



## Crisis and Character in the Story of Leah

Syllabus and Sourcebook for a  
multi-session course on Leah, based on

# THE LOST MATRIARCH: *Finding Leah in the Bible and Midrash*

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# UNIT 1: WE MEET LEAH

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 1:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 1, pp. 13-43.

2. Genesis 29:1-21

3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Biblical Verse</i></b>	<b><i>Page quoted in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
Gen. 29:7-9	14
Gen. 29:11-12	17
Gen. 29:13-15	25
Gen 29:16	29
Gen 29:17-18	31
Gen 29:18-19	36
Gen 29:20	39
Gen 29:21	40

4. Other Biblical Translations of "Rakhot" (Gen. 29:17)

### **Bloom, *Book of J*, (David Rosenberg, trans.), 108**

(Gen. 29:17). The eyes of Leah were exquisite but Rachel was finely formed, a vision to grasp.

### ***Etz Hayim Torah, Gen. 29:17, 171***

(Gen. 29:17). Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful.

*P'shat n.17. weak eyes* This does not describe poor vision, but eyes lacking in luster or lacking in tenderness and sensitivity.

### **Friedman, *Commentary*, 99**

(Gen. 29:17). And Leah's eyes were tender, and Rachel had an attractive figure and was beautiful.

**Hertz, J. H., *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 108-9**

(Gen. 29:17). And Leah's eyes were weak; but Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon.

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*n.17. weak.* Better, *tender*, which the Targum understands in the sense of 'beautiful'.

**Hirsch, *Pentateuch*, 470**

(Gen. 29:17). And the eyes of Leah were soft, but Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful to look at.

***Holy Scriptures, (JPS 1917), Gen. 29:17***

(Gen. 29:17). And Leah's eyes were weak; but Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon.

**King James Bible, 1611 version)**

(Gen. 29:17). Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

**Mitchell, *Genesis*, 61**

(Gen. 29:17). And Leah had dull eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in face and body.

***Tanach, Stone Edition*, 69**

(Gen. 29:17). Leah's eyes were tender, while Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance.

5. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Midrash</i></b>	<b><i>Page in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
Talmud <i>Megilah</i> 13b	22
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 70:13	25-26
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 70:16	33-34
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 70:17	38

## 6. Other Midrashic Sources

### **Alshech, Rabbi Moshe ben Chayim (Hakadosh), *Torat Moshe: Commentary on the Torah*, 134**

(Gen. 29:17). Leah's eyes were *weak* (a) to dissuade Esau from marrying her, and (b) to prompt her father to switch her so that Jacob would marry her.

### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 153**

(Gen. 29:17). AND LEAH'S EYES WERE TENDER, BUT RACHEL WAS COMELY IN FEATURES AND COMELY TO LOOK AT, AND JACOB LOVED RACHEL.

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*n.17.* LEAH'S EYES WERE TENDER. The precise meaning in this context of the adjective is uncertain. Generally, the word *rakh* is an antonym of "hard" and means "soft," "gentle," "tender," or in a few instances "weak." The claim that here it refers to dullness, or a lusterless quality, is pure translation by immediate context because *rakh* nowhere else has that meaning. Still, there is no way of confidently deciding whether the word indicates some sort of impairment ("weak" eyes or perhaps odd-looking eyes) or rather suggests that Leah has sweet eyes that are her one asset of appearance, in contrast to her beautiful sister.

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:43**

(Gen. 29:11). Jacob saw the other shepherds complaining to themselves. They were saying, "Since the Great Flood, people in our area have done our best to avoid sexual immorality. Here this stranger is kissing a woman in public!" Realizing that he had done wrong, Jacob began to weep.

Some say that Jacob did not kiss Rachel on the face. The Torah says, JACOB KISSED RACHEL (Gen. 29:11), indicating that he kissed her on the head or shoulder. Otherwise the Torah would have said, "Jacob kissed Rachel's face."

### **Epstein, *The Essential Torah Temimah*, 130**

(Gen. 29:17). AND THE EYES OF LEAH WERE WORN, AND RACHEL WAS BEAUTIFUL AND WELL FAVORED.

AND THE EYES OF LEAH WERE WORN [lit., soft] - What is the intent of "worn"? If, literally, "worn," is it conceivable that the Torah would resort to circumlocution in order to avoid the degrading phrase "unclean beasts," as it is written (Gen. 7:8) AND FROM THE BEASTS THAT ARE NOT CLEAN, and allow itself to speak degradingly of the righteous ones? How, then, is "worn" to be understood? Rav said: "She heard people saying: `Rebekah has two sons, and Laban, two daughters; the older son is intended for the older daughter, and the younger son for the younger daughter' " — whereupon she asked: "What is the older son like?" They replied: "He is a wicked man, who robs people." "And the younger one?" "He is an upright man, who resides in the tents [of learning]." She cried until the lids fell from her eyes (*Baba Batra* 123a).

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 283**

... Leah, like her younger sister, was beautiful of countenance, form, and stature. She had but one defect, her eyes were weak, and this malady she had brought down upon herself, through her own action [crying over having been promised as a bride to the evil Esau]...

In view of the agreement between Laban and Rebekah, Jacob refused to marry the older daughter Leah. As it was, Esau was his mortal enemy, on account of what had happened regarding the birthright and the paternal blessing. If, now, Jacob married the maiden appointed for him, Esau would never forgive his younger brother. Therefore Jacob resolved to take to wife Rachel, the younger daughter of his uncle.

***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 572***

(Gen. 29:17). RACHOT. Although her eyes were beautiful, they had a habit of breaking out in tears constantly. She was given to weeping excessively.

***Jubilees, 28:5-6***

For Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah; for Leah's eyes were weak, but her form was very handsome; but Rachel had beautiful eyes and a beautiful and very handsome form.

**Labowitz, *God, Sex and Women of the Bible*, 35**

They call her Leah, a name that has traditionally been interpreted to mean "one who is weary." The Bible translators read Leah to be a lackluster, weary woman who was an encumbrance to her family. They implied that her only redeeming virtue was that she was fertile and gave birth to many children. Indeed, given Leah's family history, she had every reason to be weary from her circumstances. Her problems might have whittled her down into a disempowered woman, one competing with her sister Rachel and wallowing in self-pity. Though lamed, aleph, and hey, the root letters that spell Leah, can mean "tired" or "heavy," they can also be translated to mean "to labor in vain" or "one who perseveres against the odds."

***Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 70:12***

Said R. Tanhuma, "The kiss exchanged among kin [is not improper]. THEN JACOB KISSED RACHEL (Gen. 29:11). AND HE WEPT ALOUD (Gen. 29:11). Why did Jacob weep? He [Jacob] said, "Concerning Eliezer when he went to bring Rebecca, it is written: 'and the servant took ten camels' (Gen. 24:10). But I do not have even a ring or a bracelet." Another reason: Why did Jacob weep? Because he foresaw that she [Rachel] would not be buried with him. That is what Rachel stated to Leah: THEREFORE HE SHALL LIE WITH YOU TONIGHT (Gen. 30:15). "With you he will sleep [for eternity], but not with me." Another reason: Why did Jacob weep? Because he saw that men were whispering with one another, saying, "Does this man intend to bring new sexually immoral practices among us?"

### **Nachmanides, *Commentaries*, 1:360-361**

(Gen. 29:9). FOR SHE WAS A SHEPHERDESS. The intent of this is to relate that Laban's sheep had no shepherd other than Rachel, since her father turned over the flock to her alone. She alone tended them all the days, and Leah did not go with the flock at all. ... Perhaps due to Leah's eyes being tender, the rays of the sun would have hurt her, or because Leah was older and of marriageable age, her father was more concerned about her.

### **Nachmanides, *Commentaries*, 1:361**

Abraham's family was proper and modest, but Rachel was yet young and there was no concern for her. This is the sense of the verse, AND JACOB KISSED RACHEL (Gen. 29:11). It may be as Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said that where the Hebrew word for "kissing" is followed by the letter lamed — [as here: *Vayishak Yaakov l'Rachel*, instead of the word *eth*] — it means not on the mouth, but that he kissed her on her head or on her shoulder.

### **Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir), *Commentary on Genesis*, 172**

(Gen. 29:17). *Rakkot*: means beautiful, *verts* in the vernacular. "If a bride's eyes are beautiful, the rest of her body requires no further scrutiny" (*Taanit* 24a). Dark eyes are not as beautiful as light-colored [blue?] eyes.

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 1 - WE MEET LEAH:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. What do the Torah's introductory verses describing Leah and Rachel up to the weddings (Gen. 29:1-21) suggest regarding their respective moral characters, personalities, emotions, and motivations?
2. What do these introductory verses suggest regarding the moral characters, personalities, emotions, and motivations of Jacob and Laban?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. How would you describe Leah's eyes? What led you to your conclusion?
2. What kind of kiss do you think Jacob gave to Rachel? What led you to your conclusion?
3. There's also a second kiss in this narrative segment—Laban's welcome kiss to Jacob. What kind of kiss was that? What led you to your conclusion?
4. There are two central conversations in this episode: Jacob and Rachel have a lovers' talk (in the midrash), and Jacob and Laban have a wedding negotiation (in the biblical text). Are the portrayals of Jacob's character and personality in these two conversations consistent or conflicting with one another?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. Jacob flees from sibling rivalry at home only to find it expressed between Leah and Rachel in Haran. Can parents do anything to help their children avoid developing anger and bad feelings from sibling rivalry, or is that rivalry an inevitable and to some extent helpful developmental challenge of normal family life?
2. The *derash* method of interpreting the Bible calls for searching the words of the text to discover their deeper theological or moral meanings, often revealed through connections to other words or events in the Bible. The *peshat* method of reading the Bible calls for the simple, literal reading of the words in their context. Do you think that the level of authority of *derash* reading is:
  - a. Equivalent to the authority of the *peshat* method of reading the biblical text;
  - b. Inferior to the authority of the *peshat* reading the biblical text, but *derash* reading may still be helpful in interpreting the intention of the text; or
  - c. When not logically required by the biblical text, the *derash* method lacks interpretive authority and should be considered only as literary invention.

# UNIT 2: LEAH'S WEDDING

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 2:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 2, pp. 45-65.

2. Genesis 29:22-29

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Biblical Verse</b>	<b>Page quoted in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
Gen. 29:22	45
Gen. 29:23	48
Gen. 29:25	52
Gen. 29:25-28	58

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Midrash</b>	<b>Page in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 70:19	46-47
Talmud <i>Megilah</i> 13b	52
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Lam. Pro 24	54-55
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 70:19	60

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Alter, R., *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 45**

Jacob becomes the victim of symmetrical poetic justice, deceived in the blindness of the night by having Leah passed off on him as Rachel, and rebuked in the morning by the deceiver, his father-in-law Laban: "It is not done thus in our region to give the younger daughter before the firstborn" (Gen. 29:26).

#### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 155**

n.26. IT IS NOT DONE THUS IN OUR PLACE, TO GIVE THE YOUNGER GIRL BEFORE THE FIRSTBORN (Gen. 29:26). Laban is an instrument of dramatic irony: his perfectly natural reference to "our place" has the effect of touching a nerve of guilty consciousness in Jacob, who

in his place acted to put the younger before the firstborn. This effect is reinforced by Laban's referring to Leah not as the elder but as the firstborn (*bekhirah*). It has been clearly recognized since late antiquity that the whole story of the switched brides is a meting out of poetic justice to Jacob—the deceiver deceived, deprived by darkness of the sense of sight as his father is by blindness, relying, like his father, on the misleading sense of touch.

### **Attar, *Or Hachaim*, 251-252**

(Gen. 29:23). IT WAS IN THE EVENING, etc. ...According to the *Zohar*, Laban's having switched Leah for Rachel was the cause that the sanctity of the birthright became downgraded. Originally both monarchy and priesthood would have been the share of the firstborn just as the firstborn receives a double portion of the inheritance from his father. When Jacob slept with Leah he intended to impregnate Rachel (since he was not aware of his partner's real identity). This meant that his marital relations with Leah at the time were not totally pure. As a result the sanctity that he could have achieved by this union if his partner had truly been his intended bride, the sanctity he hoped to create, was diluted, was significantly reduced.

HE TOOK LEAH. Perhaps Leah did not intend to deceive Jacob but was forced by her father Laban to go through with this charade. It is also possible that Laban managed to persuade her. Unless one of these two reasons is correct the Torah did not need to write "he took," but could have simply written: "he brought his daughter Leah to him."

... HE HAD MARITAL RELATIONS WITH HER. The reason that Jacob did not notice that the woman beside him was not Rachel was that a righteous man of his caliber did not engage in actions that would arouse him before performing the commandment of marital intercourse in order to produce children. There was no one who could match Jacob in this kind of piety. The Torah itself testifies in Genesis 49:3 that he was able to say of himself that Reuben was the product of the first time he emitted semen (*raisheit oni*). Look at our commentary on that verse. He joined Leah without engaging in what is called "foreplay" in our parlance. Even after completing intercourse with Leah Jacob did not recognize her since everything took place in darkness as required by *halachah* [Jewish law].

### **Attar, *Or Hachaim*, p. 253**

(Gen 29:25). WHAT IS THIS THAT YOU HAVE DONE TO ME? We need to understand what exactly Jacob referred to with this complaint. If it referred to the fact that Laban had tricked him, he already mentioned this by saying: "why did you deceive me?" We must therefore search for something else that Jacob complained about.

Jacob did indeed complain about two matters. 1) That Laban had given him Leah instead of Rachel. 2) That he had done so in such a deceptive manner. Jacob thereby revealed that had Laban forced Leah upon him he, Jacob, would have been less concerned than now that he slept with one woman while believing he slept with another. This deception had far-reaching spiritual consequences, as we already alluded to earlier on verse 23.

It is also possible that Jacob referred to the humiliation experienced by Leah who now found herself Jacob's wife and had to expect that her husband would hate her instead of love her.

Jacob's question "why did you deceive me?" indicates that he had immediately decided not to divorce Leah but to keep her as a wife.

**Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma*, 189.**

AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED (Gen. 29:31). This verse indicates that Esau's actions were hateful to her. However, when Rachel learned that she was to marry Jacob she was elated and became arrogant. Once they both were married to Jacob, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: She [Leah] cried, and fasted, and despised Esau's behavior, and prayed to me. It would be unjust to keep her from the righteous one. Indeed I will let her bear sons first. Thus it is said: AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED.

**Bialik and Ravnitzky, *Book of Legends*, 47**

R. Jonathan said: God's intention was that the birthright should have stemmed from Rachel, for it is said, THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF JACOB, JOSEPH (Gen. 37:2). But through [her prayers for] God's mercy [to spare her from marrying Esau], Leah got ahead of Rachel in the birthright. Nevertheless, because of Rachel's effacing herself [by giving the tokens of identification to Leah to spare her humiliation on the wedding night], the Holy One restored the birthright to Rachel [by giving the double inheritance portion to Joseph].

**Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:53**

Recognizing Leah in the morning, Jacob was furious. "You are a cheat just like your father," he said. "All night long I called you Rachel, and you responded as if you were she.

"It was from you that I learned," she replied. "Your example taught me that it is permissible to lie for a good cause. Twenty-one years ago your father sent Esau to bring him food, and you rushed to set it before him. When your father asked you who you were, you replied that you were Esau his firstborn. (Gen. 27:29). You did not refrain from lying to carry out your mother's orders. Today I am similarly doing my father's bidding. Besides, I had a good motive. I truly wanted to be your wife. You are a saint, and are all that I ever wanted. To think that I might have been forced to marry a criminal like Esau!"

Jacob no longer had complaints against Leah, but Laban was another matter. He raged, "How could you do such a thing to me? Here I slaved for Rachel and you gave me Leah!"

**Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:51-52**

The wedding took place on Friday night at the time of greeting the Sabbath. When the townspeople sat down, they began to sing *Hi Leah, Hi Leah* (It is Leah, It is Leah). The people slurred the words, so that it sounded like *hi la hi la la la*, and Jacob thought that they were merely tra-la-la-ing a tune.

Laban had a reason for arranging this. If Jacob came in the morning to complain, he [Laban] would reply, "But the people told you that she was Leah, and you seemed pleased enough."

With the ruse complete, Laban escorted Leah into Jacob's chamber.

***Etz Hayim Torah, Gen. 29:25, 172***

*D'rash n. 25. THERE WAS LEAH (Gen. 29:25). ...Jacob is deceived in the darkness, even as his father Isaac had been fooled in his blindness.*

**Hachut Hameshulash, (Rashbam), 536**

(Gen. 27:22). Seeing that Esau and Jacob were twins, their voices were similar to one another. This made it easy for Isaac to err as to who was in front of him if he were to rely only on his sense of hearing. Having first established that unlike Jacob who was smooth skinned, the son in front of him was hairy, Isaac was now faced with a dilemma whether to trust his sense of hearing or his sense of touch.

**Nachmanides, Commentaries, 1:339-40**

(Gen. 27:22). Now I wonder why Jacob was not afraid of vocal recognition for all people are recognizable by their voice as our Rabbis have said, "How is a blind man permitted to live with his wife? And how are people permitted to live with their wives at nighttime? Only by vocal recognition." Now if ordinary people have such power of recognition, what of Isaac, who was wise and expert in distinguishing between his sons? He should truly have the power of recognition by voice. Perhaps the brothers had similar voices, and therefore the Sages said that the verse, *The voice is the voice of Jacob* (Gen. 27:22), refers not to Jacob's voice but to his words, i.e., that he speaks gentle language and mentions the Name of Heaven. It may be that he altered his voice in order to speak as his brother did, for there are people who know how to do this.

**Nachmanides, Commentaries, 1:365-66**

(Gen. 29:31). AND THE ETERNAL SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED. Now Leah had deceived her sister and also Jacob. For even if we were to say that she showed respect for her father, who took her and brought her in to him and she was not rebellious against him, she should have by word or sign indicated that she was Leah. All the more is this so since she feigned herself all night to be another, which was the reason why Jacob did not recognize her until he saw her in the morning. It was for this reason that Jacob hated her.

**Nachshoni, Studies, 173**

(Gen. 29:22). Laban also made a big feast for "Rachel" (who was in reality Leah), which he did not do later when Rachel was actually married. According to Abarbanel, the feast was meant to publicize the wedding, so that Jacob would be ashamed later to divorce Leah.

*Tosafos HaRosh* [commentary of Rabbeinu Asher], though, holds that Laban also cheated the local people. He did not make a wedding feast, but a feast in general. He invited all the local

people to a celebration without any reason, whereas Jacob thought it was a wedding celebration.

*Torah Temimah* [commentary of Boruch HaLevi Epstein] says that the celebration was done to confuse Jacob by means of the feast and the large number of guests. The second time, when Yaakov married Rachel, there was no need to confuse him, so Laban did not make any feast.

*Sifsei Kohen* [commentary of Shabbatai HaKohen] holds that the purpose of the feast was to involve everyone in the deceit and to make all accomplices to the deed. *Oznayim LaTorah* [commentary of Zalman Sorotzkin] explains that Laban invited all the people of the place in order to be able to claim later on that it was they who had not allowed him to diverge from the local custom. Many commentators see as part of Laban's plot the fact that he gave Zilpah, the younger maidservant, to Leah, so that Jacob would believe that he was given the younger maidservant together with the younger daughter.

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 212**

(Gen. 29:22). *Da'at Zekeinim* [a collection commentaries on the Torah by Rashi's disciples] explains that Laban covertly plied Jacob with intoxicating drink throughout the feast as added insurance that Jacob would be unaware of the substitution.

### **Tuchmann, *Passions*, (Netziv), 213**

(Gen. 29:23). A woman is not truly considered a man's "wife" unless both partners are mentally and physically synchronous. The [Netziv] explains that this verse expresses none of this mutuality, for Jacob is unaware of the true identity of the woman in his marital bed. He proves this by pointing out that the Hebrew word for wife, *ishah*, is absent from this verse when Jacob unknowingly weds Leah. The Netziv [contrasts Gen.29:28], where Jacob finally weds his beloved Rachel. There, the text states explicitly that Jacob takes Rachel *l'ishah*, "as a wife."

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 216**

[Regarding the midrash that Rachel hid under the bed on Leah's wedding night and answered for Leah:] The commentary on *Torah Temima* adds the necessary detail that the two sisters' voices were similar enough to fool a bridegroom in the dark.

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 225**

(Gen. 29:23). Jacob demonstrated his hatred for Leah not only in his thoughts, but also in his words and his actions. His hatred was always in evidence because he spoke to her in anger or rebuke. And Jacob's actions spoke for themselves, as he only rarely joined her in her tent, and his interactions with her at other times evidenced his dislike [citing Abarbanel].

## **II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 2 – LEAH’S WEDDING:**

### **A. Biblical Text Questions**

1. What do these biblical verses say or imply about the morality of the actions (or the absence of actions) taken by Leah, Rachel, Jacob, and Laban in the wedding episode?
2. The wedding is a very important element in the overall story of Genesis. What is the implication, if any, of the omission from the biblical text of any express role for God in the wedding episode (Gen. 22-29)?

### **B. Midrashic Text Questions**

1. Based upon the midrashic commentaries, who are the hero(es) and villain(s) in the wedding episode? Who do you think are the hero(es) and villain(s)?
2. The commentators provide many specific interpretations of what really happened on Leah’s wedding night, including what occurred in the privacy of the wedding tent. What do you think happened on Leah’s wedding night?
3. An important element of the wedding episode is the “morning after” argument between Leah and Jacob, as found in the midrash. What do you think this midrashic story tells about Leah and Jacob?

### **C. Contemporary Questions**

1. Does the wedding episode demonstrate that human actions are rewarded or punished measure for measure by God or fate? If so, is God's measure-for-measure reward or punishment ethical when it injures innocent parties?
2. How do you evaluate the relative legality of Leah’s and Rachel’s marriages? What relevance, if any, does this issue have for contemporary Judaism or Christianity?

# UNIT 3: LEAH'S FIRST FOUR CHILDREN

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 3:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 3, pp. 67-80

2. Genesis 29:30-35

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<i>Biblical Verse</i>	<i>Page quoted in "The Lost Matriarch"</i>
Gen. 29:30	67
Gen. 29:31	72
Gen. 29:32-35	75-76

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<i>Midrash</i>	<i>Page in "The Lost Matriarch"</i>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 71:2	74
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 71:4	78

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 157**

*n.35.* SHE CEASED BEARING CHILDREN (Gen. 29:35). This may be merely the consequence of natural process, though one possible reading of the mandrakes episode in the next chapter is not that the two sisters had their conjugal turns but rather that Jacob has ceased for a long period to cohabit with Leah.

#### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 156, n. 35**

(Gen. 29:31). AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS DESPISED AND HE OPENED HER WOMB, BUT RACHEL WAS BARREN.

*n.31.* LEAH WAS DESPISED AND HE OPENED HER WOMB, BUT RACHEL WAS BARREN (Gen. 29:31).. The Hebrew term for "despised" (or "hated") seems to have emotional implications, as Leah's words in verse 33 suggest, but it is also a technical, legal term for the unfavored co-wife. [See usage in Deut. 21:15.]

### **Attar, Or Hachayim, 256**

(Gen. 29:31). GOD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED, etc. The Torah tells us here that only God was aware of the fact that Leah was hated; she herself only felt that she was not beloved as we shall explain by examining her own words presently.

*Bereshit Rabbah* 71:2 sees in the word *s'nuah* [hated] merely an allusion that Leah had been slated to become the wife of Esau who was hated (compare Malachi 1:3 where God expressed His hatred for Esau). Accordingly, Leah is here called by the name of the husband originally intended for her. If Leah had not produced children the people would have seen this as proof that she was not meant to be Jacob's wife; this is why God opened her womb and granted her children. The Torah goes on to say that Rachel was barren to indicate that it was hoped that by making Leah fruitful Jacob's hatred towards Leah would abate when she could give him children whereas Rachel apparently could not.

### **Attar, Or Hachayim, 256-257**

(Gen. 29:32-33). LEAH GAVE BIRTH, ... SHE GAVE BIRTH AGAIN. I have paid attention to the meaning of the names. Normally, a name which alludes to removal of hatred should have preceded a name alluding to love. Leah seems to have reversed this sequence by proclaiming: "now my husband will love me" after the birth of Reuben, whereas after the birth of Shimon she proclaimed: "God heard that I am hated, therefore He has given me this one too." Another strange thing is Leah's conviction when Levi was born that "now my husband will grow attached to me." Was he then not attached to her previously?

Righteous Leah had shed tears about her fate to become Esau's wife; this is why the Torah mentioned the softness of her eyes. When she now saw that she had become Jacob's wife, she realized that he was not her true mate. When she had a son she attributed this to an act of mercy by God who had seen that she was not beloved. The righteous always live according to the imperative of our sages (*Avot* 1:6) to always interpret everyone else's actions favorably. It therefore did not occur to her that her husband could actually hate her.

People who think in that fashion are blessed. When Leah's first son was born she assumed that all she lacked was her husband's love. It was only when her second son was born that she realized retroactively that she had erred; not only had she not been loved but Jacob had actually hated her. When she said: "God has heard," she meant that God had been aware of something that she herself had not allowed herself to become aware of. When she had her third son she concluded that her previous reasoning that she was not Jacob's intended wife had been wrong too and that she was indeed Jacob's intended wife. She felt that the time had come when her husband would recognize this fact too and that his relationship with her would change for the better.

Leah also thought of the time after she and Jacob would depart this world when she said "my husband will remain attached to me." She was now convinced that their souls would not become separated in the Hereafter as she was his true soul-mate. We have been told by the *Zohar Mishpatim* section 102 that truly matched pairs will remain together in the Hereafter.

She underlined the fact that she had borne Jacob three sons as the number three is indicative of something permanent, enduring.

She also foresaw in her prophetic mind that Jacob would have four wives. Accordingly, she had fulfilled her destiny by bearing him three sons. When she bore Jacob a fourth son subsequently, she said: "this time I will thank the Lord" because up to now God had treated her on the basis of justice, i.e. she had borne one fourth of Jacob's sons. Now that she had borne him four sons she thanked God who had done more for her than was required by justice.

**Berman, *Midrash Tanhuma*, 189**

At first Leah was not considered worthy of marrying anyone but Esau, while Rachel was destined to wed Jacob. Leah would sit at the crossroads inquiring about Esau's actions, and they would tell her: "Oh, he is a wicked man; he sheds blood and waylays passers-by, he is covered with red hair as a garment and commits every kind of abomination against God." Upon hearing all of this, she would cry bitterly: "My sister Rachel and I were born of the same womb, yet Rachel is to marry the righteous man and I the wicked Esau." She wept and fasted until her sight became weak. Hence it is written: AND LEAH'S EYES WERE WEAK (Gen. 29:17).

AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED (Gen. 29:31). This verse indicates that Esau's actions were hateful to her. However, when Rachel learned that she was to marry Jacob she was elated and became arrogant. Once they both were married to Jacob, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: She [Leah] cried, and fasted, and despised Esau's behavior, and prayed to me. It would be unjust to keep her from the righteous one. Indeed I will let her bear sons first. Thus it is said: AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED.

**Bloom, *Book of J*, (David Rosenberg, trans.), 109-110**

(Gen. 29:30-31). SO HE ENTERED AS WELL RACHEL; HE WAS IN LOVE WITH RACHEL, INSTEAD OF LEAH. ...NOW YAHWEH PAID ATTENTION TO THE NEGLECTED LEAH; HE OPENED HER WOMB, WHILE RACHEL REMAINED UNFRUITFUL.

**Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:66**

(Gen. 29:35). Leah knew that Jacob had four wives and was destined to have twelve sons. According to this, her rightful share was therefore three sons. But now that she had a fourth son, God had given her more than her due. This was a far greater divine kindness than even the fact that she had had children before Rachel. [She therefore felt obliged to thank God in a special way.]

She said, "I must thank God all the more. I see that this son will give rise to the royal line. His descendant will be the great King David, who will thank God and praise him."

The Talmud notes that since the time of creation, no one had thanked God until Leah did so.

### **Culi, Anthology, 3a:62-63**

(Gen. 29:31). It is unthinkable that Jacob would have actually hated Leah. She was his wife. Although Laban had tricked Jacob and switched brides on him, Leah did not have any part in it. Jacob should have actually cherished her all the more for having been so eager to obey and honor her father. Furthermore, the Torah says that Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah" (Gen. 29:30); this indicates that Jacob also loved Leah.

This becomes clear when we realize that Leah was originally barren. When a woman cannot have children, she can become depressed and dejected, not wanting to leave the house. It is painful for her to see other women showing off their babies, while she feels abandoned and unloved. This was Leah's situation; she wept day and night, praying that God grant her a child.

Leah was also apprehensive that Jacob would divorce her and she would be forced to marry Esau. Even death would be better than being married to a criminal like him.

Leah was also unloved by her townsmen. They said, "If she were an ethical person, she would not have gotten involved in a plot with regard to her sister. Now she is trying to act the part of a saint!"

People spoke so badly about Leah that Jacob had decided to divorce her. The Torah therefore says that "God saw that Leah was unloved." He [God] had mercy on her and gave her sons so that she would have status.

Rachel was actually destined to have her son be the firstborn, but Leah preceded her with prayer.

... One should therefore not think that Jacob actually hated Leah. If he had hated her, he would not have lived with her. Because he did not love her as much as he did Rachel, Leah considered herself totally unloved.

### **Culi, Anthology, 3a:64**

(Gen. 29:32). [Reuben, *Reuven* in Hebrew, literally means, "see a son."] Leah had two reasons for giving him this name.

First, as she is quoted in the Torah, "GOD HAS SEEN MY HUMILIATION. NOW MY HUSBAND WILL LOVE ME. (Gen. 29:32). I trust that just as You saw my humiliation and suffering, so will You see the persecutions of my children when they are in exile. [*Reu ben*—they will see a son. Let all the forces on high see my son and watch over him and his children.]"

The second reason was prophetic. [Reuben can also be read *Reu beyn*—"see between."] She said, "See the difference between my son and the son of my mother-in-law." She was speaking of Esau, who wanted to kill Jacob for making him sell his birthright. Prophetically she saw that Joseph would also take the birthright from Reuben, but Reuben would not even be jealous of his younger brother.

These names were actually determined by Providence. God placed the words in the parents' mouths so that each child would be given a name appropriate to his destiny.

Some say that Leah conceived on the very first night. Since Jacob thought that he was with Rachel the first night, why was Reuben's legitimacy not considered blemished? Jacob saw Leah

at the wedding ceremony, but he thought she was Rachel. When he consummated the marriage he did not think of anyone other than the woman with him, even though he did not know her name.

According to another opinion, [Reuben's legitimacy was blemished as a result of the deception]. Because of this, Reuben's portion in the Holy Land was in Trans-Jordan, and not on its western bank along with the other tribes (Joshua 13:8).

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:65**

(Gen. 29:33). [Simeon, *shimon* in Hebrew, comes from the root *shama*, meaning to "hear."] She [Leah] said, "May God also hear my descendants' prayers when they are persecuted in Egypt."

(Gen. 29:34). ...[Levi comes from the root *lavah* meaning to "accompany," or to "be a companion." Literally, Leah said, "my husband will become a companion to me."] Leah knew that Jacob would have twelve sons from his four wives. She therefore said, "Now that I have three sons, I have completed my portion. I hope that the Divine Presence will be his companion and accompany (*lavah*) him."

### **Epstein, *Essential Torah Temimah*, 131**

(Gen. 29:31). AND THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED, AND HE OPENED HER WOMB, AND RACHEL WAS BARREN.

THAT LEAH WAS HATED - What is the intent of "was hated"? If it is to be understood literally, is it conceivable that the Torah would resort to circumlocution to avoid the degrading phrase "unclean beasts," as it is written (Gen. 7:8): "and from the beasts that are not clean," and allow itself to speak degradingly of the righteous ones? But the meaning is, rather: that the Holy One Blessed be He saw that the deeds of Esau were hateful in her eyes [See 29:17], "and He opened her womb" (Baba Batra 123a).

### ***Etz Hayim*, Gen. 29:31, 173**

*D'rash n.31*. UNLOVED (Gen. 29:31). The word translated here as "unloved" (*s'nu-ah*) generally means "hated." Did Jacob hate Leah or only love her less than he loved Rachel? One commentator suggests that Leah hated herself for having tricked Jacob into marrying her.

### ***Etz Hayim*, Gen. 29:35, 174**

*D'rash n.35*. THIS TIME I WILL PRAISE THE LORD (Gen. 29:35). The names of Leah's first three sons reflect her frustrating rivalry with her sister for the love of the husband they share. The reasons given for her choice of names for the first three children say nothing about her hopes for them but focus solely on how the births will affect her marriage. Now, with a fourth son, her mood changes from rivalry to gratitude, so she names him Judah (*Y'hudah*), from a Hebrew root meaning "to praise." In the future, the descendants of Jacob will be known as Judeans, or Jews (*Y'hudim*). Yobanan stated, "From the beginning of time, no one ever thanked God as Leah did"

(BT Ber. 7b). Her heartfelt prayer of thanks reflects her having grown from self-concern and a focus on what she lacked to a genuine sense of appreciation for what was hers.

***Etz Hayim, Gen. 29:35, 174***

*P'shat n.35. SHE STOPPED BEARING (Gen. 29:35).* No reason for this is given, but Gen. 30:14-15 indicate that Jacob had ceased sleeping with her.

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 285:**

The ways of God are not like unto the ways of men. A man clings close to his friend while he has riches, and forsakes him when he falls into poverty. But when God sees a mortal unsteady and faltering, He reaches a hand out to him, and raises him up. Thus it happened with Leah. She was hated by Jacob, and God visited her in mercy. Jacob's aversion to Leah began the very morning after their wedding, when his wife taunted him with not being wholly free from cunning and craft himself. Then God said, "Help can come to Leah only if she gives birth to a child; then the love of her husband will return to her." God remembered the tears she had shed when she prayed that her doom, chaining her to that recreant Esau, be averted from her, and so wondrous are the uses of prayer that Leah, besides turning aside the impending decree, was permitted to marry Jacob before her sister and be the first to bear him a child. There was another reason why the Lord was compassionately inclined toward Leah. She had gotten herself talked about. The sailors on the sea, the travelers along the highways, the women at their looms, they all gossiped about Leah, saying, "She is not within what her seeming is without. She appears to be pious, but if she were, she would not have deceived her sister." To put an end to all this tattle, God granted her the distinction of bearing a son at the end of seven months after her marriage. ... Altogether it was an extraordinary childbirth, for Leah was barren, not formed by nature to bear children.

***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 580***

(Gen. 29:31). Jacob did not hate her [Leah]; in fact he loved her. However, seeing that he loved Rachel better it appeared as if he hated Leah. We find a similar situation in Deut. 21:15 where the Torah speaks about a husband "hating" one of his two wives. The meaning there is also relative to the wife he prefers.

Seeing that the Torah describes her womb as needing to be "opened," it is clear that she had been barren before.

***Ibn Ezra, Commentary, 283-84***

(Gen. 29:35). THIS TIME WILL I PRAISE THE LORD. *Ha-pa'am* should be explained as if written *ha-pa'am ha-zot* (this time). Its meaning is, now that I have four sons I will give thanks to the Lord for I will not desire any more children. One can paraphrase THIS TIME WILL I PRAISE THE LORD by: I will praise the Lord because he has given me all this and has satisfied me. Therefore SHE LEFT OFF BEARING.

### ***Jubilees, 28:148***

12. But the womb of Rachel was closed, for the Lord saw that Leah was hated and Rachel loved.

### ***Mitchell, Genesis, 62***

[Translation of Gen. 29:31]. AND WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS UNLOVED, HE OPENED HER WOMB; BUT RACHEL WAS BARREN.

### ***Nachmanides Commentaries, 365***

(Gen. 29:30). AND HE LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH. The reason why Scripture mentions that he also loved Rachel more than Leah is that it is natural for a man to have more love for the woman with whom he first had relations, just as the Sages have mentioned with reference to women: "And she makes a firm commitment only to he who marries her first." Thus Jacob's loving Rachel more than Leah was unnatural. This is the sense of the word *gam* [usually translated as "also, " but here as "more"]: [AND HE LOVED 'GAM' RACHEL THAN LEAH].

### ***Nachmanides, Commentaries, 365-366***

(Gen. 29:31). AND THE ETERNAL SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED. Now Leah had deceived her sister and also Jacob. For even if we were to say that she showed respect for her father, who took her and brought her in to him and she was not rebellious against him, she should have by word or sign indicated that she was Leah. All the more is this so since she feigned herself all night to be another, which was the reason why Jacob did not recognize her until he saw her in the morning. It was for this reason that Jacob hated her. But God, knowing that she did so in order to be married to the righteous one, had compassion upon her. And so the Rabbis said in *Bereshith Rabbah*: "When Jacob saw the deeds by which Leah had deceived her sister, he decided to divorce her. But when the Holy One, blessed be He, remembered her by giving her children, Jacob said, 'Shall I divorce the mother of these children?'" This is the meaning of the expression, AND THE ETERNAL SAW: He had compassion upon her so that Jacob should not leave her. But there are some scholars who say that in the case of two wives, one of whom is loved exceedingly, the second one, who is the less beloved, is called "hated" relative to the first, just as Scripture said, *AND HE LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH* (Gen. 29:30), but not that he hated her. Leah however was ashamed of the matter and so God saw her affliction.

### ***Nachshoni, Studies, 175-176***

All the commentators state that Jacob's dislike of Leah was only relative, compared to his love of Rachel. One cannot explain the words simply as hatred, because the Torah said earlier, *AND HE ALSO LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH* (Gen. 29:30). Thus we see that he loved Leah, but loved Rachel more.

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 326**

*n.32.* AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME REUBEN (Gen. 29:32). Our Rabbis explained: She said, "See what is the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law who sold the right of the firstborn to Jacob, but this son of mine did not sell [his right of the firstborn] to Joseph and did not protest over [Joseph], but rather, he sought to extricate him from the pit (Gen. 37:21-22)."

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 327**

*n.34.* THIS TIME MY HUSBAND WILL BECOME ATTACHED (Gen. 29:34). Since the Matriarchs were prophetesses and knew that twelve tribes would emerge from Jacob, and that he would marry four wives, she said, "From now on, [Jacob] has no cause for complaint against me, for I have taken [produced] my full share of sons."

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 328**

*n.35.* THIS TIME I WILL GIVE THANKS (Gen. 29:35), because I took more than my share. Now it is incumbent upon me to give thanks.

### **Sforno, Commentary, 156**

(Gen. 29:30). AND HE ALSO LOVED RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH ...not only because of the intimacy of marriage but because she was Rachel; (i.e.,) her deeds which stemmed from her personality. Even though Leah was his first wife, and it is common for a man to find greater contentment with her, as our Sages tell us, "A man finds contentment only with his first wife" (*Yevamos* 63b).

(Gen. 29:31). THAT LEAH WAS UNLOVED. (Jacob did not love Leah because) after a while he recognized (certain) signs of barrenness in her, as it says, SO HE (GOD ) OPENED HER WOMB, and he (Jacob) thought that because of this (condition) she had agreed to deceive him.

BUT RACHEL REMAINED BARREN. She was by nature barren, and remained so until God opened her womb.

(Gen. 29:32). IN MY AFFLICTION. Because my husband suspected me of willfully deceiving him, therefore God, may He be blessed, granted me children as vindication, similar to a *sotah* (a woman suspected of infidelity unjustly, who, when cleared, conceives—see *Numbers* 5:28).

(Gen. 29:33). THAT I AM UNLOVED ... and as compensation for this unfounded suspicion He has granted me this (son) also.

### **Talmud Baba Batra 123a**

And this also explains that which is written: AND GOD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED, SO HE OPENED HER WOMB (Gen. 29:31). ...What is meant here by *hated*? If you will say it means that she was hated, literally, this cannot be. Is it conceivable that Scripture does not speak explicitly of the shortcomings of an animal that is *tamei* (non-kosher) but that Scripture speaks of the

shortcomings of the righteous? Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, saw that Esau's behavior was *hated* by Leah and HE OPENED HER WOMB.

### **Talmud Berakhot 7b**

And R. Yohanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai, "From the day on which the Holy One, blessed be He, created his world, there was no one who praised the Holy One, blessed be He, until Leah came along and praised him. For it is said, THIS TIME I WILL PRAISE THE LORD (Gen. 29:35)."

### **Talmud Berachot 7b**

As to Reuben, said R. Eleazar, Leah said, "See the difference [the name of Reuben read as *reu*, see, and *ben*, between] between my son and the son [Esau] of my father-in-law. The son of my father-in-law, even knowingly, sold off his birthright, for it is written, AND HE SOLD HIS BIRTHRIGHT TO JACOB (Gen. 25:33). See what is written concerning him: AND ESAU HATED JACOB (Gen. 27:41), and it is written, AND HE [ESAU] SAID, IS NOT HE RIGHTLY NAMED JACOB? FOR HE HAS SUPPLANTED ME THESE TWO TIMES (Gen. 27:36). My son, by contrast, even though Joseph forcibly took away his birthright, as it is written, BUT FOR AS MUCH AS HE DEFILED HIS FATHER'S COUCH, HIS BIRTHRIGHT WAS GIVEN TO THE SONS OF JOSEPH (1 Chr. 5:1), did not become jealous of him, for it is written, AND REUBEN HEARD IT AND DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THEIR HAND [Reuben convinced his brothers not to kill Joseph] (Gen. 37:21)."

### **Townsend, *Tanhuma*, 185**

As soon as the Holy One saw that Leah was hated, he said: How am I to make her dear to her husband? Just look, I am raising her up and giving her children first so that she will become loved by her husband. Therefore (according to Gen. 29:31): WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED.

... Another interpretation (of Gen. 29:31): WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED. [She was hated], not because she was abhorrent to her husband, but because she had scolded him when Jacob had worked seven years for Rachel. Now his mother had said to him (in Gen. 27:44): AND YOU ARE TO STAY WITH HIM (Laban) FOR A WHILE, and he had stayed seven years. (Gen. 29:21, 23): THEN JACOB SAID UNTO LABAN: GIVE ME MY WIFE. ...AND, WHEN IT WAS EVENING, HE TOOK HIS DAUGHTER LEAH [and brought her to him]. ALL NIGHT SHE PRETENDED TO BE RACHEL. When he arose in the morning (according to Gen. 29:25), THERE WAS LEAH. He said to her: Daughter of a swindler, why did you trick me? She said to him: [What about] you! Why did you trick your father? When he said to you: Is this my son Esau, you said to him (in Gen. 27:19): I AM ESAU YOUR FIRST-BORN. Now you are saying: Why have you tricked me? And did your father not say [to Esau] (in Gen. 27:35): YOUR BROTHER CAME WITH DECEIT? So because of these things with which she scolded him, he began to hate her. The Holy One said: There is no cure for this but sons. Then her husband will desire her. Thus (in Gen. 29:31): WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED, HE OPENED HER WOMB.

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 225**

(Gen. 29:31). Abarbanel confirms Jacob's hatred of Leah. The commentator states that a person's thoughts can manifest themselves only in his speech or in his deeds. Jacob demonstrated his hatred for Leah not only in his thoughts, but also in his words *and* his actions. His hatred was always in evidence because he spoke to her in anger or rebuke. And Jacob's actions spoke for themselves, as he only rarely joined her in her tent, and his interactions with her at other times evidenced his dislike.

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 225**

(Gen. 29:31). Radak [R. David Kimchi] takes a softer view of the words LEAH WAS HATED. He is convinced that she only *seemed* hated because she was the unfortunate "other wife" in Jacob's life. Because there were two wives—one of whom was so truly beloved—the other, by comparison, seemed "hated." The commentary continues, saying that because Leah was acutely aware of the qualitative difference in Jacob's love for her and for her sister, she despised herself. God saw her suffering and opened her womb to console her.

...Radak emphasizes that *both* Leah and Rachel are barren, as were Sarah and Rebecca before them. God favors Leah with fertility at this specific juncture, however—leaving Rachel still infertile—perhaps in order to right the imbalance between them in Jacob's eyes.

### **Tuchman, *Passions*, 231**

(Gen. 29:32-34). Abarbanel suggests that Leah's first three sons' names may well reflect the three ways each birth mitigated Leah's suffering. Reuven's birth—his name is based upon the verb "to see"—caused Jacob to cease his *acts* of disdain; Shimon's birth—whose name means "to hear"—caused Jacob to refrain from his scolding *words*; and Levi's birth—whose name can also be a sound-play on the Hebrew word *LeV*, meaning "heart"—removed from Jacob's heart and mind his hateful thoughts of Leah.

### **Weissman, *Midrash Says*, 290**

(Gen. 29:28-31). A week after his marriage to Leah, Laban gave Rachel to Jacob as a wife also. Leah was depressed and thought, "Jacob will divorce me because I deceived him!" She implored God not to put her to shame. When God saw this, he immediately gave her children, in order that Jacob should abandon any thought he might have of divorcing her.

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 3 – LEAH’S FIRST FOUR CHILDREN:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. This segment of the biblical text (Gen. 29:30-35) is unusual because Leah seems to reveal her feelings through her explanations of her choice of names for her first four sons. Do you think Leah’s explanations for these names accurately reflect the external reality of her marital situation, or only her perceptions and feelings about her life?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. Many commentators weigh in on the issue of what the Bible means when it twice refers to Leah being “hated” [*s’nuah*] by Jacob soon after their marriage (Gen. 29:31, 33). What do you believe was Jacob’s attitude towards Leah at this point in their story?
2. Midrash also offers several interpretations of the verse stating that after the birth of Judah, Leah “stopped bearing,” sometimes using that statement as the basis for concluding that all four Matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel) were afflicted with barrenness. Do you believe that Leah was in fact barren at any time?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. During the period from immediately before the birth of Leah’s first son, Reuben, to immediately after the birth of her fourth son, Judah, to what extent does Leah change and develop her attitude and moral character?
2. Although Leah is the central character in this segment of the family story about the births of her initial children, did you learn anything about Jacob and God from the roles that they play in this portion of the narrative?

# UNIT 4: THE HANDMAIDENS' CHILDREN

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 4:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 3, pp. 80-99

2. Genesis 30:1-13

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Biblical Verse</b>	<b>Page quoted in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
Gen. 30:1-2	80
Gen. 30:3-4	88
Gen. 30:5-8	92-93
Gen. 30:9-13	93-94

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Midrash</b>	<b>Page in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 71:6	81
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 23:2	83
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 71:7	85-86
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 71:7	87
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 45:4	89
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 45:5	90

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Alter, R., *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 187**

After the notation of jealousy [SHE WAS JEALOUS OF HER SISTER (Gen. 30:1)], Rachel speaks, and we should keep in mind that it is the very first piece of dialogue given to her in the narrative. As such, we might expect that it will be especially revelatory of character, and in fact it immediately shows us a Rachel who is impatient, impulsive, explosive: GIVE ME SONS; IF NOT, I SHALL DIE (Gen. 30:1). The brusqueness of this is even a little more emphatic in the Hebrew, where "give," *havah*, is a word often used for peremptory and crudely material requests (Judah begins with the same word when he tells Tamar, who is disguised as a prostitute, that he wants her body [Gen. 38:16]), and where the tense of dying is more imminent (literally, "I am dead"). With an alertness to echoes, we might observe that this is the second time Jacob has been confronted by someone who claimed to be on the point of death unless immediately given what he or she wanted, the first instance occurring in the request for lentil pottage by his ravenous brother Esau (Gen. 25:32). The barren Rachel asks for not just a son but sons (the

second one she will bear is to cost her life itself). Jacob in his rejoinder says neither son (*ben*) nor child (*yeled*) but instead uses a rather formal locution, the kenning "fruit of the womb." Perhaps he chooses this term because of the theological context—God's withholding from her—of his statement; perhaps, also, it sharpens the rebuke to Rachel by stressing her condition of barrenness through the implied image of the childless woman as a plant that yields no fruit.

### **Attar, *Or Hachaim*, 257-58**

(Gen. 30:1). RACHEL SAW THAT SHE HAD NOT BORNE CHILDREN, etc. The Torah adds the word[s] FOR JACOB, since it was clear that Jacob was not the one who was sterile. The cause therefore had to lie with her. When the Torah describes Rachel as jealous of her sister, this indicates that had Leah not been her sister Rachel would have attributed the fact that she did not conceive to genetic differences between her and another wife of Jacob. She could not account for such genetic differences when her sister was involved, i.e. someone who was genetically similarly equipped (she thought).

The word[s] FOR JACOB may have an additional meaning here. Her major concern was the fact that she was unable to bear children for an outstandingly righteous man such as Jacob. Had Jacob not been clearly righteous, she would have attributed his bad luck to a character defect in her husband. Knowing that she herself was righteous she could not understand why the promise contained in Psalms 125:3 that THE SCEPTER OF THE WICKED WILL NOT BE ALLOTTED TO THE FATE OF THE RIGHTEOUS, would not apply to their union. Had Jacob not been so clearly a pious man she could have attributed their lack of success to a shortcoming in Jacob. As it was this was impossible. Therefore, she was jealous of her sister who had succeeded where she had failed.

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:68**

[Jacob responds to Rachel's demand for children, made in Gen. 30:1:] "But if a saint like you has no children, it is not considered a failing; you are certainly not considered to be dead. You might be lacking the fruit of the womb, but you have offspring enough in your good deeds. They are better than human children."

"Perhaps," she replied. "But why don't you pray for children like your parents did?"

"My parents had no children. I already have four sons."

"But your grandfather Abraham already had Ishmael when he prayed that he should have a son through Sarah. Why don't you emulate him?"

"Why don't you emulate Sarah? She gave her husband her handmaid as a second wife and let her live in her house. As a result of her suffering, she was worthy of having her own son."

"If that's all that it takes, I'll give you Bilhah."

It appears very surprising that Jacob became so angry at Rachel for what she said. A saint should not lose his temper even when he has good reason. Certainly not for something as trivial as this.

Actually, Jacob had prayed for Rachel. He was deeply in love with her, and prayed for her with all his might. Still, his prayer was not accepted. But when Rachel complained that he had done nothing, it made it seem that he did not care at all. It was by no means a trivial matter.

Some say that Rachel acted like a spoiled wife and said, "If you don't pray for me I'll die." She assumed that Jacob loved her so much that he would put on sackcloth and fast for days on end so that she would have children.

Jacob exploded at her, "Do you think that I can grant children at will just like God?"

Also surprising is Jacob's answer that he already had children. Saints usually think of others before themselves, even when the others are not in need.

Rachel wanted to have children from Jacob. She wanted him to pray just like his father had prayed that he could have children through Rebecca. Jacob answered that since he already had children, it is less likely that his prayer would be answered.

### ***Etz Hayim Torah, Gen 30:2, 175***

*D'rash n.2.* The Sages criticize Jacob for his insensitive response (Gen R. 71:10). Might it be that Jacob is disappointed to learn that his love is not enough to satisfy Rachel, that Rachel's primary passion is to be a mother, not just a wife? [Sforno].

### ***Etz Hayim Torah, Gen 30:9, 175-76***

*P'shat n.9.* SHE HAD STOPPED BEARING This connects with Gen. 29:35. Leah's resort to concubinage is unexplained. Perhaps she sensed that Jacob wanted more children. Convinced that Rachel could not provide them and facing the fact that her husband did not find her desirable, Leah was prepared to sacrifice her pride and give her maid for that purpose.

### ***Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 285***

(Gen. 30:1). When Rachel saw that her sister had borne Jacob four sons, she envied Leah. Not that she begrudged her the good fortune she enjoyed, she only envied her for her piety, saying to herself that it was to her righteous conduct that she owed the blessing of many children.

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n. 178. BR 71. 7; Aggadat Bereshit 51, 104, which has the additional remark that Rachel was very anxious to become a mother because she had a presentiment of her premature death.

### ***Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, 332***

(Gen. 37:18-20). When his brethren saw him afar off, they conspired against him, to slay him. Their first plan was to set dogs on him. Simon then spoke to Levi, "Behold, the master of dreams cometh with a new dream, he whose descendant Jeroboam will introduce the worship of Baal. Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, that we may see what will become of his dreams."

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 583***

(Gen. 30:2). [Jacob responded to Rachel:] God denied you children, not I. You have to pray to Him, not to berate me. As far as I am concerned, I have made my contribution already having slept with you far more often than with Leah. If you are genetically barren then you have to ask God to open your womb. Your sister did the same and her prayer has been answered. The word *manah*, "prevented," which Jacob used meant that the sperm did not enter the area of the womb where fertilization takes place. Jacob's anger was due to Rachel attributing her problem to Jacob and something Jacob had failed to do, and not to God, Who decrees who is barren and who is fertile. The demand to her husband "get me children," was entirely out of place. Had she asked Jacob to plead with God to have mercy on her, she would have been perfectly in order. He would not then have become angry at her.

(Gen. 30:3). SHE SAID. After Yaakov had explained to her that her failure to have children was God's doing, she suggested what Sarah had suggested to Abraham, that she was willing to become a vicarious mother through her servant maid having a child by him. She therefore asked Jacob to sleep with Bilhah.

### ***Jubilees, 28:20***

And when Leah saw that she had become sterile and did not bear, she envied (Rachel) and she also gave her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob to wife, and she conceived, and bore a son, and Leah called his name Gad...

### ***Nachmanides, Commentaries, 367***

(Gen. 30:2). Perhaps we can rectify Jacob's retort in consonance with the opinion of our Rabbis [who related that Jacob said to Rachel, "It is from you that he has withheld children and not from me,"] for it is impossible to think that Jacob did not pray on behalf of his beloved wife who was barren, however his prayer was not accepted.

### ***Nachmanides Commentaries, 368-369***

(Gen. 30:9). WHEN LEAH SAW THAT SHE HAD LEFT OFF BEARING SHE TOOK ZILPAH HER HANDMAID, etc. I do not know what motivated this deed of Leah and why she gave her handmaid to her husband for she was not barren that she should hope to have children through Zilpah, and it is not natural for women to increase the number of their husbands' wives. We must, however, say that the matriarchs were prophetesses, who knew that Jacob was destined to establish twelve tribes, and Leah desired that the majority of his sons be from her or from her handmaid, who was in her power, so that her sister Rachel would not prevail over her with respect to the number of her sons. Therefore, she said, GOD HATH GIVEN ME MY SHARE, BECAUSE I HAVE GIVEN MY HANDMAID TO MY HUSBAND (Gen. 30:18). Jacob also came unto her on account of this, i.e., that he raise many sons for he knew it to be so, as our Rabbis have said.

It is possible that knowing that the Land had been given to their children, and realizing that Abraham and Isaac had not had many children, Jacob wanted to have many wives in order to

increase his progeny so as to inherit the Land, for A FOURTH GENERATION SHALL COME HITHER AGAIN (Gen. 15:16), and so Leah wanted to give him her handmaid so that he would not wed a stranger.

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 328**

*n.1.* AND RACHEL BECAME ENVIOUS OF HER SISTER (Gen. 30:1). She envied her good deeds. She said, "Were she not more righteous than I, she would not have been worthy of bearing sons."

### **Sforno, Commentary, 159**

(Gen. 30:11). [*BA GAD:*] GOOD LUCK HAS COME. He [Gad] has come by chance, for had I [Leah] not ceased to bear (children) I had no intention to bring him into the world (through my maidservant). *Bagad* is written as one word, implying "failure," because she failed to bear, after she had done so heretofore. (*Bagad* is derived from) MY BRETHREN HAVE DEALT DECEITFULLY [have betrayed] (*bagdu*) AS A BROOK (Job 6:15).

### **Tuchman, Passions, 251**

(Gen. 30:9). The *Netziv* presents a more unselfish view of Leah's giving her handmaid to Jacob. According to the *Netziv*, Leah's motivation for giving Zilpah to Jacob was compassion for the girl's unmarried state in Jacob's household. Leah uniquely understood Zilpah's feeling of exclusion from the anticipation of connubial intimacy, having initially been passed over by Jacob in favor of her younger sister. A magnanimous Leah sought to alleviate Zilpah's envy of Bilhah, whom Rachel had elevated in status from handmaid to wife. Leah felt she could do as much for Zilpah. *Torah Shlema* [20<sup>th</sup> century commentary by R. Menachem Mendel Kasher] explains that Leah approached Zilpah, and convinced her to be a wife to Jacob. *Da'at Zekeinim* [a compilation of Torah commentary by medieval Tosafists] reminds us that Zilpah was Laban's daughter, also. She was called a "handmaid" because she was born to Laban's concubine. Notably, Leah emancipated Zilpah, as Rachel did for Bilhah, allowing Jacob to take her to be his *wife* and not merely his concubine. *Ohr Hachayim* [commentary by R. Chaim Ibn Attar] agrees, reiterating that, as was the case with Bilhah, the text is clear that the sons Zilpah bore were "to Jacob." She became his wife and the sons she bore him enjoyed the same status and property rights as all his other sons.

### **Tuchman, Passions, 235-236**

(Gen. 30:1). What, then, is the true nature of Rachel's ENVY? The commentator [*Torat Hachida*, a work by Rabbi Haim Yosef David Azulai] continues that Rachel, in her heart of hearts, cannot understand why Leah—who is the one who carried the trick *too* far and pretended *throughout the night* to be Rachel—is the one to bear Jacob sons, while Rachel (who had pitied her sister and allowed her to save face) is herself afflicted with childlessness. Rachel envies Leah her seeming absolution (that is, her ability to bear children), while she—Rachel—is still being punished for her part in the deception, and remains barren. Thus, in her anguish born of the powerful emotions of guilt and righteousness, Rachel now fears that somehow Jacob holds the

key to free her from continued punishment. She has convinced herself that if Jacob would only forgive her for her part in her father's trickery—as he has apparently absolved Leah—then she, too, will surely be blessed with children.

The *Netziv* adds that Rachel secretly thought that perhaps the fault of her childlessness lay not in her, but in Jacob. If only he would open his heart to forgive her, he would be blessed with children from her womb, also. The *Netziv* continues that this secret suspicion is consistent with the notion that she—and no other—was Jacob's preferred wife, and thus was entitled to bear his sons. Following this logic, if Rachel is not becoming pregnant, the "fault" must be in Jacob, who may in some manner be as yet unworthy of fathering Rachel's children. The time has come, to Rachel's way of thinking, for Jacob to humble himself sufficiently that God will determine that *he* is worthy.

**Tuchman, *Passions*, 238**

(Gen. 30:1). *Sha'arei Aharon* [a contemporary commentary on Torah, Rashi, and Onkelos by R. Aharon Rutter] suggests that in her desperation, Rachel thinks that Jacob is indifferent to the emotional consequences of her barrenness, because *he* already has achieved fatherhood through Leah. She begins to suspect that Jacob is deliberately withholding children from her "for her own good." He is still so passionately in love with her that he seeks to spare her the agony and physical travail of childbirth, and the drudgery of housewifery and motherhood. He desires Rachel always to retain the virginal youthfulness of the young woman she was at the well.

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 4 – THE HANDMAIDENS’ CHILDREN:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. In the earlier wedding episode, the important “morning after” argument between Leah and Jacob is entirely a product of midrash. That spousal argument finds a strong parallel in the current segment about the birth of Jacob’s next sons after Leah’s first four. But there are some important differences: here the dialog is detailed in the biblical text itself, and the argument is between Rachel and Jacob. What are some of the other important similarities and differences between these two spousal dialogs, and what do those similarities and differences signify?
2. After Rachel demands children from Jacob, she offers her handmaiden, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife/concubine. When Bilhah produces two sons for Jacob, Leah makes a similar offer of her handmaiden, Zilpah, who also produces two sons for Jacob. What does Jacob’s silent acceptance of these wives/concubines indicate about him?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. In the previous story segment, numerous commentators debated the meaning of the biblical statement that Leah was “hated” by Jacob. Now the commentators show a similar focus on the meaning of the biblical statement that Rachel “envied” her sister. How would you describe Rachel’s feelings towards Leah at this point in the story?
2. Some commentators conclude that God punishes Jacob for his angry response to Rachel’s demand for children; other commentators defend Jacob’s righteousness. What is your opinion of Jacob’s reaction to Rachel here?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. Although Rachel does not bear children in this segment, she envies her sister, demands children from Jacob, provides Bilhah as a surrogate mother, and names Bilhah’s children. During this portion of the story, to what extent does Rachel undergo change and development with respect to her attitude and moral character?
2. First Rachel and then Leah give their handmaidens to Jacob as wives to bear children for him. What do you think were the motivations and ethics of Rachel and of Leah in these actions?

# UNIT 5: THE MANDRAKES, AND THE BIRTH OF DINAH

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 5:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 4, pp. 101-117

2. Genesis 30:14-21-30:21

3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Biblical Verse</b>	<b>Page quoted in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
Gen. 30:14-15	101-02
Gen. 30:16	105
Gen. 30:17-20	107-08
Gen. 30:21	111

4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Midrash</b>	<b>Page in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 72:3	104
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 72:5	108-09
<i>Talmud Berakhot</i> 60a	113-14

5. Other Midrashic Sources

### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 160 n14**

*n.14.* MANDRAKES. As in other, later cultures, these plants with tomato-shaped fruit were used for medicinal purposes and were thought to be aphrodisiac, and also to have the virtue of promoting fertility, which seems to be what Rachel has in mind. The aphrodisiac association is reinforced in the Hebrew by a similarity of sound (exploited in the Song of Songs) between *duda'im*, mandrakes," and *dodim*, "lovemaking."

### **Attar, *Or Hachaim*, 259**

(Gen. 30:16). LEAH WENT OUT, etc. The reason Leah went to meet Jacob, something that was not considered good manners, was that she was afraid Rachel might change her mind. If we accept the view that Rachel swore to her and therefore could not go back on her word we must justify Leah's behavior as being based on the lack of precision of Rachel's promise. Rachel had

not said that Jacob could sleep with Leah *on that night*. Leah did not want to be put off. By displaying eagerness to sleep with her husband she profited by becoming pregnant.

Leah may also have walked towards her husband in order not to have to call him to her after Jacob had already entered Rachel's tent. This would have been an embarrassment for her sister Rachel. It might have resulted in open jealousy. Leah's virtuous considerations therefore outweighed the unconventional manner of her behavior. It is clear that God appreciated this as He rewarded her by letting her conceive; the Torah wrote: GOD LISTENED TO LEAH AND SHE CONCEIVED (Gen. 30:17).

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:72-73**

(Gen. 30:16). Leah heard Jacob's donkey bray, and she went out to greet him, telling him that he was to spend the night with her. Leah was such a saint that she did not wish to discuss this in Rachel's presence. She therefore met Jacob far out in the field and whispered it before he went to Rachel's tent. She did not want to embarrass Rachel. If he had gone in to Rachel's tent, it would not have been proper for him to leave.

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:74**

(Gen. 30:16). If a woman verbally asks her husband to have intercourse with her, she is considered shameless. If she does not actually ask, but tries in other ways to get her husband to pay attention to her, making herself beautiful so that he will not think of other women, she will be rewarded with pious, scholarly children, just as was Leah.

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:75**

(Gen. 30:21). Leah had actually become pregnant with another son. She prayed, "Lord of the Universe. Jacob is destined to have twelve sons. I have given birth to six. Bilhah has two sons, and Zilpah has two. This gives Jacob a total of ten sons. If I have another son now, Rachel will be humiliated. She will not be able to have as many sons as even the handmaids. "

When Bilhah and Zilpah discovered that Leah was pregnant, they came to her and said, "We three have had enough sons. Save some for Rachel."

Providence decreed that the sex of the embryo should be changed, and Leah gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Dinah.

... According to another opinion, Dinah was Zebulun's twin. The Torah therefore says, "She then had a daughter," without mentioning that she became pregnant again.

### ***Etz Hayim Torah Gen. 30:15, 176***

*P'shat n.15.* MY HUSBAND . . . MANDRAKES The pairing of these two words intimates that the fruit was to be used to induce Jacob to resume his conjugal duty.

HE SHALL LIE WITH YOU The nature of this barter arrangement is underlined by the fact that in Genesis when the verb "to lie with" (*Sh-Ch-V* root—*yishchav*, here) is used with a sexual

nuance, it never connotes a relationship of marital love but one that takes place under unsavory circumstances.

**Ginzberg, Louis, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 287**

[Regarding the bargaining over the dudaim (Gen. 30:14-15):] It was altogether unbecoming conduct in Rachel to dispose thus of her husband. She gained the dudaim, but she lost two tribes. If she had acted otherwise, she would have borne four sons instead of two. And she suffered another punishment, her body was not permitted to rest in the grave beside her husband's.

Jacob came home from the field after night had fallen.... When Leah heard the braying of Jacob's ass, she ran to meet her husband, and without giving him time to wash his feet, she insisted upon his turning aside into her tent. At first Jacob refused to go, but God compelled him to enter [by making the ass turn], for unto God it was known that Leah acted from pure, disinterested motives. Her [bargaining over the] dudaim secured two sons for her, Issachar ... and Zebulun....

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 287**

(Gen. 30:21). Leah bore once more, and this last time it was a daughter, a man child turned into a woman by her prayer. When she conceived for the seventh time, she spake as follows: "God promised Jacob twelve sons. I bore him six, and each of the two handmaids has borne him two. If, now, I were to bring forth another son, my sister Rachel would not be equal even unto the handmaids." Therefore she prayed to God to change the male embryo in her womb into a female, and God hearkened unto her prayer.

***Hachut Hameshulash*, (Kimchi), 591**

(Gen. 30:21). It would appear that originally Dinah was meant to become Zebulun's twin (brother). This is why the Torah wrote AFTERWARDS, without making any mention of Leah again becoming pregnant. The Torah did not even write *she bore again*. No mention is made of why she named the girl Dinah.

There is a well-known *aggadic* explanation that Leah did not want her sister to be shamed in having fewer sons than even the handmaids; her prayer to that effect was answered by this fetus becoming a girl.

**Ibn Ezra, *Commentary*, 287**

(Gen. 30:14). MANDRAKES. Onkelos renders *dudaim yavruchin* (Aramaic for mandrakes). They are similarly called in Arabic. Mandrakes give off a pleasant scent. Thus it is written, THE MANDRAKES GIVE FORTH FRAGRANCE (Songs 7:14). The mandrakes are shaped like humans. They have the shape of a head and hands. I do not know how they can help a woman conceive since their nature is cold.

### **Ibn Ezra, Commentary, 288**

AND AFTERWARDS SHE BORE A DAUGHTER (Gen. 30:21). Some say that Dinah was Zebulun's twin.

### **Nachmanides, Commentaries, 369-370**

(Gen 30:14). DUDA'IM. These are '*sigli*' (violets). In Arabic it is called *jasmin*. So I found in Rashi's commentary. But this is not so for the Arabic *jasmin* bears the same name in the words of our Rabbis ..., while they say *sigli* is an odorous herb .... However, their season is not IN THE DAYS OF THE WHEAT, but perhaps Reuben found them there by chance. It is best to accept Onkelos' opinion concerning the translation of *duda'im*, which he rendered as *yavruchin* (mandrakes).

...The correct interpretation is that Rachel wanted the *duda'im* for delight and pleasure, for Rachel was visited with children through prayer, not by medicinal methods. And Reuben brought the branches of *duda'im* or the fruit, which resemble apples and have a good odor. The stem, however, which is shaped in the form of the human head and hands, he did not bring, and it is the stem which people say is an aid to pregnancy. And if the matter be true, it is by some peculiar effect, not by its natural quality. But I have not seen it thus in any of the medicinal books discussing mandrakes.

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 332**

*n.15*. THEREFORE, HE SHALL LIE WITH YOU TONIGHT (Gen. 30:15). The lying of this night was mine [i.e., he was to have spent the night with me], but I give it to you "in exchange for the *dudaim* of your son." Since she belittled the lying of the righteous one [i.e., spending the night with him], she was not privileged to be buried with him.

### **Sforno, Commentary, 160-61**

(Gen. 30:15). [Leah to Rachel:] AND NOW TO TAKE EVEN MY SON'S DUDA'IM ... to increase his (Jacob's) love for you and hatred for me!

[Rachel to Leah:] THEREFORE, HE SHALL LIE WITH YOU TONIGHT. Hence, the effectiveness and magical power of these *duda'im* (for me) will be preceded by your (spending the night with Jacob) and so no harm will come to you, by giving me the *duda'im* now...

(Gen. 30:16). [Leah to Jacob:] IT IS TO ME THAT YOU MUST COME FOR I HAVE SURELY HIRED YOU. You will not be guilty of any wrongdoing by depriving my sister her conjugal rights since she has willingly consented (to relinquish her right). This incident may appear immodest to those who brazenly misinterpret (Torah) but it reveals to us that the Patriarchs viewed marital intimacy as innocently as did Adam and Eve before they sinned, for there was no thought or intent of physical gratification at all; they were solely motivated to produce offspring, to serve and honor God. This incident also tells us that the motive of the Matriarchs was acceptable to God, the Blessed One, when they tried (to build the house of Israel) by bringing in co-wives (Bilhah and Zilpah) and the incident of the *duda'im* (as well). Because of their (pure deeds) their

prayers were accepted, for it is proper for the *tzaddik* [righteous person] to utilize every possible natural means to attain his goal, combined with prayer, as our Sages tell us, *the Holy One, Blessed is He, desires the prayers of the righteous* (Yevamos 64a).

SO HE LAY WITH HER THAT NIGHT ...with his full knowledge and consent, cognizant of Leah's zest and pure motives....

### **Sforno, Commentary, 161**

(Gen. 30:18). GOD HAS GRANTED MY REWARD BECAUSE I GAVE MY MAIDSERVANT TO MY HUSBAND. This [pregnancy] was my first effort, when I brought this rival-wife into my house.

(Gen. 30:20). GOD HAS ENDOWED ME. He has granted me a (generous) portion and rewarded me for my second effort, i.e., with the *duda'im*...

### **Talmud Nedarim 20b**

(Gen. 30:16). But R. Shmuel bar Nachmani has said in the name of R. Yonasan: Any man whose wife solicits him for marital duties will have children the like of whom did not exist even in the generation of Moses. For it is stated [by Moses, Deut. 1:13]: TAKE FOR YOURSELF MEN WHO ARE WISE AND UNDERSTANDING. But later it is written [Deut. 1:15]: SO I TOOK THE HEADS OF YOUR TRIBES, WISE MEN, and it is not written "understanding." This shows that men of understanding could not be found in the generation of Moses.

### **Talmud of the Land of Israel, Berakhot, 1:340**

[Mishnah:] AND ONE WHO CRIES OUT OVER A PAST OCCURRENCE, LO, THIS IS A VAIN PRAYER. HOW SO? ONE WHOSE WIFE WAS PREGNANT AND HE RECITED, "MAY IT BE THY WILL THAT SHE BEAR A MALE CHILD," LO, THIS IS A VAIN PRAYER. The House of Yannai say, "Our Mishnah refers to a situation where the woman is sitting in the labor chair. But before that time one may pray [for a male child]." Said R. Judah b. Pazzi, "Even if she is sitting in the labor chair, the sex of the fetus can be changed [by God], in accord with the verse, BEHOLD, LIKE THE CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HAND, SO ARE YOU IN MY HAND, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL (Jer. 18 : 6).

Rabbi [said] in the name of the House of Yannai, "Originally [as a fetus], Dinah was a male. After Rachel prayed, she was changed into a female. In this regard it says, AFTERWARDS SHE BORE A DAUGHTER, AND CALLED HER NAME DINAH (Gen. 30:21). After Rachel prayed, Dinah was changed into a female."

And R. Judah b. Pazzi said in the name of the House of R. Yannai, "Our mother Rachel was one of the earliest prophetesses. She said, 'Another shall descend from me.' In this regard it is written, 'She called his name Joseph, saying, `MAY THE LORD ADD TO ME ANOTHER SON' (Gen. 30:24). She did not say, 'other sons.' Rather she said, 'Let another one be descended from me.' [She knew that Jacob would have one more son and she prayed that it would be through her. At that moment, Leah's fetus changed into a female.]

**Tuchman, *Passions*, (Netziv), 260**

(Gen. 30:16). The *Netziv* ascribes to Leah a second worthy motive. For while her rushing out to greet Jacob may not have been the soul of modesty, it was preferable that she did so, thus sparing Rachel the embarrassment of having to turn Jacob away when he presented himself at *her* tent at the end of the day.

## **II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 5 – THE MANDRAKES; AND DINAH’S BIRTH:**

### **A. Biblical Text Questions**

1. As in the previous story segment about Rachel and Jacob arguing over Rachel’s demand for children, the biblical text for the mandrakes segment is centered on another dialogue, this one between Leah and Rachel. What does this dialog disclose about the sisters’ respective motivations and moral characters?
2. The midrashic story that Dinah was originally a male seems based not so much upon the biblical text (Gen. 30:21, which states only that after the birth of Zebulun, Leah bore a daughter and named her Dinah), but rather what the text fails to state (that Leah conceived again). Is this an appropriate basis for interpretation of an ancient text that so often omits to provide narrative details in many stories?

### **B. Midrashic Text Questions**

1. The commentators disagree on just what the sisters were really negotiating about in the mandrakes incident. What do you think each sister was seeking? What did each sister get?
2. Many commentaries focus on the moral implications of the Bible’s statement that Leah “went out” to greet Jacob and bring him to her tent on the night of the mandrakes exchange. Some commentators justify or even praise Leah for her actions, while others condemn her for those actions. Which point of view do you think the biblical text most supports?
3. What do the midrashic tales about the birth of Dinah indicate about Leah’s personality and moral character? What do the commentaries about the birth of Dinah indicate about the other characters (Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah, Jacob, and God)?

### **C. Contemporary Questions**

1. As between Leah and Rachel, which of the sisters acts in a morally superior manner in the mandrakes episode?
2. What do the midrashic tales of Dinah’s birth indicate about the attitudes, motivations, and biases of the Rabbis who created those stories?

# UNIT 6: RACHEL GIVES BIRTH TO JOSEPH AND STEALS THE TEREPHIM

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 6:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 5, pp. 119-135

2. Genesis 30:22-32:1

3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Biblical Verse</i></b>	<b><i>Page quoted in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
Gen. 30:22	120
Gen. 30:23-24	122
Gen. 31: 4, 14-16	124
Gen. 31:30-32	130
Gen. 31:34-35	131
Gen. 31:43, 50; 32:1	131-32

4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Midrash</i></b>	<b><i>Page in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 73:4	120-121
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 74:13	132

5. Other Midrashic Sources

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:76**

(Gen. 30:22). Rachel also had her own merit [to become pregnant with Joseph] for giving Leah her secret sign with Jacob, and sparing her humiliation. Although she knew that Leah would be substituted, she remained silent. Jacob had sent Rachel gifts at that time, but Laban gave them to Leah, telling her, "These are the gifts that your bridegroom sent you." Rachel acted as if she did not know anything. Her only complaint was, "What reason could my father have for hating Jacob and keeping such a saint from me?"

Now that she was not having any children, she was worried that Jacob would divorce her and she would be forced to marry Esau. People were already saying that this was what Esau was anticipating.

Jacob was also afraid that Esau would order him to divorce the beautiful Rachel. "Why did you marry both sisters and not leave one for me? If Rachel had given you children, I would not have said a word.

**Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:93-94**

(Gen. 31:19). LABAN HAD GONE TO SHEAR HIS SHEEP, AND RACHEL STOLE THE FETISHES THAT BELONGED TO HER FATHER. ...Laban knew how to make use of these fetishes [for divination]. Rachel stole them so that Laban would not be able to find out where they had gone.

**Etz Hayim Torah, Gen. 8:1, 46**

*P'shat n.1.* GOD REMEMBERED "To remember," in the Bible, is not to retain or recall a mental image. It is to focus on the object of memory that results in action.

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 287-290**

(Gen. 30:22). Now all the wives of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah, united their prayers with the prayer of Jacob, and together they besought God to remove the curse of barrenness from Rachel. On New Year's Day, the day whereon God sits in judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth, He remembered Rachel, and granted her a son. And Rachel spoke, GOD HATH TAKEN AWAY MY REPROACH (Gen. 30:23), for all the people had said that she was not a pious woman, else had she borne children, and now that God had hearkened to her, and opened her womb, such idle talk no longer had any reason.

By bearing a son, she had escaped another disgrace. She had said to herself: "Jacob hath a mind to return to the land of his birth, and my father will not be able to hinder his daughters who have borne him children from following their husband thither with their children. But he will not let me, the childless wife, go, too, and he will keep me here and marry me to one of the uncircumcised."

... Benjamin, the second son, whom Rachel regarded merely as a supplement, had ten sons, while Joseph begot only two. These twelve together may be considered the twelve tribes borne by Rachel. Had Rachel not used the form of expression [when naming Joseph, Gen. 30:24], THE LORD ADD TO ME ANOTHER SON, she herself would have begotten twelve tribes with Jacob.

*n.202.* That Rachel bore children was a miracle, as she was sterile by nature, and this miracle was granted to her as a reward for her kindness to Leah, whom she saved from being put to shame by Jacob, who would have detected the fraud played on him by Laban, had not Rachel divulged to her sister the sign agreed upon by her and Jacob by which he would recognize her on the nuptial night.

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 291**

(Gen. 31:19). That her father might not learn about their flight from his *teraphim*, Rachel stole them, and she took them and concealed them upon the camel upon which she sat, and she went on.

n218. Rachel's motive in stealing Laban's idols was a laudable one; she said: Should I depart and leave the old man with his idolatry? See BR 74.5

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Rashbam), 611***

(Gen. 31:19). [AND RACHEL STOLE THE TEREPHIM] in order that Laban should not be able to locate the whereabouts of Jacob and his family. We know from Hoseah 3:4 that *teraphim* were credited with supplying such information to people believing in their power. Zechariah 10:2 also refers to them as speaking, though deceptively. At any rate, they were widely consulted to provide information about the future, information of a supernatural dimension.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 612***

Rachel's objective in stealing the *teraphim* was to deny Laban knowledge about the route Jacob had taken when he left.

### ***Ibn Ezra, Commentary, 301***

(Gen. 31:19). Some say that Rachel stole the *teraphim* in order to keep her father from idolatry. If this were the case, why did she take them with her and not bury them on the way? The most likely reason that Rachel stole the *teraphim* was that Laban, her father, was an astrologer, and Rachel feared that he would look at the stars and discover which way they fled.

### ***Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 73:4***

THEN GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL (Gen. 30:22): What was the occasion for the act of remembrance? It was the silence that she preserved in her sister's behalf when they gave Jacob Leah. She knew about it but she kept silence.

THEN GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL: That was only just, for she brought her co-wife into her house: R. Huna, R. Aha said in the name of R. Simon, "DAN, JOSEPH, AND BENJAMIN (1 Chr. 2:2) means, It was on account of the merit of Dan [that is, Leah bringing her co-wife into her house] that she was remembered and Joseph and Benjamin were born."

### ***Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 74.5***

AND RACHEL STOLE THE TERAPHIM THAT WERE HER FATHER'S (Gen. 31:19). But her purpose was a noble one. She said: "What, shall we go and leave this old man [Laban] in his errors [worshipping idols]!" Therefore the Bible tells us, AND RACHEL STOLE THE TERAPHIM THAT WERE HER FATHER'S.

### ***Nachmanides, Commentaries, 367***

AND JACOB'S ANGER WAS KINDLED (Gen.30:2). It is not in the power of the righteous that their prayer be heard and answered in any case, and because she spoke in the manner of yearning

women who are loved, thus attempting to frighten him with her death, his anger was kindled. Therefore, he said to her that he is not in God's stead that he should remember the barren ones by giving them children in any case, and he does not care about it since it is from her that children were withheld and not from him. He said this in order to admonish her and shame her. Now the righteous woman Rachel, seeing that she could not rely upon Jacob's prayer, then went to pray on her own behalf to Him Who hears the cry of those in trouble. This is the sense of the verse, AND GOD HEARKENED TO HER (Gen.30:22).

### **Raver, *Listen to her Voice*, 64**

(Gen. 31:19). The *teraphim*, figurines invoking the Goddess of fertility and childbirth, were sacred objects to Rachel.

### **Rashi, *Commentaries*, 334-35**

n.23. [GOD "HAS TAKEN AWAY" MY DISGRACE (Gen. 30:23)]. (*asaf*) He brought it in to a place where it will not be seen. [It will be hidden, covered up.]

"MY DISGRACE." For I became a disgrace because I was barren, and they [people] would say about me that I would ascend to the portion of Esau, the wicked.

### **Tuchmann, *Passions*, (Alshich), 269**

(Gen. 30:22). God never ceased to "remember" Rachel and her barren condition. Rather, God forbore granting her a pregnancy for several years until it was deemed time to answer her prolonged prayers. God did not wish it to appear that it was the *dudaim* that caused Rachel's fertility, rather than Divine intervention.

### **Tuchmann, *Passions*, (Rabbi Abraham), 269**

(Gen. 30:22). Rabbi Abraham, son of the Rambam [Maimonides], focuses on the words "and God listened to [Rachel]" in this verse. The text teaches us that Rachel never abandoned belief that a merciful God would remember her. Rachel was steadfast in her trust, and when she prayed she never failed to petition God for a son. It was Rachel's prayer that God "heard."

### **Tuchmann, *Passions*, (Alshich), 271-72**

(Gen. 30:22). Alshich adds that Rachel's shame had been compounded in her own mind by several factors. First, that Jacob had laid the blame for her childlessness squarely at *her* feet, telling her in his anger that "God has withheld fruit of the womb from *you*," and not from *me* (Gen. 30:2). Also, Rachel felt shamed that despite her best intentions she failed to accept the sons of her handmaid as true substitute sons for her to raise. Her sister, Leah, was subsequently able to do so with the sons of her own handmaid, but perhaps this was because she already had borne four sons, while Rachel had borne none, and did not consider herself to be the true mother to Bilhah's sons. And finally, says Alshich, Rachel suffered the sharp pain of humiliation

at the hand of her sister Leah, who accused her of TAK[ING] AWAY MY HUSBAND (Gen. 30:15), when in fact the reverse was true: Jacob had always intended Rachel to be his first and only wife, and it was Rachel's act of immense charity that allowed Leah to marry first.

...[A]ccording to the *Netziv*, since no child was forthcoming from Rachel's union with Jacob, she was shamed that people should perceive that her marriage was solely for Jacob's physical pleasure

## **II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 6 – RACHEL GIVES BIRTH TO JOSEPH AND STEALS THE TERAPHIM:**

### **A. Biblical Text Questions**

1. Gen. 30:22 relates that GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL. What does it mean for God to “remember” Rachel?
2. The text makes it clear that Rachel “stole” (*va-tignov*) her father’s *terephim* (Gen. 31:19), and that she subsequently tricks him so that his search would be unsuccessful (Gen. 31:33-35). Were Rachel’s actions in stealing from and tricking her father morally justified?

### **B. Midrashic Text Questions**

1. The commentators propose a variety reasons for why God ended Rachel’s barrenness. Assuming for purposes of this question that you accept the traditional view that God exercises the power to permit or bar pregnancies, why do you think God acted to permit the birth of Joseph?
2. According to biblical chronology, God “remembered” Rachel and she gave birth to Joseph several years after she had demanded children from Jacob. Why did God “remember” Rachel at this particular time?

### **C. Contemporary Questions**

1. To what extent, if at all, does Rachel’s moral character change (for better or worse) in this segment of the narrative describing her giving birth to Joseph and stealing the *terephim*?
2. Some of the commentaries seem driven to defend the moral excellence of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs. But the text of the Hebrew Bible often seems to attribute to the Matriarchs and Patriarchs some actions, attitudes, and motivations that are not generally consistent with our contemporary concept of moral heroism (anger, envy, deception, belief in magic, etc.). What do you think are the literary purposes or functions for those negative depictions in the Bible?

# UNIT 7: MEETING ESAU

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 7:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 6, pp. 137-146

2. Genesis 32:2-33:17

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Biblical Verse</b>	<b>Page quoted in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
Gen. 32:2-3	139
Gen. 32:8-9	139
Gen. 33:1-2	140
Gen. 33:6-7	142
Gen. 32:23	144

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b>Midrash</b>	<b>Page in "<i>The Lost Matriarch</i>"</b>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 78:10	142
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 76:9	145

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:120-21**

(Gen. 32:8). Jacob took the livestock and other goods and made one camp. The women and children he made into a second camp. He then said, IF ESAU COMES AND ATTACKS ONE CAMP, THE OTHER ONE WILL SURVIVE (Gen. 32:9).

God had told Jacob, RETURN TO THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS...AND I WILL BE WITH YOU" (Gen. 31:3). Jacob was not sure what God meant. God might have meant that Esau would take all that he had acquired while he was with Laban, and Jacob would not derive any gain from it; He therefore ordered him to return home, and *there* He would make things go well for him. Or else, God might have meant that besides the good that he had experienced while with Laban, He would give him more good when he returned to his father's house.

Since he was not sure, he placed his possessions in one place, and his wives and children in another. If Esau attacked the camp containing his belongings, he would know that the first interpretation was correct. If so, he reasoned, let it be mere property rather than human lives that are lost. He therefore said, "the remaining camp will survive."

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Yehudah Sharaf (1602-1675) that Jacob was uncertain whether or not to engage Esau in battle.

... God had told Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers, and I will be with you- (Gen. 31:3). Jacob was therefore not sure whether or not to engage Esau in battle with all his strength, trusting that God would help him. It was equally possible that God did not want him to fight against Esau, but rather, to let God take care of him. If this was God's meaning, then Jacob should not wage war against Esau, since war causes God to review carefully a person's deeds.

... Jacob therefore divided his company into two camps. He left the first camp unarmed, with instructions not to fight at all. The second camp, on the other hand, was extremely well armed.

Jacob reasoned, "If Esau attacks the armed camp, this will be a sign that God wants me to engage Esau in battle. I do not wish to remain with my hands tied. The remaining camp will certainly survive, since God has promised that He would save me.-

Jacob therefore responded to the threat in three ways:

1. With tribute. He sent gifts to Esau to blind him. Bribery can always accomplish its ends.
2. With prayer. He prayed that God would rescue him.
3. With war. If the other methods failed, he was prepared to meet Esau in battle.

### **Culi, *Anthology*, 3a:148**

[Joseph is mentioned before Rachel in Gen. 33:7.] Joseph stood in front of Rachel with outspread arms so that Esau would not see her. He was rewarded for this, as we shall see in *VaYechi* (see Gen. 48:22).

Although Rachel was extremely beautiful, Jacob did not have to conceal her in a chest as he did to Dinah. Esau was a grandson of Abraham, and even though he was a criminal, he would not seize a married woman.

Still, Joseph was not about to take chances. Esau might still try to force Jacob to divorce Rachel, arguing that Laban had two daughters, and they should be divided evenly. If Jacob argued that Laban had tricked him, Esau would say that once Jacob had Leah, Rachel should have remained for him. Joseph therefore reasoned that it would be best to conceal her.

The Torah says that LEAH AND HER CHILDREN ALSO APPROACHED (Gen. 33:7). She was not afraid to come forward even though people had once said that she was destined for Esau. She saw that God had saved her from him once, and was confident that He would do so again.

### ***Etz Hayim Torah*, Gen. 33:4, 203**

*P'shat n.4*. HE KISSED HIM Esau's undoubtedly sincere kiss—he seems genuinely moved by Jacob's extravagant gesture—signals the conclusion of the chain of events precipitated by that other kiss, Jacob's deceitful kiss, recounted in 27:27, which played a crucial role in the original blessing.

*D'rash n.4* HE KISSED HIM The commentators are divided as to whether Esau's hugs and kisses and kind words were genuine. (The Masoretic text has dots over the words "he kissed him," indicating that there is something unusual about them.) Some are reluctant to credit Esau with

any decent motives (Gen. R. 78:9). One *midrash* says, "everything Esau ever did was motivated by hatred, except for this one occasion which was motivated by love" (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* [A] 34). Hirsch comments, "Even Esau gradually relinquishes the sword and begins to feel the chords of human love." Zornberg sees the brothers' embrace as resembling Jacob's encounter with the angel. Their embrace is a combination of hugging in love and grappling in struggle, as each one wants to merge with the other but also to defeat him.

Both Jacob and Esau realize that the mental images each has been carrying of the other for 20 years are no longer accurate.

### **Friedman, *Commentary*, 114**

(Gen.33:7:) JOSEPH AND RACHEL CAME OVER. Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah are mentioned before their children, but Joseph is mentioned before Rachel, yielding a picture of him approaching ahead of her. In his favor, we might take this as a protective gesture toward his mother. Alternatively, we might take this as consistent with the next picture we shall have of his early years: seeing himself in a special status relative to his family.

### **Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 303**

(Gen. 33:4). In the vehemence of his rage against Jacob, Esau vowed that he would not slay him with bow and arrow, but would bite him dead with his mouth, and suck his blood. But he was doomed to bitter disappointment, for Jacob's neck turned as hard as ivory, and in his helpless fury Esau could but gnash his teeth. ... Esau bawled because his teeth were hurt by the ivory-like flesh of Jacob's neck, and Jacob [wept because he] feared that his brother would make a second attempt to bite him.

### **Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 303**

(Gen. 33:4). Joseph and Rachel came last, and Joseph walked in front of his mother, though Jacob had ordered the reverse. But the son knew both the beauty of his mother and the lustfulness of his uncle, and therefore he tried to hide Rachel from the sight of Esau.

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*n.* 262 [citing *Midrash HaGadol, Sefer B'raisheit, I*]. At this time Rachel was pregnant with Benjamin, and Joseph, fearing lest Esau should look at her and she become frightened, placed himself in front of his mother to conceal her.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash*, (Kimchi), 633**

(Gen. 32:8). VAYIRA ... VAYETZER [FREIGHTENED ... DISTRESSED]. The reason why the Torah repeated the emotions Jacob experienced twice but in different words was to underline how strongly he felt this fear.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash*, (Kimchi), 655**

(Gen. 33:4). *VAYISHAKEHU* [he kissed him], the word has a dot on each of the letters. In *Bereshit Rabbah* 78:9 Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says that everywhere where you find the dots do not cover each letter of the word underneath we give preference to the meaning of the text as is, without the dots. When there are more dots than letters, we give emphasis in our interpretation to the dots. In this instance, there are as many dots as there are letters in the word *vayishakehu*, so that we understand that Esau kissed Esau sincerely with all his heart. To this Rabbi Yannai countered by asking that if this is indeed so, why bother to put any dots on the word if they do not affect the meaning? We therefore must interpret that originally Esau had intended to bite Jacob's neck feigning an embrace. God made his teeth as soft as wax and Jacob's neck as hard as ivory.

AND THEY WEPT, one on account of his neck, the other on account of his teeth.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 657***

(Gen. 33:7). He [Jacob] made Joseph approach Esau before Rachel, seeing that Rachel was so protective of him (her only child) that she made him walk in front of her where she could constantly keep her eye on him, literally keeping him between her hands. There is an *aggadic* explanation (quoted by Rashi) that Joseph walked in front of his mother on his own initiative because she was so attractive that he wanted to shield her from inquisitive eyes using his tall physique to shield her from such glances.

### **Hirsch, *Pentateuch*, 152, n4**

(Gen. 33:4). AND THEY WEPT. That here purely humane feelings overcame Esau is warranted for by the little word, THEY WEPT. A kiss can be false but not tears that flow at such moments. (Related to: *to burst out*), tears are drops from one's innermost soul. This kiss and these tears show us that Esau was also a descendant of Abraham. In Esau there must have been something more than just the wild hunter. Otherwise how could he have had the ability to domineer the whole development of mankind [which the Romans actually did]. The sword alone, simply raw force, is not able to do that. But Esau also, gradually more and more lays the sword aside, turns gradually more and more towards humaneness, and it is just Jacob on whom Esau has most opportunity to show that, and how, the principle of humaneness begins to affect him. When the strong respect the rights of the strong it may well be wisdom. It is only when the strong, as here Esau, fall round the necks of the weak and cast the sword of violence far away, only then does it show that right and humaneness have made a conquest.

### **Ibn Ezra, *Commentary*, 313-14**

(Gen. 32:8-13). Although God promised Jacob, AND THY SEED SHALL BE AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH (Gen. 28:14), Jacob did not know whether it referred to the children he now had, or to children he would have in the future. A prophet does not know hidden things unless God reveals them to him. Jacob was alive when Joseph was sold into slavery and yet was unaware of it. ...The above also answers those who ask, why was Jacob afraid considering that God promised that he would protect him, viz., God's assurance, AND I WILL BE WITH THEE (Gen.

31:3)? The latter is also the promise referred to by Jacob when he said, AND THOU SAIDEST I WILL SURELY DO THEE GOOD (Gen. 32:13). Jacob was afraid because of the possibility that he alone would escape. Furthermore, we know that the personality of the individual is taken into account when his sins are considered, be they major or minor transgressions. Therefore, a minor sin committed by a great personality is considered a major transgression. Jacob was afraid that he may have sinned or inadvertently transgressed in his mind and as a result of this God no longer would be with him. Do not be amazed at what I write, for behold, Moses the greatest of men, whom God himself sent to bring Israel out of Egypt, erred and God sent an angel to kill him.

### **Ibn Ezra, *Commentary*, 319**

(Gen. 33:2). AND RACHEL AND JOSEPH HINDERMOST. He placed Rachel and Joseph last so that they might possibly escape. Jacob did this because of his great love for them.

### ***Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 76:2**

THEN JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID AND DISTRESSED (Gen. 32:7): Said R. Judah bar Ilai, "Are not fright and the distress the same thing? Rather: ... GREATLY AFRAID that he not be killed ... AND DISTRESSED that he not kill. He thought, 'If he overcomes me, will he not kill me, and if I overcome him, will I not kill him?' That is the sense of the statement, THEN JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID AND DISTRESSED: ...GREATLY AFRAID that he not be killed, ...AND DISTRESSED that he not kill."

...Said R. Yudan, [God commanded,] RETURN TO THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS (Gen. 31:3); nevertheless, THEN JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID AND DISTRESSED (Gen. 32.7). On the basis of these verses, we learn that there is no true security for a righteous person in this world."

### ***Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis 78:8**

AND HE PUT THE HANDMAIDS AND THEIR CHILDREN FIRST, AND LEAH AND HER CHILDREN NEXT, AND RACHEL AND JOSEPH LAST" (Gen. 33:2): That is, the further back, the more dear.

### **Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (Visotzky), 283**

[T]he moral implications [of Jacob's life] are very disturbing. That chosenness can in some way free you from moral obligation is a terrifying thought. In some way, it replicates what we saw with Abraham. Abraham does all kinds of things that are not quite on the up-and-up, and God rewards him. Now, two generations later, we go through the same thing. Jacob is duplicitous again and again, and God stands by. Now it's a nice message, I suppose, that God will always be with you—but you'd like there to be some link between your action and the consequence.

### **Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (Visotzky), 301**

It's fascinating to me the extent to which Isaac and Rebekah replicate themselves in very subtle ways in Jacob's actions. Right before and after Jacob's famous wrestling match, he's facing the fact that he's going to cross the river and meet Esau. He's got this whole troop of family with him, and he's terrified. But the way he deals with this terror is, to me, horrifying. He divides his family into groups. He puts the concubines and their children up front, and then he puts Leah and her children behind them, and then Rachel and Joseph he keeps at the back. Then he actually even says out loud, "Well, you know, if somebody's got to go, let it be the front troops. We'll save the guys in back." I think to myself how horrifying it must have been for Gad and Asher and Naftali and Dan to hear their father say, "Okay, you guys, you're in the front lines, you're cannon fodder. If you die, it's not so terrible, as long as the boys in the back are saved." When I realized the horror that they must have felt, I recognized that, in fact, that is what Jacob and Esau hear from their parents. Rebekah prefers Jacob to the exclusion of Esau. Isaac prefers Esau to the exclusion of Jacob. And Jacob, when his turn comes, reproduces that terrible preference of children.

### **Nachmanides, *Commentaries*, 397-398**

THEN THE CAMP WHICH IS LEFT SHALL ESCAPE (Gen. 32:9). In line with the simple meaning of Scripture, Jacob stated this as a possibility. He said that perhaps one camp shall escape, for during the time he [Esau] smites one, the other will flee, or perhaps his anger will subside or deliverance will come to them from God. And so the Rabbis said in *Bereshith Rabbah*, "The Torah teaches you proper conduct: a man should not leave all his money in one corner." And Rashi wrote: "[Jacob stated:] 'THEN THE CAMP WHICH IS LEFT SHALL ESCAPE in spite of him [Esau] for I will fight against him.' He prepared himself for three things: for prayer, for giving Esau a gift, and for war." And I have seen in the Midrash: "What did Jacob do? He armed his people underneath, and clothed them in white from outside, and he prepared himself for three things." And this is the most correct [interpretation, in line with Rashi and the Midrash, who say that he prepared himself also for war, as opposed to the simple meaning first mentioned]. The intent of this is that Jacob knew that all his seed would not fall into Esau's hands. Therefore, in any case, one camp would be saved.

### **Rashi, *Commentaries*, 326**

n.2. AND LEAH AND HER CHILDREN NEXT (Gen. 33:2). The further back the more dear.

### **Rashi, *Commentaries*, (to Gen. 33:7), 374-75**

n.7. JOSEPH AND RACHEL CAME FORWARD (Gen. 33:7). With all of them, the mothers would come forward before the sons, but with Rachel, Joseph went forward ahead of her. He said [to himself], "My mother is of beautiful appearance. That evil one [Esau] may hang [set] his eyes upon her. I will stand opposite her and block him from looking at her."

**Sforno, Commentary, 175-76**

(Gen. 32:12). [Jacob speaking to God: ...I fear Esau may come] AND STRIKE ME DOWN, MOTHER AND CHILDREN. By killing the mother and the children he will smite *me*, even if I personally escape.

(Gen. 32:13). [Jacob speaking to God:] AND YOU HAVE SAID, I WILL SURELY DO GOOD WITH YOU ...and if this comes to pass it will negate the promise to do good with me, as well as the promise of ... AND I WILL MAKE YOUR OFFSPRING. For if my family is exterminated, this will negate the promise made to multiply my offspring; and even if I am unworthy, save me for the sake of Your Name, as we find, THOUGH OUR INIQUITIES TESTIFY AGAINST US, HASHEM [GOD], DO FOR YOUR NAME'S SAKE (Jer. 14:7).

**Visotzky, Genesis of Ethics, 189**

Again, the text (Gen. 32:1) informs us that Esau has a retinue of four hundred men. Again, we see the threat that Jacob perceives in these troops accompanying Esau. His fear is manifest in his division of his family into front, middle, and rear lines. He sets them out in reverse order of preference (Gen. 33:1-2) so that if Esau's intentions are for ill, those in front will be slaughtered first while those behind may be rescued. Thus he regrettably repeats the preferential division of family he had already articulated before his wrestling: "If Esau comes and strikes the first encampment, then the second encampment will survive."

What can Gad and Asher, Dan and Naphtali think when Jacob so exposes them to danger? Does he not remember how he felt when Isaac showed preference for Esau? Can he not imagine a better form of defense than making clear to his sons that they are but so much cannon fodder? Even Leah's children, Reuben, Shimeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and the uncounted Dinah, are all put in peril. Only Rachel and Joseph are protected in the closing ranks. In this moment, Jacob determines Joseph's fate with his brothers [Joseph in the pit] and plants the seed of Shimeon and Levi's lethal protectiveness of their sister [revenge against Shechem].

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 7 – MEETING ESAU:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. The biblical text describing Jacob and his family meeting Esau (Gen. 32:2-33:17) features many instances of the overall theme in Jacob's life of pairing, twinning, dividing, and doubling. What are some of the principal expressions of this theme in this episode (and in Genesis generally), and how do they advance the narrative?
2. Are you aware of any other expressions of this theme in other parts of the story of Jacob and his family or in other portions of Genesis? How does the application of a transcendent theme such as this to multiple situations affect how you read the biblical text?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. There are several midrashic commentaries analyzing the presentation of Rachel and Joseph to Esau, but the commentators say little about Leah and her sons. Does this contrast in emphasis imply anything significant about Leah?
2. Joseph is the great hero of much of the remaining portion of Genesis. The commentators seem to seize upon the mention of Joseph's name before his mother's, when they are presented to Esau, as a basis for analyzing Joseph's character. Do you derive any impression of Joseph's character based upon this reversal of word order in the text?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. Leah is barely mentioned in the Torah's final description of her, as part of the family presentation to Esau. Do this Torah text and the related midrash offer any evidence that a final change or development (positive or negative) has occurred in Leah's character since the point she was introduced in the story?
2. The biblical text (Gen. 32:23) states that Jacob took his eleven sons [or eleven children] across the Jabbok. Based upon Dinah's omission from this verse, midrash explains that Jacob hid her in a box to protect her from Esau, which led to major consequences for Dinah and the Shechemites. Do you think this midrash is justified by the verse?

# UNIT 8: DINAH AND SHECHEM

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 8:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 6, pp. 146-161

2. Genesis 34:1-31

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<i>Biblical Verse</i>	<i>Page quoted in "The Lost Matriarch"</i>
Gen. 34:1	147
Gen. 34:2	149
Gen. 34: 3-4	150-51
Gen. 34:5	152
Gen. 34:25-26	154
Gen. 34:13	158

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<i>Midrash</i>	<i>Page in "The Lost Matriarch"</i>
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 80:10	154-55
Ginzberg, <i>Legends of the Jews</i> , 308-9	155-56
<i>Midrash Rabbah</i> , Genesis 80:11	156

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Alter, R., *Genesis*, 191**

(Gen. 34:13). AND THE SONS OF JACOB ANSWERED SHECHEM AND HAMOR HIS FATHER DECEITFULLY, AND THEY SPOKE AS THEY DID BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED DINAH THEIR SISTER ....

*n.13*. DECEITFULLY. This is the same term, *mirmah*, that was first attached to Jacob's action in stealing the blessing, then used by Jacob to upbraid Laban after the switching of the brides.

#### **Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 94-95**

(Gen. 34:5). At the time of the rape, Jacob's sons were away from home with their flocks. But Jacob was in the family encampment outside the town. His reaction was chilling. He had "heard that Shechem had defiled his daughter Dinah," the narrator tells us, but "held his peace" awaiting the return of his sons. Jacob was not a restrained man. We shall see that when another of his children [Joseph, in Gen. 37:33-35] met with disaster, he was inconsolable. But this time

he simply "held his peace" — *hekharish*, a word that in the Bible usually connotes culpable inertia or negligence. He made no attempt to rescue his daughter from the town, and did not even bother to summon his sons home. The narrator gives us a clue to Jacob's extraordinary apathy at the very beginning of the chapter, when he reminds us that Dinah was Jacob's daughter by Leah.

### **Attar, Or Hachaim, 282-83**

(Gen. 34:1). DINAH, LEAH'S DAUGHTER WENT OUT, etc. The reason that the Torah emphasizes that Dinah was Leah's daughter (something that we are well aware of) is in order to facilitate understanding of the causes underlying Dinah's excursion into town. There were three reasons for this.

1) Dinah was Leah's daughter. Had she been Rachel's daughter she would never have made such an unchaperoned excursion. Her mother Leah had "gone out" to meet her husband (Gen. 30:15), something that was uncharacteristic of Jewish women. *Bereshit Rabbah* 80:1 claims that at the time Leah adorned herself with all her jewelry. Her daughter copied her mother, giving the impression that she was a harlot.

2) A second cause for Dinah's excursion was the fact that as an only daughter she had no female playmates; she went in search of suitable company. Inasmuch as she was a daughter of Jacob she had already acquired the reputation of being a distinguished person, something that provoked Shechem as we shall explain later.

3) SHE WENT TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND. According to *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* chapter 38, Shechem had brought the girls of the neighborhood to play music around the tent of Jacob. This then was a third reason for Dinah venturing outside. From all the above you may surmise that unless Shechem had already been aware of the existence of Dinah, a daughter of the famous Jacob, even before she left her house he would not have committed the rape.

(Gen. 34:2). THE PRINCE OF THE LAND, etc. Shechem's position in the community was the reason that no one came to Dinah's assistance when she cried for help against being raped.

HE SLEPT WITH HER BY FORCING HER. We must understand the sequence of how the Torah reports what happened [not "he forced her and slept with her"]. ...The Torah therefore tells us that although Shechem slept with Dinah in a perfectly natural way, not subjecting her to painful perversions, Dinah felt tortured. Instead of enjoying the experience. Her distaste of Shechem is obvious; this is why Shechem had to expend so much effort by "speaking to her heart."

### **Attar, Or Hachaim, 284**

(Gen. 34:7). THEY WERE DISTRESSED... BECAUSE HE HAD COMMITTED A DISGRACEFUL ACT AGAINST ISRAEL, etc. The Torah uses two expressions, 1) "they were angry" and 2) "they were distressed" to indicate that Shechem had been guilty of two wrongs. It would have been shameful for the family of Jacob even if Shechem had married Dinah, seeing that they would not give their sister to an "unclean" person. However, that would have been merely distressing.

The fact that Shechem had raped their sister, something that was repugnant even to the local inhabitants aroused their anger.

### **Attar, Or Hachaim, 284-85**

(Gen. 34:13). THE SONS OF JACOB REPLIED, etc. We have to understand exactly what wisdom Onkelos attributes to Jacob's sons when he translates the word *b'mirmah* as "with wisdom" instead of as "with guile." At first glance it appears that the sons of Jacob simply meant to deceive Chamor and Shechem. Actually, the cleverness of the sons when they answered Chamor *b'mirmah* consisted in that they answered him in such a way that their proposal seemed extremely plausible. Shechem and Chamor did not feel that they needed to be on guard against reprisals. The brothers lulled Chamor into a false sense of security by the very fact that they threatened to take some action if their proposal was not accepted; they thus made him believe that if the town accepted the proposal of mass circumcision the whole chapter of the rape would be closed.

### **Attar, Or Hachaim, 286-87**

(Gen. 34:21). THEY KILLED EVERY MALE. Why did they kill people who had not actively committed a sin? Why did they not first kill the truly guilty, i.e. Shechem?

Actually, the sons of Jacob did not intend to kill anyone except the guilty party; however, all the inhabitants formed a human barrier to protect their king and prince. As a result the sons of Jacob were forced to kill the townspeople under the heading of killing a *rodef*, a pursuer, someone who endangers the life of the avenger. When the Torah states that they killed all the males this means that they succeeded in killing Chamor and his son only after killing the other males in the town. Had they not done so they could not have executed someone who was guilty of death.

Another reason they killed all the males in the city was that they had all been accessories to the crime by keeping Dinah captive after the rape. This was tantamount to kidnapping. According to the Noachidic law the penalty for kidnapping is death. Gentiles are not guilty of the death penalty for sleeping with an unmarried girl.

### **Attar, Or Hachaim, 34:21, 287-88**

(Gen. 34:21). In his *Hilchot Melachim* chapter 9.14, Maimonides explains that the reason all the inhabitants of Shechem were guilty of death was that they had failed to establish a judiciary which would deal with the robbery committed by Shechem. Whence does Maimonides know that the common people had to judge their king or crown prince? Is it not a fact that even amongst the Israelites individuals do not have to testify against the King, and one does not sit in judgment of him (*Sanhedrin* 16)? Accordingly, we are forced to conclude that the guilt of the people of Shechem consisted in their being active accessories to the crime. They may even have advised Shechem how to successfully rape Dinah.

### **Culi, Anthology, 3a:78**

In a period of seven years, Jacob had 23 children. He had eleven sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher and Joseph. Each of these sons had a twin sister, yielding a total of 22. Including Dinah, there were 23 children.

Twin sisters were born to each son since there was no one else for Jacob's sons to marry. Providence arranged for Jacob to have daughters who would be his son's wives. Of course, the sons did not marry their twin sisters; Reuben married Dan's sister, and so on. Although the Seven Universal Commandments prohibit a man to marry his own sister, this is only true when they have the same mother. If they are only half-sisters from the same father it is permitted.

[Some say that] Joseph was born without a twin sister. Dinah did not have a twin either. As we shall see, Joseph married Dinah's daughter.

### **Etz Hayim Torah, Gen. 34:26-27, 210**

*P'shat n.26.* TOOK DINAH...WENT AWAY The entire affair began with Dinah "going out" and being "taken" (Gen. 34:1, 2). It concludes with the same two Hebrew verbs, but in reverse order. As far as Simeon and Levi are concerned, their account with Shechem is settled. They take no part in the plunder of the city.

*P'shat n.27.* THE OTHER SONS The other brothers seize the opportunity to pillage, but they do not destroy the city.

### **Friedman, Commentary, 115-16**

(Gen. 34:2). HE TOOK HER AND LAY WITH HER AND DEGRADED HER. This is commonly treated as a story of a rape. Some Bibles even put a heading over it: "The Rape of Dinah." But, the nature of the act is not in fact clear from this wording. The three key terms here (took, lay, degraded) appear to suggest force, but all three are used without such a meaning in the Torah's laws concerning marriage and rape. To "take" (*laqah*) a woman is used even to mean marriage (Deut 22:13); and to "lie with" (*sakab*) and to "degrade" (*'innah*) are both used in a case that is specifically ruled not to be a rape (Deut 22:23-24). The following case there adds the words "he took hold of her" (22:25), and that case is ruled to be a rape. Also the story of Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13) is comparable to the Dinah story in a notable number of details and terms. In that story there is unquestionably a rape, and it uses the terms "lay with her" and "degraded her," but it also adds "he took hold of her" (13:11-12,14). That determining verb in Deuteronomy and in the Tamar story is not present here in the Dinah story. It may be a rape, but we cannot be sure. What we can say, at minimum, is that whether it is a rape, a seduction, or even consensual intercourse, Shechem's act, taking place before the request for marriage, is regarded as disgraceful by Dinah's family. This leads to Simeon's and Levi's violent deception, and this in turn has consequences ultimately for the destiny of the family....

### **Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 307**

(Gen. 34:1). While Jacob and his sons were sitting in the house of learning, occupied with the study of the Torah, Dinah went abroad to see the dancing and singing women, whom Shechem had hired to dance and play in the streets in order to entice her forth.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 655-66***

(Gen. 34:1). She went forth from her mother's tent, her father also not being at home, and she came into the town to get acquainted with other girls in the town. The reason why the Torah underscored that she was the daughter of Leah, a fact we are all familiar with was to remind us "like mother like daughter." Her mother had been described in Gen. 30:16 by the words LEAH WENT FORTH TO MEET HER HUSBAND, suggesting that she took an initiative which was not common for her. The reason the Torah added another fact that we knew already, i.e. WHOM SHE HAD BORN FOR JACOB, is to alert us to the fact that what happened to her was a punishment for her father. ...

(Gen. 34:2). The reason why the Torah uses the word *vayianeha* when what Shechem had done was more in the nature of a seduction than a violent rape, is that this term is used in connection with a virgin having intercourse, something usually very painful for her. The term is also used on account of this reason in Deuteronomy 22:29.

(Gen. 34:3). His soul felt a strong attachment to her on account of her beauty as well as on account of the fact that she was the daughter of an outstanding personality, Jacob. Seeing that he had caused her pain, he now did his best to soothe her feelings as he was intent of marrying her and needed her consent. He hoped that his being the crown prince would help sway her opinion in his favor.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 670***

(Gen. 34:26). There is an *aggadic* commentary (*Bereshit Rabbah* 80:11) according to which Dinah felt so ashamed that she did not want to leave the house of Shechem until Shimon swore to her that he would marry her, and that this is the meaning of Gen. 46:10 where among the issue of Shimon one is described as being named SHA-UL SON OF THE CANAANITE (WOMAN). Supposedly, the father of that child was Shechem, i.e. Dinah had conceived him at the time of the rape.

(Gen. 34:27). ...The men of this city had defiled their sister. This became public knowledge in the region after the sons of Jacob killed the people who had tolerated this crime; the townspeople had watched the violent rape and had not lifted a finger to stop it.

### ***Hachut Hameshulash, (Kimchi), 673***

(Gen. 35:1). The incident with Dinah's rape and the subsequent upheaval had delayed Jacob's progress in the direction of his father's home. Jacob's having built himself a house in Sukkot and his purchase of real estate had given the impression that he intended to settle in that vicinity permanently. His duty at that time had been to proceed to Bet El and to pay his vow of

34 years ago. He was supposed to proceed directly in the direction of his father's home without allowing himself to be distracted on the way. Having failed to do this, God punished him with the incident involving Dinah. Even though we explained that Jacob 's punishment was due to his having experienced fear in spite of repeated assurances by God that He would be with him, this delay he had allowed himself was an additional reason for his being punished.

### **Ibn Ezra, Commentary, 327**

(Gen. 34:1). AND DINAH WENT OUT. Of her own accord.

(Gen. 34:2). AND HUMBLLED HER. He had normal intercourse with her. Scripture uses the term *va-ye'anneha* (and humbled her) because she was a virgin.

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 80:1**

R. Simeon b. Laqish said to him [R. Yose], ..." [W]hat is the meaning of the verse, BEHOLD EVERYONE THAT USES PROVERBS SHALL USE THIS PROVERB AGAINST YOU, SAYING, 'AS THE MOTHER, SO HER DAUGHTER' (Ez. 16:44)?"

He said to him, "There is no cow that goes unless her calf kicks, there is no woman who turns into a whore unless her daughter commits an act of prostitution."

He [R. Simeon b. Laqish] said to him, "If that is the case, was our matriarch Leah a whore?"

He said to them, "Indeed so, for it is written, AND LEAH WENT OUT TO MEET HIM (Gen. 30:16). She went out all made up to meet him, just like a whore. That is why it is written, AND DINAH, DAUGHTER OF LEAH, WHOM SHE HAD BORNE TO JACOB, WENT OUT (Gen. 34:1)."

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 80:4**

R. Judah bar Simon opened with this verse: DO NOT BOAST ABOUT TOMORROW (Prov. 27:1). But you [Jacob] said, SO SHALL MY RIGHTEOUSNESS BEAR WITNESS FOR ME TOMORROW (Gen. 30:33). Therefore tomorrow your daughter will go out and get raped: NOW DINAH WENT OUT (Gen. 34:1).

R. Huna in the name of R. Abba, the Priest, of Bardelayya: TO HIM WHO IS READY TO FAINT KINDNESS IS DUE FROM HIS NEIGHBOR (Job 6:14). The Holy One, blessed be he, said to him [Jacob], You have withheld kindness from your neighbor. ... [Y]ou did not seek to marry Dinah off to someone who was circumcised [Esau]. So she will be married to an uncircumcised person [Shechem]. And you did not seek to have her married off in the acceptable way, so she will be taken in marriage in a forbidden way [by Shechem]. So it is written: AND DINAH WENT OUT (Gen. 34:1).

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 80:5**

So it is written, AND THE LORD GOD FASHIONED THE RIB ...INTO A WOMAN (Gen. 2:22). ... [God said, 'I did not create woman from the foot of man so that she would not be a gadabout,'] yet she is a gadabout: AND DINAH WENT OUT (Gen. 34:1)."

NOW DINAH, THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH...WENT OUT (Gen. 34:1): R. Berekhiah in the name of R. Levi: "The matter may be compared to someone who had a couple of pounds of meat in hand. Once he exposed it, a bird swooped down and grabbed it from him. "So too: NOW DINAH, THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH...WENT OUT. Forthwith: AND WHEN SHECHEM, THE SON OF HAMOR THE HIVITE, THE PRINCE OF THE LAND SAW HER... (Gen. 34:2)." R. Samuel bar Nahman: "He saw her arm."

...HE SEIZED HER AND LAY WITH HER: having sexual relations vaginally. ...AND HUMBLING HER (Gen. 34:2): having sexual relations anally.

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 80:8**

THE SONS OF JACOB ANSWERED SHECHEM AND HIS FATHER HAMOR DECEITFULLY BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED THEIR SISTER DINAH (Gen. 34:13). Said R. Samuel bar Nahman: Do you think that what we have here is case of lying? No, it is the Holy Spirit which explains [justifies what would otherwise be deceit]: BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED THEIR SISTER DINAH.

...[Hamor and Shechem said to the Shechemites:] WILL NOT THEIR CATTLE, THEIR PROPERTY AND ALL THEIR BEASTS BE OURS? ONLY LET US AGREE WITH THEM AND THEY WILL DWELL WITH US (Gen. 34:23): The [people of Shechem] had in mind to cheat but were themselves cheated.

### **Maimonides, Mishneh Torah (Code of Jewish Law), Book 14, "Kings and Wars," Ch. 9:14, 234**

As regards the commandment laid upon Noahides to establish courts of justice, the duty is enjoined upon them to set up judges in each district .... A Noahide who violates any of the seven commandments is executed by decapitation with the sword. Therefore all the inhabitants of Shechem were condemned to death by beheading because Shechem had been guilty of robbery [kidnapping]. They saw it, knew it, and failed to impose sentence upon him.

### **Nachmanides, Commentaries, 1:416**

(Gen. 34:13). Now surely all the brothers gave that answer [to Chamor] with subtlety, while Simeon and Levi alone executed the deed, and the father [Jacob] cursed only their wrath. [But if all the brothers shared responsibility for the answer and the plan, why did Jacob single out only Simeon and Levi for chastisement?] The answer is that the craftiness lay in their saying that every male of theirs be circumcised, as they thought that the people of the city will not consent to it. Even if perchance they will listen to their prince and they will all become circumcised, they will come on the third day, when they were in pain, and will take their daughter from the house of Shechem. Now this was the advice of all the brothers and with the permission of their father, but Simeon and Levi wanted to take revenge of them and so they killed all the men of the city.

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 1:384**

*n.13. b'mirmah* – WITH CLEVERNESS (Gen. 34:13). This means *b'hachmah* – with wisdom. BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED. The verse states that it was not deceit for, see now, "he had defiled their sister, Dinah."

### **Rashi, Commentaries, 1:389**

*n.1. ARISE, GO UP* (Gen. 35:1). Since you delayed fulfillment of your vow [see Gen. 28:20-22], you were punished, and this came to you through your daughter [see Gen. 34:2].

### **Raver, Listen to Her Voice, 65**

(Gen. 31:19). One of the most telling acts of Rachel's life was her theft of her father's household idols, the *teraphim* (literally translated from Hebrew as "vile things"). The *teraphim*, figurines invoking the Goddess of fertility and childbirth, were sacred objects to Rachel.

...Rachel was steadfast in her mission to keep the *teraphim* with her, and was punished by premature death for her actions. Her beloved cursed her unknowingly when Jacob swore to Laban that whoever had stolen his household *teraphim* "shall not live." (Genesis 31:32). Indeed Rachel died in painful labor, birthing her second son, Benjamin. ...For thousands of years, Rachel's grave on the road to Efrat, now Bethlehem, has been a pilgrimage site for women struggling with infertility. It is said to be a place of miracles.

### **Sforno, Commentary, 258**

(Gen. 48:7) RACHEL DIED UNTO ME ...AND I BURIED HER THERE IN THE WAY TO EPHRATH. So intense was my grief that I had not the strength even to carry her to the cemetery in Bethlehem. From that moment on, all physical desire left me, and I no longer cohabited (with my wives).

### **Townsend Tanhuma, 216-17**

(Gen. 34:1:) NOW LEAH'S DAUGHTER DINAH [WHOM SHE HAD BORNE TO JACOB] WENT OUT. ... Let [a woman] not, however, go out into a public place with a single piece of jewelry. Now, our masters say: Even on a weekday she must not go out into a public place. Why? Because people will stare at her. Thus the Holy One gave jewelry to a woman only for her to adorn herself with them inside of the house; for one does not give an opening to the trustworthy person, let alone to the thief. ... But, if she walks about a lot and goes out into the marketplace, she finally comes to a state of corruption, to a state of harlotry. And so you find in the case of Jacob's daughter Dinah. All the time that she was sitting at home, she was not corrupted by transgression; but, as soon as she went out into the marketplace, she caused herself to come to the point of corruption.

**Townsend, *Tanhuma* 220**

The Holy One said to him: Have you forgotten what you vowed to me? And did you not say this (in Gen. 28:20): IF GOD IS WITH ME ... AND PROTECTS ME ... from unchastity, [then] OF ALL THAT YOU GIVE ME, I WILL SURELY SET ASIDE A TITHE FOR YOU (Gen. 28:22). As soon as he came to the land of Israel, he forgot this vow. The Holy One said: By your life, through the very things which you said you would observe, through them you shall come to grief. ... Where is it shown in regard to unchastity? From Dinah, of whom it is stated (in Gen. 34:2-3): THEN SHECHEM BEN HAMOR THE HIVITE, THE PRINCE OF THE LAND, SAW HER. ...AND HIS SOUL CLUNG TO JACOB'S DAUGHTER DINAH.

**Visotzky, *Genesis of Ethics*, 196-97**

This story [of Dinah and Shechem] is an archetype of the “girl and boy from opposing tribes fall in love” tale. My citation of [the closing six lines of Shakespeare’s] *Romeo and Juliet* makes a radically revisionist assumption about the tale: Dinah was not an unwilling partner to Shechem; rather, they were star-crossed lovers.

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 8 – DINAH AND SHECHEM:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. In the entire Chapter 34, which tells the dramatic story of Dinah and Shechem, Leah is mentioned only once, and then only in the first verse identifying Dinah: AND DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH, WHOM SHE BORE TO JACOB, WENT OUT TO SEE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND. (Gen. 34:1). Nevertheless, many of the commentators rely upon this verse as a basis for blaming Leah for the tragedy that unfolds for Dinah and the Shechemites. Do you think this is a fair reading of the verse?
2. While the descriptions in Chapter 34 of the relations between Dinah and Shechem seem unusually specific and detailed, the commentators are not in agreement on the central issue of whether the biblical text describes rape, seduction, infatuation, or (at least eventually) mutual love. What do you believe was the physical and emotional relationship between Dinah and Shechem?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. Besides arguing over Leah's responsibility for the tragedies in Chapter 34, the midrashic commentaries also argue over apportioning blame to almost everyone else in the story: Dinah, Shechem, Jacob, Shimon and Levi, Jacob's other sons, King Hamor, and entire Shechemite nation. How would you assign relative moral culpability among the characters in this story?
2. The midrashic commentaries are also in disagreement about the one-word description of how the brothers negotiate with Hamor and Shechem: JACOB'S SONS ANSWERED SCHECHEM AND HAMOR HIS FATHER *BIMIRMAH* AND THEY SPOKE BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED DINAH HEIR SISTER (Gen. 34:13). Much like the two meanings for Leah's *rakhot* eyes, speaking *bimirmah* could mean either *deceitfully* or *with cleverness*. Should the brothers be blamed or praised for their negotiations with Hamor and Shechem?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. Chapter 34 includes detailed descriptions of conversations and actions of many characters. But the story is also noteworthy for what is not said or done by three characters whose words and deeds we would expect to be central to the narrative: Leah, Jacob, and of course Dinah herself. What do you understand from the relative absence of descriptions of these three characters' conversations and actions in the biblical text? Is your understanding affected by the midrashic tales of how Dinah acted to save her family from attack, or how Dinah had to be dragged out of Shechem's palace?
2. The story in Chapter 34 begins with the disaster that befalls Dinah, but it ends with the disaster that befalls the Shechemites. To what extent, if at all, does what happened to Dinah justify the brothers' revenge against the Shechemites?

# UNIT 9: CHANGE AND DEATH

## I. SOURCES FOR UNIT 9:

1. The Lost Matriarch: Chapter 7, pp. 165-184

2. Genesis 35:16-29  
47:28-48:22  
49:29-50:21

### 3. Biblical Text Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Biblical Verse</i></b>	<b><i>Page quoted in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
Gen. 35:16-20	165
Gen. 35:22-23	168
Gen. 48: 7	175
Gen. 49:31	178
Jer. 31:14-15	183

### 4. Midrash Quoted in *The Lost Matriarch*

<b><i>Midrash</i></b>	<b><i>Page in "The Lost Matriarch"</i></b>
Jubilees 36:22-24	171
Talmud, <i>Sanhedrin</i> 22b	176

### 5. Other Midrashic Sources

#### **Attar, *Or Hachaim*, 400**

[W]hat did Jacob mean when he said, SHE DIED ON ME? (Gen. 48:7)

Actually, having told Joseph that God had told him that he would have more children himself, Jacob now explained to Joseph that it was his own fault that this did not happen as Rachel had died prematurely because of his negligence by delaying to honor the vow he had made after the dream of the ladder. This is the meaning of [ON ME:] "she died on my account."

... *Vayikra Rabbah* 37:1 tells us that if someone makes a vow and is tardy in keeping it he is punished by having to bury his wife. Jacob's saying AND I WHEN I WAS RETURNING FROM PADDAN, RACHEL DIED ON ME (Gen. 48:7) is quoted as the source for this statement. Alternatively, Jacob may have referred to his rash curse of ANYONE WHO HAS STOLEN LABAN'S TERAPHIM SHALL NOT LIVE (Gen. 31:32) which he made without knowing that Rachel had been the thief. In either event, had Rachel remained alive Jacob himself would have sired the additional sons God had promised to him in Gen. 35:11.

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 320-322**

But when the time came to divide Isaac's possessions between the two brothers, Esau said to Jacob, "Divide the property of our father into two portions, but I as the elder claim the right of choosing the portion I desire." What did Jacob do? He knew well that "the eye of the wicked never beholds treasures enough to satisfy it," so he divided their common heritage in the following way: all the material possessions of his father formed one portion, and the other consisted of Isaac's claim upon the Holy Land, together with the Cave of Machpelah, the tomb of Abraham and Isaac. Esau chose the money and the other things belonging to Isaac for his inheritance, and to Jacob were left the Cave and the title to the Holy Land. An agreement to this effect was drawn up in writing in due form, and on the strength of the document Jacob insisted upon Esau's leaving Palestine. Esau acquiesced, and he and his wives and his sons and daughters journeyed to Mount Seir, where they took up their abode.

Though Esau gave way before Jacob for the nonce, he returned to the land to make war upon his brother. Leah had just died, and Jacob and the sons borne by Leah were mourning for her, and the rest of his sons, borne unto him by his other wives, were trying to comfort them, when Esau came upon them with a powerful host of four thousand men, well equipped for war, clad in armor of iron and brass, all furnished with bucklers, bows, and swords. They surrounded the citadel wherein Jacob and his sons dwelt at that time with their servants and children and households, for they had all assembled to console Jacob for the death of Leah, and they sat there unconcerned, none entertained a suspicion that an assault upon them was meditated by any man. And the great army had already encircled their castle, and still none within suspected any harm, neither Jacob and his children nor the two hundred servants. Now when Jacob saw that Esau presumed to make war upon them, and sought to slay them in the citadel, and was shooting darts at them, he ascended the wall of the citadel and spake words of peace and friendship and brotherly love to Esau [which Esau rebuffed]. ... Jacob grasped his bow and killed Adoram the Edomite, and a second time he bent his bow, and the arrow struck Esau upon the right thigh. The wound was mortal, and his sons lifted Esau up and put him upon his ass, and he came to Adora, and there he died. ... [The sons of Jacob performed heroic efforts in battle, and with God's help defeated Esau's sons and their army, pursuing them to Adora, where the remnant of Esau's army abandoned the body and fled to Seir.] . But the sons of Jacob remained in Adora overnight, and out of respect for their father they buried the remains of his brother Esau. In the morning they went on in pursuit of the enemy, and besieged them on Mount Seir. Now the sons of Esau and all the other fugitives came and fell down before them, bowed down, and entreated them without cease, until they concluded peace with them. But the sons of Jacob exacted tribute from them.

**Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., 414**

Nevertheless the conflict [among Abraham's descendants] was not averted; it broke out in the end between the sons of Jacob and Esau and his followers. When the former were about to lower the body of their father into the Cave of Machpelah, Esau attempted to prevent it, saying that Jacob had used his allotted portion of the tomb for Leah, and the only space left for a grave belonged to himself. For, continued Esau, "though I sold my birthright unto Jacob, I yet have a

portion in the tomb as a son of Isaac." The sons of Jacob, however, were well aware of the fact that their father had acquired Esau's share in the Cave, and they even knew that a bill of sale existed, but Esau, assuming properly that the document was left behind in Egypt, denied that any such had ever been made out, and the sons of Jacob sent Naphtali, the fleet runner, back to Egypt to fetch the bill. Meantime, while this altercation was going on between Esau and the others, Hushim the son of Dan arose and inquired in astonishment why they did not proceed with the burial of Jacob, for he was deaf and had not understood the words that had passed between the disputants. When he heard what it was all about, and that the ceremonies were interrupted until Naphtali should return from Egypt with the bill of sale, he exclaimed, with indignation, "My grandfather shall lie here unburied until Naphtali comes back!" and he seized a club and dealt Esau a vigorous blow, so that he died, and his eyes fell out of their sockets and dropped upon Jacob's knees, and Jacob opened his own eyes and smiled. Esau being dead, his brother's burial could proceed without hindrance, and Joseph interred him in the Cave of Machpelah in accordance with his wish.

### **Hirsch, *Pentateuch*, 199-200 n7**

n.7. SHE DIED ON ME (Gen. 48:7). It was a fatal disaster that befell me. See Gen.35:16. This speech of Jacob, referring back to Rachel's death and burial is usually taken as having been said as exoneration for his placing such weight on his being buried in Machpela although Joseph's mother was not buried there. But if that was its meaning, we should have expected it to have been said above in the previous conversation, where Jacob asked for the promise for his burial (Gen. 47:29-31). In the connection in which we find it here it can only have reference to the matter of the discourse here, the decision about the sons of Joseph. In this conversation until the moment when he gives his blessing and imparts to his grandsons their position in the future of the nation [Gen. 48:8], Jacob is designated solely as Jacob, and not as Israel. In Gen. 48:2 when Joseph came to him Jacob pulled himself together so as to regard Joseph not only as his son, but in his importance for the national future which is associated with the name *Israel*; and from this standpoint too, he expresses, Gen. 48:8, his blessing on Joseph's sons. But favoring him by making him a double tribe, sprung from Jacob's personal relationship to Joseph, hence *Jacob said* in Gen. 48:3, and only at Gen. 48:8 again *Israel saw*. For it seems that this favoritism to the sons of Joseph came, not from national considerations, but from the individual personal feelings which Jacob, as Jacob, the man, personally felt. In the last days of his life thoughts of the wife whom he loved the most deeply, who was the actual wife of his choice, and who had been taken away from him the earliest, were specially prominent in his mind; her whole fate made it likely that her memory would be more in the background in the future memorials of the nation. When the children of Israel in later times visited the graves of their ancestors, they would find Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, but Rachel, Joseph's mother, was not granted, even in death, to receive her place in the common resting-place of the ancestors of the nation. And only two tribes call her their mother. So it would be just the wife of his heart, whom he had thought of as the real mother of his future people, who might vanish from the hearts of the nation. That was why it was the deep desire of his heart to raise Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, to be the firstborn of his national tribes, by making his sons into two tribes, to grant him the right of the firstborn to a "double portion".

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 82:10**

(Gen. 35:19). SO RACHEL DIED AND SHE WAS BURIED ON THE WAY TO EPHRATH.... Why did Jacob bury Rachel on the way to Ephrath? Jacob foresaw that the exiles would pass by there [on their exile to Babylonia]. Therefore he buried her there, so that she should seek mercy for them: A VOICE IS HEARD IN RAMAH...RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN...THUS SAYS THE LORD, 'KEEP YOUR VOICE FROM WEEPING...AND THERE IS HOPE FOR YOUR FUTURE' (Jer. 31:15-16).

### **Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 97**

AND AS FOR ME, WHEN I CAME FROM PADDAN, RACHEL DIED UNTO ME, etc. [Gen. 48:7]. R. Johanan said: UNTO ME—Rachel's death was a greater sorrow than all the other misfortunes of my life.

### **Nachmanides, Commentaries, 273**

(Gen. 35:19). And God, by Whom alone actions are weighed, [brought it about] that Rachel died on the way when they started coming into the Land, for on account of her own merit she did not die outside the Land, and for Jacob's merit, he could not dwell in the Land with two sisters [in their lifetime, since this is forbidden in the Torah, and the laws of the Torah were observed by our ancestors in the Land of Israel even before the Torah was given on Sinai], and she [Rachel] was the one by whose marriage the prohibition against two sisters took effect [since Jacob was already married to Leah]. It would appear that Rachel became pregnant with Benjamin before they came to Shechem, and while in the Land Jacob did not touch her at all, for the reason that we have mentioned.

### **Nachmanides, Commentaries, 573-75**

(Gen. 48:7.) AND I BURIED HER THERE. "Now I know that there is some resentment in your heart against me [for not having brought her into the city] . But you should know that I buried her there by the word of God, that she might help her children when Nebuzaradan would exile them," for when they passed along that road, Rachel came forth from her grave and stood by her tomb beseeching mercy for them, as it is said, A VOICE IS HEARD IN RAMAH, LAMENTATION AND BITTER WEEPING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN, (Jer. 35:14), and the Holy One, blessed by He, answered her, THY WORK SHALL BE REWARDED ... AND THE CHILDREN SHALL RETURN TO THEIR OWN BORDER (Jer. 35:15-16). This is the language of Rashi.

...Furthermore, she died on the road suddenly, and he could not bury her in the cave of Machpelah for how could he leave his children and his flocks on the road and hurry with her body to the cave of Machpelah? And where could he find doctors and medicines to embalm her? This is the meaning of the word *alai* (by me) [in the verse, RACHEL DIED BY ME]. Even though the cave of Machpelah is but a half-day's distance from the place of her death, Jacob was heavily laden with much cattle and family, and he would not arrive there for many days.

...But the reason Jacob did not transport Rachel to the cave of Machpelah was so that he should not bury two sisters there, for he would be embarrassed before his ancestors. Now Leah was

the one he married first, and thus her marriage was permissible, while he married Rachel out of his love for her and because of the vow he made to her.

### **Sforno, Commentary, 190**

(Gen. 35:17). [The midwife said to Rachel:] HAVE NO FEAR ...that your hard labor indicates it will be a girl, as our Sages tell us, *The travail (of childbirth) is much greater when a girl (is born) than when a boy (is born)* (Talmud Niddah 31a).

### **Sforno, Commentary, 258**

(Gen. 48:7) RACHEL DIED UNTO ME ...AND I BURIED HER THERE IN THE WAY TO EPHRATH. So intense was my grief that I had not the strength even to carry her to the cemetery in Bethlehem. From that moment on, all physical desire left me, and I no longer cohabited (with my wives).

### **Talmud Niddah 31a**

When the time comes for the fetus to leave the womb, it turns over and exits. And this is the cause of a woman's travail. And this explains that which was taught: The travails caused by a female [birth] are more intense than those caused by a male [birth].

... Why is it that the travails for the birth of a female are more intense than those for the birth of a male? Because the female comes out of the womb according to its position during intercourse, i.e. face up, and the male comes out of the womb according to its position during intercourse, i.e. face down. [Since fetuses develop facing down,] the female must turn her face upward before she emerges from the womb, but the male does not need to turn his face.

### **Zornberg, Beginning of Desire, 374**

(Gen. 48:7). Jacob's mysterious reference to Rachel's death and burial comes between Jacob's intention to adopt Ephraim and Manasseh and the moment of poetic crisis. Here, I would suggest, is the bridge, the thought that discomposes Jacob to the point of paralysis.

Enigmatically, he pivots the sentence on himself: AS FOR ME...SHE DIED ON, FOR ME.... Is this a certain guilt speaking, as Jacob remembers how he cursed the unknown thief of the *teraphim* (31:32)? Or how he delayed fulfilling his vow to return to Beth El, to return to his father, and assume the authority, the originality of his own being? Or is he explaining that Rachel's death was, on the level of erotic feeling, a desiccation of his own faculty for vital feeling (*meita alai*—"her death was my death")?

## II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR UNIT 9 – CHANGE AND DEATH:

### A. Biblical Text Questions

1. The Bible tells us that immediately after Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel, Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and God saw that Leah was hated [or “unloved”], Gen. 29:30-31. The book of Jubilees (Jub. 36:22-24) paints a rosier picture for Leah at the time of her death; but does the biblical text itself indicate any change in Jacob's initial attitudes towards his two principal wives by the end of those marriages?
2. The Bible does not describe much about Rachel's death and burial on the road to Bethlehem when it happens, Gen. 16-20, and Jacob only briefly recapitulates that description later when he is dying, Gen. 48:7. Why did Jacob bury Rachel on the road?

### B. Midrashic Text Questions

1. Some of the commentators conclude that Jacob inadvertently caused Rachel's premature death, or that Jacob at least felt guilt for doing so. Do you believe that Jacob felt guilt for Rachel's death? Are there other factors explaining what appears to be the special grief Jacob seems to express over Rachel's death (especially since he doesn't seem to express much grief about Leah's death)?
2. The midrashic commentaries create two elaborate death scenes for Leah and Jacob (which are to some extent inconsistent with each other, since Esau dies in a different time and manner in the stories). (See Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2nd Ed., 320-322, 414.) While they may both be fascinating stories, neither of these midrashic tales seems substantially based upon the biblical text. What do you believe is the value and authoritativeness of this type of midrash?

### C. Contemporary Questions

1. *The Lost Matriarch* asserts that Leah develops and maintains exemplary moral heroism in dealing with her life's desperate circumstances. But she shares her life story with her sister and their husband. What is your view of the respective qualities of moral heroism in Leah, Rachel, and Jacob?
2. Leah's life is traditionally read as if its major feature is the continuing sibling rivalry with Rachel. Looking at that rivalry, which sister ends up the winner?

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# APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTOR'S NOTES

## “Crisis and Character in the Story of Leah”

Notes for the Syllabus and Sourcebook on  
*The Lost Matriarch: Finding Leah in the Bible and Midrash*  
by Jerry Rabow

***The Lost Matriarch*** uncovers the generally neglected literary character of Leah through a close reading of the Bible, as illuminated by two millennia of midrashic interpretation and literary commentary. To accomplish this, the book presents a portrait of Leah in the context of the people who influenced her life: Jacob, Rachel, Laban, and Esau, as well as her relationship with her children, her neighbors, and God.

The Syllabus and Sourcebook materials have been designed to serve as resources for teaching a multi-session college or adult education discussion course focusing upon the development of Leah's moral character and personality.

These materials presume that the class will have read ***The Lost Matriarch*** before the course commences, or that they will complete at least the directly relevant segments of the book prior to each related class session. To facilitate incremental reading of the book during the course, the instruction units are arranged in biblical chronological order paralleling the order of presentation in the book.

Although the following materials are divided into nine topic units, the instructor can combine some shorter units or subdivide some longer ones in order to fit the course into the available number of class sessions.

Biblical and midrashic sources not already set forth in the book are excerpted or summarized for each unit so that students will not require independent library or online research. However, students wishing to dig deeper into these issues can consult the sources listed in the Syllabus materials as well as the endnotes and bibliography in the book. In addition, substantial supplemental and background materials are posted and available for free downloading at [jerryrabow.com](http://jerryrabow.com).

Each instruction unit closes with three groups of suggested questions for discussion: questions focused on the biblical text, questions focused on the midrashic commentaries, and overall questions for the contemporary reader. Depending upon the purpose and style of the course, these unit questions can be distributed to the students as guidance and preparation for class discussion, or some questions may be selected by the instructor for guiding class discussion.

If you have any questions or comments, or if your class comes up with new interpretations of Leah's story that you want to share, I would welcome hearing from you. Please e-mail me: [jerry@jerryrabow.com](mailto:jerry@jerryrabow.com). I hope to post relevant e-mails and my responses on my website: [www.jerryrabow.com](http://www.jerryrabow.com).