

Geulas Yisrael #78 Vayetze

The Labyrinth of Redemption

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Ya'akov worked for seven long years, patiently awaiting the day he would marry Rochel, start his family and perhaps, commence his return to Israel. He hoped that after seven years of hard labor his bitter odyssey in a foreign land would come to a close. Even if his return to Israel were delayed, his marriage to Rochel would liberate him from his burdensome labor. As a married man, he would hold more sway in Lavan's house and would possess both greater leverage as well as freedom of movement. During those seven long years of labor his horizons of hope were wide open, as he looked forward to better times.

As we all know it didn't end that easily. It never does. Life is seldom as smooth and simple as we imagine. Ya'akov was deceived by his father-in-law into marrying Leah and this subterfuge compelled him to an additional seven years of hard labor for the "right" to also marry Rochel. Even after marrying Rochel and laboring an additional seven years, his trials didn't cease, and it took him an additional six years to disentangle himself from his swindling father-in-law. All told, he spent twenty years in a foreign land and in the clutches of his devious father-in-law before returning with his family to Israel. Despite his initial hopes for a brief seven-year expedition and a rapid turnaround, Ya'akov's ordeal lasted far longer and was far more complicated than he could ever have imagined.

Chazal viewed Ya'akov's marital odyssey as a metaphor for Jewish history and for the redemptive process. As the midrash comments **דוגמא שלכם דומה ליעקב אביכם** מה יעקב אביכם עד שלא נשא אשה נשתעבד משנשא אשה נשתעבד אף אתם משלא נולד גואל נשתעבדתם משנולד גואל אתם משתעבדים. Just as Ya'akov was indentured both before, during, and after his marriages, similarly the Jewish people will endure hardship both before their redeemer is born, as well as after he is born. The story of Yaakov's dashed expectations is a cautionary tale, signaling that our redemptive arc will also be complicated, and warning us against adopting simplistic redemptive narratives. Our geulah will be convoluted in the same

manner that Ya'akov's marital process was prolonged. Redemption will not be a straight line, but rather a jagged journey.

We often adopt simplistic redemptive assumptions. We presume that redemption will be immediate and conclusive, yielding a utopian reality absent of any hardship or struggle. We naively expect all our outsized redemptive expectations to be met as soon as the redemptive process is launched. When, and if, redemption evolves more gradually and with less than idyllic conditions, we doubt its validity or its divine source.

Ya'akov's marital misadventures debunk these simplistic notions of redemption. Redemption isn't immediate and it certainly isn't smooth. There are watershed moments in which redemptive potential develops, but it may take time for that potential to fully materialize. That redemptive period may be marked by hardship and struggle even as the overall process surges toward a final and complete redemption.

We cannot allow naïve expectations which go unfulfilled, to fluster our redemptive stamina. In the mid-90's we relinquished land in Israel hoping to achieve a durable peace, which, sadly, remained and continues to remain elusive. Independent of whether this proposed peace agreement was prudent, any relinquishing of land in Israel is a heartbreaking setback. Many were disillusioned by this calamity, concluding that the redemptive process had screeched to a halt. Ya'akov's entanglement reminds us that even as redemption unfolds, the struggle for complete geulah continues. Redemption and struggle go hand in hand. The process may include lags and even setbacks.

Two steps forward, one step back

Even when redemption does surge forward, we can still experience struggles and possibly, even reversals. Even after Ya'akov's second marriage, in which he finally weds Rochel, his struggles with Lavan continue, and even intensify. His repeated efforts to disassociate with Lavan fail, forcing him to escape with his wives and children in the "middle of the night". Similarly, our redemption may stumble even after it surges forward. Even after we witness redemptive advances, we can still encounter adversity and frustration. Nothing is guaranteed but the terminus. Final redemption will one day arrive and the journey toward that condition has

begun. How soon we arrive and how rocky the road to final redemption will be, are each unknown.

While we struggle, we also build

During the second seven-year term of his labor Ya'akov didn't just struggle with Lavan, but was also busy constructing the foundation for his future. During those years, his wives bore eleven sons who would later form the bedrock of the twelve tribes and of the Jewish nation. Those subsequent years, when he labored as a married man were characterized by struggle and adversity, but also by phenomenal growth, expansion, and development of his future.

We have yet to receive our final, perfect, and long-awaited for redemption. Many are waiting for our redemptive struggles to end, for optimal redemptive conditions to develop and for a perfect Messianic world to emerge. Others have decided to build *while we wait*. Though we haven't yet achieved the redemption of our dreams, we are slowly but surely building the infrastructure for that future. The society we build will serve as the foundation of our future utopia. The religious spirit we infuse into our secular culture, will, one day blossom into deeper and broader religious commitment. The roads we build will serve as causeways along which thousands pilgrimage to Yerushalayim for the chagim. Our efforts to absorb immigrants from vastly different cultures will, one day yield a common narrative and sweeping national unity. Every stone we lay, will serve as the foundation of the city we will one day raise.

We have so much to build and so much to construct. Instead of wasting our time sorrowing over the imperfect state of redemption, let us continue building that future. Perhaps, one day, our eyes will gaze upon the radiant and golden city of Yerushalayim with a Mikdash perched at its center. Perhaps we will be that fortunate. Alternatively, we may not be that fortunate and this vision will only occur long after our eyes have permanently shut. Either way, we will have built a historical platform for the future. If our eyes don't witness final redemption, at least our handiwork will greet it. We may not personally witness it, but our fingerprints will be all over it.