



## Leah - More Than Meets the Eye

*By Yonatan Kurz ('18)*

As the Torah introduces us to Lavan's two daughters, Leah is introduced by the phrase, "ועיני לאה רכות" (BeReishit 29:17). This is a rather specific and peculiar physical description; of course, as Bartneura points out, the way of the Torah is to describe the Tzaddikim of the Torah with praise and not disgrace, and the Imahot were no exception. But why does the Torah specifically give details of Leah's eyes? Why are these adjectives used in the illustration?

Rashi quotes a Midrash that Leah's eyes were weak from weeping, as she had heard everyone say, "Rivka has two sons to correspond to Lavan's two daughters — the elder daughter for the elder son, the younger daughter for the younger son." The thought of her having to marry Esav caused her great distress, and as a result, she was found sobbing, her eyes soft with tears.

The Ba'al HaTurim makes a fascinating connection, referring to a similar description of optics later on in Sefer BeReishit, citing Ya'akov in Parashat VaYechi as being described as being "dim with age" (BeReishit 48:10). There is a Pasuk in Iyov which says that "the eyes of the wicked pine away" (Iyov 11:20), and the Ba'al HaTurim says this is true in both instances in BeReishit: Leah was worried about marrying Esav in the future, and Ya'akov's eyes were heavy because he saw that both Yeravam and Achav would descend from him.

In a Gemara in Bava Batra 123a, Rav Elazar says that the word רכות is really ארכות, and is alluding to the fact that Leah's gifts given to her descendants (the Kehunah and the monarchy), were long-lasting, as they were passed down from generation to generation. However, Rav contests this answer and provides Rashi's explanation with an additional comment. He recounts

how after Leah found out about the prophesied bond between the daughters of Lavan and the sons of Rivkah, she would sit at the crossroads and ask passersby what the deeds of the older and younger son were. Upon being told that the older son was an evil man who robbed others while the younger son was a quiet man who dwelled in tents, she became so distraught at the prospect of marrying the older brother that she tearfully prayed for mercy from Hashem. Although Leah ended up marrying Ya'akov, her eyelashes fell out from all of her tears, making her appear "weak-eyed."

Even though Leah's appearance did not compare to Rachel's, her response to such disheartening news enabled her to change her fate and show the power of prayer. In fact, according to Rav Huna, Leah's Tefillah was so strong that it not only annulled the decree that she would marry Eisav, but even allowed her to precede Rachel in marrying Ya'akov. Moreover, this story teaches that people cannot simply be judged from a physical perspective at face value, as everyone has their own complexities and nuances under the surface.

In his book *Talking to Strangers*, Malcolm Gladwell discusses the cognitive bias of the "illusion of asymmetric insight," which is the conviction that we know others better than they know us. We believe that we may have insights about other people that they lack, but not vice versa, and that leads us to "talk when we would do well to listen and to be less patient than we ought to be when others express the conviction that they are the ones who are being misunderstood or judged unfairly." Perhaps this is the case with Leah, who was characterized by the physical toll of her tears to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, rather than the spiritual impact that her Tefillot had. Hopefully, we can avoid being shallow and superficial by focusing more on the values and principles of others rather than their features and profiles. As we learn from Leah, appearance is not the

entire story; sometimes, there is more than meets the eye.

## Reuven: Gardener or גומל חסד?

*By Shimon Ross ('23)*

In the fourth Aliyah of this week's Parashah, the Parashah discusses the building of the Shevatim. Interestingly, despite the Aliyah mainly being about Rachel and Leah, it starts with Reuven picking the Duda'im for Leah. The Torah says this story happened after Leah had already had four of her eventual six sons. She was distraught that she wasn't having any more and was temporarily infertile. Reuven realized that Leah was unhappy and knew that the way to stop her pain was to end the cause. He therefore went and got the Duda'im because he knew they had the unique medicinal capabilities to help her give birth, and she would no longer have to be barren and sad anymore. This is the first of many times Reuven demonstrates his Tzidkut and tries to prevent his parents, particularly his mother, from suffering. At the age of four or five, he understood that Leah was upset that she was no longer having kids. The Pasuk, therefore, emphasizes that Reuven actively went out to find the Duda'im because he knew that they would help out his mother. In doing so, he shows flashes of some of his most praiseworthy character traits. He shows his wisdom because he understood that Leah was upset that she was the secondary wife, and he knew that these Duda'im would help her give birth and help her emotional well-being. We also see his kindness, as he was compassionate toward his mother's suffering and went out of his way to help her. This shows that Reuven's later sin with Bilhah was only out of love for and a sense of commitment to his mother. This is also similar to how when she names him, she says that he will be named Reuven because "Hashem saw my suffering, and now my husband will love me." He brought these to his mother because he knew that the most important thing to her was the ability to build up Bnei Yisrael. We see this again when he prevents Yosef from being killed because he says that he did so to prevent Ya'akov from suffering when he finds out that Yosef died. All of these stories show how Reuven had extraordinary intelligence, both emotional and technical. This story of the Duda'im teaches Reuven's incredible compassion and intelligence, which we should

all draw upon in our daily interactions to figure out how to help those around us.

## Ya'akov's Strength and Outstanding Middot

*By Dani Needle ('25)*

Parashat Toledot ends with Ya'akov being told to go to Lavan since Eisav wants to kill him for "stealing" the Bechor Berachah. Yitzchak tells Ya'akov to marry one of his daughters. Parashat Vayeitzei starts by saying "ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה," Ya'akov left from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan." He takes stones, puts them around his head, and sleeps. Ya'akov has a dream where a ladder is resting on the ground, and the top of it goes all the way up to heaven, angels are going up and down, and Hashem is at the top. Rashi says that Ya'akov then realizes that he slept in a very holy place; if he had known, he would never have slept there. Ya'akov was such a Tzaddik that even though he had this incredible interaction, if he had known that this place was holy, he would never have slept there. This shows how highly Ya'akov valued having proper Middot. Also, from the dream, Ya'akov learned that all of one's challenges are like a ladder in which one can go up or down, but, ultimately, one must always strive to ascend. And when Ya'akov woke up, he said that Hashem was in this place and was with him. There, Ya'akov recognized that these challenges were for good. What we can take from this is that when we face difficulties in life and we can either go up the ladder or down, we always remember that Hashem is always with us even when we are down. Later in the Parashah, when Ya'akov finally gets to Lavan, Ya'akov makes a deal with Lavan to work for seven years to marry Rachel, but Lavan, the tricky man he is, gives Leah, saying that he would never marry off his younger daughter before the older. Ya'akov and Lavan then make another deal that Ya'akov has to work another seven years for him to marry Rachel. Here we see Ya'akov's incredible resilience and Middot that instead of trying to argue with Lavan, Ya'akov accepts the new deal and works for another seven years for Rachel.

# Trying to Explain the Eishet Yefat To'ar: A Shiur Forty Years in the Making

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The rules of the Eishet Yefat To'ar outlined at the beginning of Parashat Ki Teitzei seem awful and disturbing. For many years I have been searching for an explanation of the humanity of these laws. After many years of contemplation, I humbly set forth my thoughts.

## What the Torah Says vs. What We Would Expect the Torah to Say

Devarim 21:10-14 states: *When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God deliver them into thy hands, and thou carries them away captive, and seest among the captives a woman of goodly form, and thou hast a desire unto her, and wouldest take her to thee to wife; then thou shalt bring her home to thy house, and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails, and she shall put the raiment of her captivity from her, and shall remain in thy house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month; and after that thou mayest go in unto her and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will, but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not deal with her as a slave, because thou hast humbled her.*

We would have expected the Torah to say: *When thou goest forth to battle against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God deliver them into thy hands, and thou carries them away captive, and seest among the captives a woman of goodly form, and thou hast a desire unto her, and wouldest take her to thee to wife; then thou shalt say: "NO!" and then thou shalt walk away.*

## Four Points of Explanation

The following four points help place the Eishet Yefat To'ar rules in perspective:

#1: The Chassidische Rebbe and the Suicidal Chassid

A Chassid told his Rebbe he wanted to end his life and instead of yelling at him, the Rebbe empathized with the Chassid and helped him plan out his suicide. The Rebbe suggested various suicide methods but then noted each of their drawbacks. He kept trying to discover a satisfactory solution but found problems with every potential solution. The Rebbe told him to return in two

weeks to resume the conversation. The Chassid realized that someone finally understood his pain and predicament. Had the Rebbe yelled, the Chassid would have thought that even his trusted and beloved Rebbe did not understand him. He was in a high emotional state, and you could not reason with someone like that. The Chassid never returned to the Rebbe to discuss the matter further and did not attempt suicide.

#2: My Ten-Year-Old Cousin in Efrat

There were two ten-year-olds in Efrat who were angry and eager to engage in a fistfight. They asked my cousin to referee the fight, and he agreed. He then set forth a list of rules they had to follow if they wanted to fight and have him referee. By the time he finished, they had realized they did not want to fight anymore since there were so many rules.

#3: *Platoon* Movie from 1986

In 1986, I watched the movie *Platoon*, which is a very vivid and very intense depiction of the brutal horror of war. I even asked my father, a three-and-a-half-year World War 2 combat war veteran, to join me in watching the movie<sup>1</sup>. After walking out of the movie staggered by what I had seen, I asked my father if this was what the war was actually like, and he responded with two words: "much worse."

#4: The persistent and horrific problems of war rape

War rape is a heinous issue that often happens in war and persists until this day in the Russian war against Ukraine<sup>2</sup>. The persistence of this horrible behavior points to the fact that legislation alone is an ineffective tool to prevent and combat war rape.

## The Torah's Strategies to Combat War Rape

Rashi (to Devarim 21:11 citing Kiddushin 21b) notes, "לא לרע הרע, דבירה תורה אלא כנגד יצר הרע," the Torah presents an effective means to counter war rape. Hashem is trying to convince a combat soldier at an intense emotional high to calm down and refrain from terrible behavior. The soldiers are ordinary people that become crazed due to combat. They

<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, it was a severe error to watch a movie like this with its unbridled depiction of raw and extreme violence. It was also a severe mistake to ask my father to relive the horror of war. To his credit and my amazement, my father never complained about my taking him to this movie.

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/04/26/ukraine-war-rape-sexual-assault/>.

just need to be delayed and calmed a bit. Saying no with an exclamation point in such a situation is utterly ineffective.

Had the Torah outright said no, the soldier, in his unbalanced state, would reject the Torah's exhortation as incompatible with his emotional needs. Instead of saying just walk away, the Torah imposes a long set of rules to help calm the soldier. It also slows him down by first spending thirty days back home away from the war front to help him settle back into his normal emotional patterns and thought processes before marrying this woman.

Judging by the pervasiveness of the issue of war rape, it seems that army legislation does not work, which just adds to the logic behind the Torah's strategy.

Finally, the first three mitzvot in Ki Teitzei: Eishet Yefat To'ar, Isha Senu'ah – the hated wife, and Ben Sorer U'Moreh, also strongly discourage war rape.

This Semichut Parshi'ot (juxtaposition), the aforementioned Rashi notes, communicates to the soldier that beginning a marital relationship horribly - starting it out based on just physical attraction - will lead to an awful family relationship yielding angry and rebellious children.

The Torah is subtly telling the soldier that while Hashem is not directly forbidding this relationship, the soldier should realize that if he yields to his overwrought emotions, he will pave a path of utter familial dysfunctionality. How would one expect otherwise by forcing a woman into an alien environment with a husband with whom she has no relationship? She hates her environment and husband, who she is forced to join. Children from such marriages will be rebellious since they are raised by an angry and resentful mother.

### **Conclusion**

The Eishet Yefat To'ar rules, at first glance, seem horrifying and inhumane. However, upon reflection, one realizes that these Halachot reflect Hashem's brilliant manner of dealing with human emotion and effectively convinces a soldier not to commit war rape.

### **Postscript**

The TABC Talmidim wondered if an Eishet Yefat To'ar ever happened. I responded that while it's possible that it never happened, the Gemara does not record such an approach. By contrast, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 71a) does

quote opinions that Ir HaNidachat, Ben Sorer U'Moreh, and Tzara'at HaBayit never happened.

Moreover, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 21a) states that David HaMelech married numerous women under the laws of Eishet Yefat To'ar. This Gemara, however, may be seen as cautionary, as David HaMelech's family was filled with murder and other horrors, which may just help prove the point of the Torah's rejection of war rape.

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