

מבשר

MEBASSER

Union of Orthodox
Jewish Congregations of India
Publication

Vol. II

13th Sivan 5722
15th June 1962

No. 4

“GRATITUDE”

III. Leah's Dream

The most illustrious example of this nobler kind of gratitude, “thankfulness”, is our Mother Leah. Her life's greatest ambition was—to marry Jacob and to be sincerely loved by him. When our Torah tells us that “the eyes of Leah were *rakkot*,” dull or weak (Gen. 29:17), the Rabbis ask: what does *rakkot* mean? Rav says, literally dull; and this is not meant to discredit Leah but is said in praise of her. For she had heard people saying that Rebecca has two sons and Laban has two daughters, the older will marry the older (that is, Esau will marry Leah) and the younger will marry the younger (Jacob will marry Rachel). She went about inquiring: what are the characters of these men? She was told that Esau is a wild and evil man. Jacob is a decent, respectable, scholarly young man. And she, therefore, was slated to marry the despicable but successful thief! As a result, she wept so much and so bitterly and so loudly that her eyes dulled, until her eyelashes fell off because of her many tears! Her red, dull, uncomely eyes were beautiful indeed, for they had become so out of protest against being mated to Esau!

How pathetic is Leah's story! Her love of Jacob is so great that she even submits to her father's nefarious plan to substitute her for her sister Rachel, whom Jacob dearly loves, deceiving Jacob thereby. She is even willing to go to the *huppah*, and throughout life, playing second fiddle to a more vivacious, dazzling, beautiful sister, married to the same husband. And when she finally is married to him—how tragic her frustration, the blow to her self-esteem!

Pathetic indeed—yet Leah does not give up hope. Her desire for Jacob's love and respect is too precious to yield so quickly. She has a son and feels that now he will love her, so she calls the child *Reuven*, adding: “now my husband will surely love me.” But he does not. A second child comes, and she calls him *Simeon*, “for G-d has seen how despised I am” and will make Jacob love me. And then a third child, *Levi*—“Now my husband will draw close to me.” But he does not. She has failed, and now she knows it. She cried her eyes out, quite literally, for this man, and he openly rejects her. Now there is only resignation. She must reconcile herself to being scorned, unloved, unfulfilled. What would be the normal woman's reaction to this kind of marital problem, to this denial of her whole life's dreams?—despair, bitterness, soured on life, a misanthrope hating the whole world, full of constant complaints.

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The Jewish Center Bulletin, 12-1-62