiably
- c) How dare Leah say that Rachel took her husband?
 - 1. At that moment, she stopped, and she saw her sister's way to see it

- We, too, have sisters
- We, too, have brothers

- 2. Sometimes we also are confined to terrible conflicts with them
- 3. But the time when it hurts most, if we can emulate Rachel's heroism, can stop just for a minute and get out of our own skin



- See what it looks like through the eyes of our brother or sister
- Feel their pain too and respond
- Then maybe, like Rachel, God will be unable to deny us our deepest wishes just like her

