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Parshat HaShavua
Yeshivat Har Etzion

Rachel's Death and Burial

By Rav Yaakov Medan

"So says God: a voice is heard in Rama; it is the sound of bitter weeping, Rachel is crying over her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, for they are gone.

So says God: Withhold your voice from weeping and your eyes from their tears, for there is a reward for your action, promises God, and they will return from the enemy land. And there is hope for your end, promises God, and the children will return to their borders."
(Yirmiyahu 31:14-16)

Rachel is one of the four matriarchs of the Jewish nation. Why is she singled out here?

A similar question arises from our parasha, concerning Rachel's burial on the road to Efrat, which is Beit Lechem, away from the burial place of the patriarchs and the other matriarchs:

"And I, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, on the way, with just a short distance left to come to Efrat, and I buried her there on the way to Efrat, which is Beit Lechem." (48:7)

It is not surprising, then, that the midrashim, Rashi, and Jewish tradition throughout the generations have bound these two sources together:

"I [Yaakov] wanted to bring her up [to Chevron] and bury her, but the Holy One, blessed be He, would not let me. As it is written, 'I buried her there (sham)' - what is the meaning of 'there'? By God's word.

And why? For it was known and clear to Him that the Temple would ultimately be destroyed, and His children were going to be exiled, and they would pass by the [graves of the] forefathers and ask them to pray for them, and it would not help them. And while they were walking on the way, they would come and embrace the burial place of Rachel, and she would stand and plead for mercy from the Holy One, saying to Him: 'Master of the Universe! Hear the sound of my weeping and have mercy on my children, or give me my reward [for my treatment of my sister Leah].' Immediately, God listened to her prayer. How do we know this? It is written, '...bitter weeping; Rachel is crying over her children,' and then it is written, 'there is hope for your end [promises

God], and the children shall return to their borders." (Pesikta Rabbati (Ish Shalom), parasha 3)

The midrashim are also in accord as to what special merit Rachel had, which caused God to listen specifically to her supplication: the fact that she conveyed the special "signs" to Leah.

The Midrash elaborates on this story, also connecting it to Rachel's special right to pray for her children at the time of the Temple's destruction:

"At that moment, the matriarch Rachel leaped before God and said: "Master of the Universe, it is known before You that Yaakov, Your servant, loved me very greatly, and worked for my father for seven years in order to marry me. And when those seven years were complete and the time came for my wedding to my husband, my father decided to replace me with my sister for my husband. This was exceedingly hard for me, for it was known to me; I told my husband of it and gave him a sign by which he would be able to distinguish me from my sister, so that my father would not be able to exchange me. Thereafter I regretted it and stifled my desire, and I had mercy on my sister, that she would not be shamed. In the evening, they exchanged my sister for me, and I gave my sister all the signs that I had given to my husband in order that he would believe that she was Rachel. Not only that - I climbed under the bed upon which he lay with my sister; he spoke with her and she remained silent, I answered him each and every time so that he would not recognize my sister by her voice.

I performed kindness for her, and was not jealous of her, and I did not allow her to be shamed. And if I, a mere mortal, dust and ashes, was not jealous of my rival and did not allow her to be shamed and humiliated - what of You, living, eternal, merciful King: why are You jealous of idolatry, which has no substance to it? You have exiled my children and they have been killed by the sword, and their enemies have done with them as they please!"

Immediately God's mercy was aroused, and He said: "For you, Rachel, I shall return Israel to their place."

This is as it is written, "So says God: A voice is heard in Rama, it is the sound of bitter weeping, Rachel is weeping over her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children for they are gone." And it is written, "So says God: Withhold your voice from weeping and your eyes from their tears, for there is a reward for your act...", and it is written, "There is hope for your end, promises God, and the children will return to their borders." (Eikha Rabba, petichta 24)

The problem with this special merit attributed to Rachel is that it is difficult to find in the text any hint of support for the legend of Rachel handing over the secret signs to Leah. Lavan is known to be deceitful and treacherous even if we do not assume that any signs changed hands between Yaakov and Rachel.

A. BABYLONIAN EXILE AND HADRIAN'S CAMPAIGN

Let us return to Rachel's burial on the road to Efrat. From the Pesikta quoted above, it appears that Rachel was buried on the road that was destined to be traveled by the exiles of Jerusalem, following the destruction of the Temple. We can understand this midrash better if we know exactly where Rachel was buried.

Opinions are divided on this matter, because of the contradiction between the verses in Sefer Bereishit (35:16 and 48:7), noting the place of her burial as being in the region of Efrat and Beit Lechem (in Yehuda), and the verse in Shemuel I (10:2), which locates the place of Rachel's burial on the border of Binyamin, at Tzeltzach. The verses in the Book of Yirmiyahu would likewise seem to suggest that Rachel was buried in the portion of Binyamin, since they mention that Rachel's voice is heard in Rama - a well-known city in the portion of Binyamin, north of Jerusalem (today, the site of A-Ram, next to Atarot). In other words, some sources seem to indicate that Rachel is buried south of Jerusalem (the site known today as Rachel's Tomb), while others indicate that she is buried north of Jerusalem, in the portion of Binyamin.

The "southern" view is presented in the Tosefta:

"... 'When you depart from me today... at Tzeltzach' - where do we find that Rachel was buried on the border of Binyamin, at Tzeltzach? Was she not buried at Beit Lechem - in the portion of Yehuda, as it is written, 'Rachel died and she was buried on the road to Efrat' - and Efrat is in Yehuda's portion, as it is written, 'And you, Beit Lechem of Efrat - are too young to be among the thousands of Yehuda'?"

Rather, he [Shemuel] said to him [Shaul], 'Now, while I am talking to you, they [the men] are at Rachel's tomb. You will go, while they will be approaching, and you will meet them on the border of Binyamin, at Tzeltzach.'" (Tosefta Sota [Lieberman edition], 11:13)

Similar views are presented by Midrash Shemuel (14) and, in a different form, in Bereishit Rabba (82, 9). Rashi (Shemuel I 10:2), Radak, and the Metzudot (ad loc.) explain in accordance with the Tosefta, arriving at the "southern" view. Ramban, after visiting Eretz Yisrael and retracting his interpretation which had preferred the "northern" view (48:7), likewise adopted the "southern" view in his commentary (35:16), regarding it as an altogether Jewish tradition. Mention should also be made of the articles by Dr. Yoel Elitzur (Shemaatin 59, and Z. Ehrlich, ed., Lifnei Efraim u-Vinyamin u-Menasheh, 1985), who supported the "southern" view, rejecting most elegantly the proofs against it from the Books of Shemuel and Yirmiyahu.

The first source that I know of supporting the "northern" view is the opinion of R. Meir in the Sifri:

"'Rachel died and she was buried on the road to Efrat, which is Beit Lechem' - R. Meir says: She died in the portion of Binyamin, her son, as it is written, 'And I, when I came from Padan to Eretz Canaan, on the road, with just a short distance before reaching Efrat, Rachel died by me...' - and Efrat is Beit Lechem, as it is written, 'And you, Beit

Lechem of Efrat.' Lest I imagine [that she died] in the portion of her son Yosef, the text comes to teach, 'Behold, it is heard in Efrat, it is found in the field of the forest' - the one who is compared to an animal of the forest. And who is this? Binyamin." (Sifri Devarim 352)

Assuming that the Pesikta quoted above and the other midrashim are speaking about Rachel weeping over the children of Israel as they depart into the Babylonian exile after the destruction of the First Temple, we have almost no choice but to accept the "northern" view. To this view, it appears that the midrash connects the place of Rachel's burial with her voice weeping for her children, which is heard specifically in the city of Rama (Yirmiyahu 31:14), and the midrash connects both of these with the description of the camp of the captives who had been exiled by Nevuzaradan from the ruins of Jerusalem towards Babylon, which also bordered on the city of Rama:

"The word that came to Yirmiyahu from God, after Nevuzaradan, the captain of the guard, had sent him away from Rama, when he had taken him along, bound in chains, among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Yehuda, who were being carried away to Babylon." (Yirmiyahu 40:1)

On the exiles' last stop in Eretz Yisrael, in the city of Rama, Rachel - who was buried nearby - prayed for her captive children.

If we adopt the "southern" view, it appears that we are forced to accept the opinion of Prof. Yehuda Elitzur, according to whom the midrash refers to the captives who were taken in Hadrian's campaign, following the failure of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, and who were led away to be sold on the slave market at the great fair of Bothna in Ilanin, north of Chevron. On their way to Ilanin, the captives would therefore have passed by Rachel's tomb at the place where it is identified today, and there Rachel prayed for their return.

It would SEEM that adopting the "southern" view would lead us to the conclusion that the midrash did not mean in any way to explain the prophecy of Yirmiyahu - for it is difficult to contend that Yirmiyahu prophesied the failure of the rebellion against Hadrian and its results. To this view, what the midrash is really referring to is those same verses in Yirmiyahu describing Rachel's weeping, but for its own purposes: as a commentary on the terrible phenomenon of Jews being sold at slave markets following the failure of the Bar Kokhba rebellion. Obviously, this is a somewhat forced explanation.

If, on the other hand, we choose to adopt the dominant tradition among Chazal - that Rachel's grave is next to Beit Lechem in Yehuda - then we may attribute Yirmiyahu's prophecy to the destruction of the First Temple, which took place in his time. However, we shall have to forego the "reality" - the conceivable historiographic situation. It is not logical that the exiles on their way to Babylon - whose camp of captivity was in Rama, north of Jerusalem, and who were headed north, towards Babylon - would have passed by Beit Lechem of Yehuda, which is south of Jerusalem.

B. EGYPTIAN EXILE FOLLOWING THE DESTRUCTION

The desire to remain within a logical historiographic situation - both concerning Yirmiyahu's prophecy of the destruction of the First Temple and with regard to the accepted tradition concerning Rachel's grave - leads us to an obscure legend, whose source in the writings of Chazal I was unable to find, though it is mentioned in the medieval "Sefer ha-Yashar," among other places. According to this legend, following the sale of Yosef, when the Ishmaelites took him down to Egypt, their caravan passed by Rachel's grave. Yosef left the caravan for a moment and went to cry at his mother's grave; Rachel cried to the Holy One, conveying Yosef's pain at the bitterness of his fate, and promised Yosef that she would be with him in his distress and would plead before God until he would be redeemed from his troubles.

This legend can be shown to rest squarely on a comparison of the verse in Yirmiyahu - "Rachel is weeping for her children, SHE REFUSES TO BE COMFORTED for her children, for they are gone" (Yirmiyahu 31:14) - with the verse describing Yaakov after the sale of Yosef: "All his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, BUT HE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED" (37:35). In general, the maternal image of Rachel fits in well with the mercy that she requests for her son Yosef, for whom she waited so long and who became, at her death, an orphan, his weakness exploited by his half-brothers to treat him as they did.

The legend of the dead Rachel's prayer for her son is quite conceivable, apart from the claim that the caravan of the Ishmaelites passed by her grave. Rachel is certainly buried in the mountainous area on Yaakov's route with his camp from Beit-El to Chevron. In contrast, the Ishmaelites, crossing from Gil'ad to Egypt, via the valley of Dotan, would have used the latitudinal (east-west) road crossing through the Dotan valley in order to pass from the eastern longitudinal (north-south) road - the king's highway, at Gil'ad - to the western longitudinal road - through the land of the Philistines (more or less today's coastal road). There is no reasonable possibility that the caravan passed by Rachel's tomb. Moreover, Yirmiyahu was most obviously speaking about some contemporary event: for what reason would he speak about a historical event, from the period of Yaakov's sons? But without the verses from Yirmiyahu, there is nothing linking the Torah text to the legend.

Perhaps the legend of Rachel crying over the sale of Yosef explains the verses in Yirmiyahu that recount the murder of Gedalia ben Achikam, after the destruction of the Temple, when the remnant of the survivors was lost from the land, since they fled after the murder. Let us turn our attention to this story, mentioned briefly at the end of Sefer Melakhim (Melakhim II 25:25-26), and at much greater length in Yirmiyahu (Chapters 40-44). After the destruction, and the exile of Tzidkiyahu and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the king of Babylon appointed Gedalia ben Achikam as the governor of the small number of survivors who remained in Eretz Yisrael. Gedalia embarked on a process of rehabilitation of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael, and the exiles from the neighboring lands began to return.

The prophet Yirmiyahu foretells success in this endeavor:

"If you will dwell again in this land - I shall build you up and not destroy, I shall plant you and not pluck, for I regret the evil that I have done to you." (Yirmiyahu 42:10)

But the rebuilding of the Jewish settlement in Eretz Yisrael collapses and crashes because of the decision by Yishmael ben Netania to murder Gedalia, and Yirmiyahu's prophecies of consolation are not fulfilled because of the decision by Yochanan ben Kareach and his cohorts to flee the land, for fear of the king of Babylon, because of the murder; they decide to go down to Egypt, taking the survivors (including Yirmiyahu) with them.

The gravity of Yishmael's act arises not only from its disastrous results, but also from the act itself, in which a Jew (Yishmael ben Netania) collaborated with a gentile king (Ba'alis, king of Ammon) in order to kill one of his Jewish brethren - apparently out of personal jealousy, in view of the authority that Gedalia had received from the king of Babylon. We may draw a parallel between the evil deed of Yishmael ben Netania (who killed Gedalia) and of his sworn rival, Yochanan ben Kareach (who took the remnant of Yehuda down to Egypt, in contravention of the prophet's instructions), and the story of the sale of Yosef. The jealousy aroused by the authority vested in Gedalia by the king of Babylon brings to mind the jealousy of the brothers because of Yaakov's love for Yosef and because of Yosef's dreams. Yosef came, in all innocence, to check on his brothers' welfare, his innocence preventing him from seeing the danger inherent in his brothers' hatred for him. Gedalia's innocence likewise prevented him from listening to the warnings of Yochanan ben Kareach; he hosted Yishmael at his table, to eat bread together with him at Mitzpa.

The most striking detail in the comparison between the two incidents is the casting of the victim's body into the pit. Yishmael actually threw Gedalia's body into a pit, while in the story of Yosef this was the original plan, but ultimately things happened differently:

"And now, let us go and kill him and cast him into one of the pits, and we shall say, 'A wild beast consumed him' - and we shall see what will become of his dreams." (37:20)

"And it was, as they came into the city, that Yishmael ben Netania slew them [and cast them] into the pit - he and the men who were with him." (Yirmiyahu 41:7)

On the other hand, the story of the murder of Gedalia is also reminiscent of Yehuda's suggestion to sell Yosef to the Ishmaelites. The brothers cooperated with the gentile Ishmaelites who came from Gil'ad, just as the Jewish Yishmael collaborated with Ba'alis, king of Ammon, who also ruled, most of the time, in Gil'ad. In the wake of the murder, Yochanan ben Kareach and his men save all the survivors from the hands of Yishmael, but lead them into Egyptian exile. Correspondingly, Yehuda saves Yosef from the horrors of the pit, but sells him to the Ishmaelites who take him down to Egypt; ultimately all of his father's household is drawn into exile after him.

Let us now return to our deliberation as to the meaning of the midrash in its connection between Rachel's tomb and her prayer, and the exiles of Zion at the time

of the Temple's destruction. On the one hand, we tend towards the view of most of the midrashim and most of the commentators, who locate Rachel's tomb near Efrat which is Beit Lechem, south of Jerusalem. On the other hand, we note the implausibility of applying Yirmiyahu's testimony to an event so far removed as the destruction by Hadrian, following the Bar Kokhba revolt, when the captives passed through Beit Lechem on their way to the slave market in Bothna.

As noted above, it is possible that Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning Rachel's weeping was uttered when Yochanan ben Kareach and his colleagues took the remnant of Yehuda with them down to Egypt, following the murder of Gedalia. According to this approach, the prophet is referring to the last stop by the exiles of Zion in the land, prior to their journey down to Egypt:

"Yochanan the son of Kareach and all the captains of the forces that were with him, took all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Yishmael ben Netania, from Mitzpa... they went and stayed in Gerut-Kimham which is by Beit-Lechem, to go towards Egypt." (Yirmiyahu 41:16-17)

While the exiles were staying in Beit-Lechem, south of Jerusalem, Rachel prayed for them just as she had prayed for Yosef, her son, as he was being led down to Egypt after being saved from death.

This view - that Rachel prayed from her grave in Beit-Lechem Yehuda - still faces the difficulty presented by the explicit verse that introduces her prayer, describing the place: "A voice is heard in Rama." Rama is located north of Jerusalem, which is where the captives' camp on its way to Babylon was located!

For a possible answer, let us return to what appears to be the gravest aspect of the story. The brothers, in their conflict with Yosef, exploited the hard-heartedness of the Ishmaelites and the Midianites, who - for monetary gain - were prepared to expand their spice trading to include slave trading; through their offices, the brothers sold Yosef into Egyptian slavery. Correspondingly, Yishmael ben Netania, with the inspiration of Ba'alis, king of Ammon, who ruled in Gil'ad, killed Gedalia. Perhaps the prophet finds it necessary to emphasize, by means of the pit mentioned above, the atrocity of forging a covenant with foreigners against a brother, and against the nation of the murderer:

"The pit into which Yishmael cast all the bodies of the men whom he had killed because of Gedalia - was the same pit that King Asa had made for fear of Ba'sha, king of Israel; it was this [pit] that Yishmael ben Netania filled with corpses." (Yirmiyahu 41:9)

The story of the conflict between Asa, king of Yehuda, and Ba'sha, king of Israel, followed the same ugly and inexcusable pattern:

"In the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa, Ba'sha, king of Israel, rose up against Yehuda, and he build Rama so as to prevent anyone from leaving or coming to Asa, king of Yehuda. So Asa took silver and gold from the treasuries of God's house and of the king's house, and sent to

Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, who dwelled in Damesek, saying: 'There is a pact between me and you, and between my father and your father. Behold, I am sending you silver and gold; go and break your alliance with Ba'sha, king of Israel, so that he will depart from me.'" (Divrei ha-Yamim II 16:1-5)

The pit, recalled hundreds of years later for eternal infamy, is the same pit that was dug as part of a war in which the king of Yehuda drew in Ben-Hadad, king of Aram (who appears to have ruled, at that time, also in northern Gil'ad), against his rival who ruled over the house of Yosef. Once again, we find collaboration between Yehuda and a gentile from Gil'ad against Yosef.

The pit in question was at the foot of the city of Rama; it was this place that represented the border and division between the two kingdoms - that of Yosef and that of Yehuda. The voice of Rachel, praying from her grave near Beit-Lechem for the exiles of Zion who were camped there at their final station in the land, is heard as far as Rama - as far as the pit into which Yishmael ben Netania cast the bodies of Gedalia and his men.

My assumption, in this section, has been that it is specifically Rachel who weeps over the exiles from Zion as a continuation of her prayer for Yosef when he was sold as a slave, because Bnei Yisrael were exiled for a sin that was similar to what the brothers had done to Yosef. This assumption may explain the midrash describing Rachel's special merit - the merit that causes God to listen to her prayer: handing over the signs that Yaakov had given her to Leah, in order that Leah would not be humiliated. In the preceding sections, we questioned this midrash, which appears not to have any source in the text; besides which - Yaakov's mistaken identification of his new wife, on his wedding night, may be explained simply on the basis of the time elapsed since his original encounter with Rachel, without any need to introduce the story of the signs.

Perhaps Chazal viewed the relationship between Rachel and Leah as a prototype of the relationship between siblings, of which jealousy is a dominant element. All that we know of the relationship between the two sisters is that there was jealousy. Leah was jealous of Rachel because Yaakov loved her more; Rachel was jealous of Leah because she merited to give birth to four sons which Rachel remained childless (30:1). Jealousy is an evil trait, and Rachel is praiseworthy for knowing where to place a limit on it. After seven years of waiting - and we must assume that these were likewise years of jealousy and competition between her and Leah - Rachel put aside her jealousy of her sister out of concern lest Leah come to be shamed, and she gave her the secret signs.

The story of the two sisters therefore declares loudly and clearly that even if a person is unable to control the jealousy that he feels, it must still have limits. Tale-bearing about the object of one's jealousy to an 'outsider' (Yaakov or Lavan) in order to bring about his humiliation or punishment, thereby serving one's own purposes, is beyond the bounds of jealousy. The jealous individuals who did not limit their jealousy, and involved foreign parties in their scheming against the objects of their jealousy - like Yosef's brothers at the time of his sale, and like Yishmael ben Netania in the murder

of Gedalia - ended up almost destroying the world, and the Jewish nation. Rachel, who makes the heart-wrenching choice to put a limit on her jealousy, is the one who pleads for mercy for those harmed by boundless jealousy - for her son Yosef, and for the remnant of Yehuda being led away to Egypt. Therefore, it is only her prayer that God is prepared to hear, promising her hope and repair, with the words, "the children will return to their borders."

C. DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE AND THE FAILURE OF THE BAR-KOKHBA REVOLT

Perhaps what I have suggested above represents the basis of the midrash concerning the ten martyrs, which teaches that the death sentence meted out to the ten Sages of the Sanhedrin by the Romans, at the time of the Destruction, was a Divine punishment for the sale of Yosef by his ten brothers, as the poet declares: "You will bear the sin of your forefathers." In the words of the Midrash:

"R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: The ten martyrs were killed only because of the sin of the sale of Yosef." (Midrash Mishlei 1)

Chazal point out numerous times that the destruction of the Second Temple came about because of baseless hatred. The beginning of the destruction, and the loss of Israelite independence - as mentioned above - lay with the conflict between the brothers Hyrcanus and Aristobolus, the sons of Yanai, over the kingship, and the involvement of Pompey, the Roman governor, to decide this controversy. Jerusalem was defeated by the siege during the Great Revolt, to a great extent as a result of the internal struggle for leadership between the various groups of rebels. Apparently, the poet believed that the destruction at the hands of the Romans in general, and the death sentence meted out to the Sages of the Sanhedrin in particular, were a punishment for the causeless hatred that existed in the generation of the Destruction. This hatred represented an "adopting of the deeds of their forefathers" - the hatred of the brothers which caused Yosef to be taken down as a slave to Egypt, and therefore the law of "visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children" applied to them: that generation was punished for the sale of Yosef (some eighteen hundred years later!). As to our subject: only Rachel, who prevented the development of the jealousy between the sisters and a struggle over the birthright, is worthy of asking for mercy for Bnei Yisrael, and it is therefore she who receives an answer from God.

It seems that the midrash about the ten martyrs, with all its different versions in various midrashim and different lists of the Sages who made up the group, is also talking about both the casualties of the Great Revolt at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, as well as the casualties of Hadrian's decrees following the failure of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. The causeless hatred discussed above relates, as we have pointed out, mainly to the Roman takeover of the land and the ensuing Destruction, and Chazal also attributed to it the famine in Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. We also find an example of causeless hatred in the Bar-Kokhba revolt and the decrees that followed it - and specifically among the Torah sages:

"They said: Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students ... and all died within a short period, because they did not treat one another with the proper respect; and the world was desolate." (Yevamot 62b)

Similarly, the death of Bar-Kokhba himself was attributed to his unjustified suspicion of Rabbi Elazar ha-Moda'i, and to the fact that he killed him (Eikha Rabba, 2).

Perhaps we may find in the midrash a connection between the brothers' hatred for Yosef - leading to his sale - and the suffering that came with the failure of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, with Hadrian's decrees, when many thousands of Sages died - including Rabbi Akiva's disciples, as well as the Sages listed as the ten martyrs.

The possibilities that we have discussed thus far with a view to explaining Rachel's prayer for the exiles of Zion have focused mainly on explaining the midrash teaching that Rachel was buried away from Ma'arat ha-Makhpela so that the exiles, passing by her tomb, would be able to ask her to pray on their behalf. We noted the possibility that the reference is to the captives' camp that Nevuzaradan established in the city of Rama close to Rachel's tomb (in accordance with the "northern" view), after the destruction of Jerusalem during the reign of Tzidkiyahu. We also noted the possibility that Rachel's prayer, recalling her self-sacrifice for the sake of her sister's dignity, is connected specifically with the results of brotherly hatred in the murder of Gedalia ben Achikam, the Destruction of the Second Temple, or the Bar-Kokhba revolt. But we have yet to deal with two problems with these explanations:

1. As we noted in the first section, there is no necessity to relate the tomb of Rachel on the Efrat road to the misery of the exiles of Zion, nor to Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning her weeping for her children. Perhaps Rachel was buried on the road to Efrat because of the difficulties of the journey, because Yaakov wanted to bury her in the portion of her son Binyamin, to whom she gave birth before dying, or for other reasons. There is also no necessity to relate Rachel's prayer for the exiles of Zion to the place of her grave, for she could pray for them (as described by Yirmiyahu) even if they did not pass by her grave in an organized, mass fashion. The reliance on the story of Rachel passing the "secret signs" to Leah likewise seems to lack firm support in the text; we have already noted that the legend itself would seem to be hinting at the future, to the causeless hatred that would lead to the destruction of the Second Temple.
2. It is also problematic that it is specifically Rachel, righteous as she was, who prays for the exiles of Zion. Her connection with them is not actually so strong, since three of the thirteen tribes (if we count Efraim and Menashe separately) are not her biological descendants.

In the following sections, I shall propose interpretations, based on different assumptions, which answer the difficulties presented here. In the conclusion, I shall attempt to connect what appears to be the simple meaning of the text with the midrashim of Chazal concerning Rachel's grave.

D. THE DESTRUCTION OF SHILO

Our second question, concerning the relationship between the exiled children and the matriarch Rachel, leads us to propose that Yirmiyahu's prophecy concerning Rachel weeping over her children is actually referring to a tragedy that happened principally to the children of Rachel - Efraim, Menashe and Binyamin. Perhaps the prophet is referring to the destruction of Shilo. The Sanctuary at Shilo served the entire nation, and its destruction - with the capture of the Ark of God and the deaths of Eli and his sons - was a national tragedy; it would seem, nevertheless, that it was the three tribes of Rachel who were most affected. The city of Shilo was in the portion of Efraim (or Binyamin); its destruction and burning, the murder of its inhabitants and the violation of its women were, first and foremost, a catastrophe for the children of Rachel. It may be assumed that the deaths of about fifty thousand men in the battles of Even ha-Ezer, in the destruction of Shilo, and in the cities that were taken in war by the Philistines were likewise borne mostly by these tribes.

The interpretation that we have proposed explains Rachel's connection to the destruction of Shilo, which is the cause of her weeping. We still need to explain Yirmiyahu's connection, in his prophecy, to this weeping, for the destruction of Shilo had happened over four hundred years previously. Indeed, Yirmiyahu recalls at length the destruction of Shilo (in chapters 7 and 26), as a warning of the impending destruction of the Temple.

Moreover, it would seem that God chose Yirmiyahu as the prophet of the destruction even before he was born (Yirmiyahu 1:5), because he was a kohen from Anatot. It is possible that he was a descendant of Evyatar, who was a kohen in Anatot, and hence bore the curse of the house of Eli, of which he was a descendant (Melakhim I 2:26-27). If this is true, then Yirmiyahu, bearing the curse of the house of Eli, is chosen in order to illustrate to the nation, on the eve of the destruction of Shilo, the significance of its destruction. At the same time, this would not seem to be sufficient reason to introduce here a prophecy of consolation concerning the destruction of Shilo, and hence it appears that this interpretation cannot stand on its own merit; it requires completion. This will occupy us in the next section.

E. THE EXILE OF SHOMRON

It would seem that the view that remains most closely faithful to the literal text, in explaining Rachel's weeping in Rama, involves an analysis of the entire prophecy of consolation within which Rachel's weeping is mentioned, in chapter 31 of Yirmiyahu.

This prophecy deals with the redemption of Shomron and the bringing up of the tribe of Efraim from the land of the north. Here we may assume that the name "Efraim" is a general reference to the Israelite kingdom of ten tribes, which split from the kingdom of Yehuda; all are subordinate to the tribe of Yosef (or his mother, Rachel). They are referred to throughout the prophecy by the name "Efraim," and their capital is Shomron, in the portion of Menashe. The prophecy in question deals with the return of Efraim and his brethren from exile in Assyria to their inheritance.

The prophecy that we are discussing - in chapter 31 - deals with the return of the ten tribes, but it is a prophecy of consolation, not one of rebuke, and it is therefore placed

in the midst of the prophecies of consolation (chapter 29-33). Yirmiyahu tells the nation about the return of Ephraim and his brethren to their inheritance after a hundred years of exile, in the merit of Rachel - Ephraim's matriarch - who left her young children orphaned and died broken-hearted, knowing that there was no one to care for them. God promises her that He will take care of them.

F. SUMMARY

In his prophecy, Yirmiyahu makes use - by God's word - of the ancient dialogue between the matriarch Rachel and God, applying it to a contemporary situation - the renewed rapprochement between the tribe of Yehuda and the tribe of Ephraim, upon the return of the ten tribes: "In those days the house of Yehuda will go with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north" (3:18). Yirmiyahu understands that the dialogue was not a one-time event. It is an ongoing, continual dialogue, and Rachel - who, upon her death, left her sons to the arbitrary treatment of their half-brothers - protects them from any type of trouble after her death, through prayer. In Yirmiyahu's time, her weeping was for Ephraim, who had been exiled from Shomron and had not yet returned.

As discussed, it is difficult to find any hint in the text to the story of the handing over of the signs. Perhaps the author of this midrash was inspired in this regard by Ramban's daring commentary on the conclusion of the story of Yosef and his brothers:

"It appears to me, in accordance with the literal text, that it was never told to Yaakov that the brothers had sold Yosef; he believed that [Yosef] had become lost in a field, and whoever had found him had taken him and sold him to Egypt, for the brothers did not wish to tell him of their sin... Yosef, righteous as he was, did not wish to tell him, and therefore it is written 'They commanded Yosef, saying: Your father commanded, before his death, saying...' If Yaakov had known of the matter, they would have beseeched their father upon his deathbed to command Yosef himself, for [Yosef] would honor him and not go against his word, such that they would not be in danger and would not need to invent these words on their own." (Ramban 45:27)

From the Ramban we learn that Yosef achieved a "tikkun" (repair) for the bad reports that he had brought his father concerning his brothers in his youth. He remained silent and did not tell his father the true story of the injustice that his brothers had done to him. Had he told his father, perhaps Yaakov would have cursed all of Leah's children, rejecting them from sanctity and from inheritance in the land, and would have regarded Yosef and Binyamin alone as his sole heirs and bearers of his heritage. But none of this happened; Yosef remained silent while his brothers, Leah's children, deceived their father for so many years, and he did not shame them before their father.

Yosef learned Torah from his father, but perhaps the ability to remain silent was learned from his mother. Leah deceived Yaakov on their wedding night, just as her children deceived him throughout the rest of his life. Rachel knew and kept silent so that her sister would not be shamed, just as Yosef remained silent so that his brothers would not be shamed. When his brothers quarreled with him, Yosef had the merit of

his mother's silence. According to the legend, the merit of her prayer also stood by him when he was sold as a slave. It stood by him again when Efraim returned from the exile of Shomron, as Yirmiyahu prophesies in our chapter. Perhaps Rachel's merit stood by Yosef and all of Israel during the battle between brethren when Gedalia was murdered, when the remnant of Yehuda stayed in Beit-Lechem Yehuda on their way to their exile in Egypt by the hand of Yochanan ben Kareach; in the days of the Destruction of the Second Temple which happened because of brotherly strife, when Am Yisrael was required to pay with ten of its greatest Sages for the sale of Yosef; when they were required to pay with the failure of the Bar-Kokhba revolt for not treating one another with the proper respect, as they passed - on their way to the slave market in Bothna - by Rachel's grave to the north of Beit-Lechem.

Rachel's prayer for Binyamin in the merit of her selflessness for him, and her prayer for Yosef and for all of Israel in the merit of her ability to conquer her natural jealousy - these prayers have stood by Israel throughout the generations, and will stand by them until the end of days, until the prophecy, "The children will return to their borders," will be fulfilled for all the distant exiles of Israel - speedily in our days, Amen!

This shiur is abridged from the Hebrew original. The full shiur can be accessed in the original at:

<http://www.etzion.org.il/vbm/parsha.php>.

Translated by Kaeren Fish