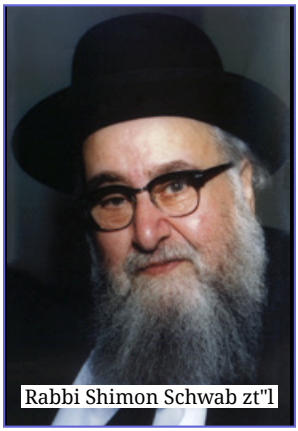


RABBI SHMUEL SILBER
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ORTHODOX UNION
Enhancing Jewish Life

When Life Doesn't Go According to Plan

It was the dawn of a new and exciting age. The era of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs paved the way for Twelve Tribes and the beginnings of the Nation of Israel. However, Yaakov's familial circumstances were far from idyllic. There was ongoing tension in the household. This was most clearly expressed in Leah's naming of her children:


Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt"l

Leah desired to be close to Yaakov. She desperately pined to feel loved. She knew she was not the intended or desired spouse. She knew the intensity of the love shared between Yaakov and Rachel and yearned for that same level of marital connectedness. With the birth of each child Leah secretly hoped that this would be the event that would create marital closeness with Yaakov.

"And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction, for now my husband will love me." And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Since the Lord has heard that I am hated, He gave me this one too." So she named him Shimon. And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, for I have borne him three sons; therefore, she named him Levi" (Genesis 29:32-34).

Yet something changed with the birth of her fourth son. "And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "This time, I will thank the Lord! Therefore, she named him Judah, and [then] she stopped bearing." (Genesis 29:35) Yehuda's name makes no mention of her pain or desire for Yaakov's attention. The first three children's names all reflected this anticipatory desire for greater spousal connection and yet now she utters just a simple statement of gratitude to God. What changed? Furthermore, why didn't Leah express her gratitude to God upon the birth of her older children?

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) explains this profound transformation in one word - acceptance. Leah spent the first few years of her married life in incredible pain over her second-tier status. Yaakov loved Leah, as the Torah states, "... and he also loved Rachel more than Leah ... (Genesis 29:30)" – he just loved Rachel more. For there to be harmony in a marriage a wife must know that she is most important and a priority in her husband's life. Leah knew she was loved, she knew Yaakov cared for her, but she also

knew she was not the most important person in his life. Leah's pain was so acute that it was reflected in the naming of her children. During what should have been a time of incredible joy, all Leah felt was pain. This pain overshadowed and eclipsed the feeling of blessing that should have been present at the birth of her children.

But then something changed. Leah's circumstances had not changed. What changed was her relationship with those circumstances. She could continue measuring her life by the love she wished she had, or she could begin appreciating the blessings and possibilities of the life she had been given. Leah chose the latter.

Leah chose to accept her circumstances and realized that although she may not be the primary wife, she would become the dominant matriarchal influence within the Abrahamitic family. The future *kehuna* (priesthood from the tribe of Levi) and monarchy (from the tribe of Yehuda) would emanate from her. When Yehuda was born, Leah had already accepted the reality of her circumstances and her new role. As a result of this acceptance, Leah was finally able to appreciate the beautiful life blessings God had conferred upon her.

We start out with a vision of how we expect life to turn out. We have dreams and aspirations and when we close our eyes we can even see how each of these dreams will materialize. Sometimes, they do, but more often than not, life does not turn out the way we expected. Life does not always go according to plan. Whenever possible we must exert incredible effort to bring our dreams and life vision to fruition. However, there are moments when we must accept that the life we want is not the life that we have. We must sometimes accept that some dreams do not and will not come true. And it is in those very moments we must make a decision: will I spend all of my energy lamenting that which is not, or will I devote myself to maximizing that which is?

Even if the story doesn't have a fairy tale ending, we can find happiness, meaning, and fulfillment. ■

Rabbi Shmuel Silber has served the Orthodox Union (OU) as its Executive Vice President since November 2026. As the executive vice president, Rabbi Silber is responsible for representing the OU's vision on both Torah and public policy, and providing hashkafic and halachic guidance within the organization and beyond. Prior to joining the OU, Rabbi Silber served for 23 years as the rabbi of Suburban Orthodox Congregation Toras Chaim, building it into one of Baltimore's most vibrant and dynamic kehillahs. Rabbi Silber is also the founder and dean of the Institute for Jewish Continuity (IJC), which provides contemporary Torah learning with Chassidic influences for adults at all levels. As the Founding Rabbi of the Berger Towers community in Katamonim, Jerusalem, Rabbi Silber oversees the community's rabbinic leadership and hashkafic direction. Rabbi Silber received semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University and holds a master's degree in secondary Jewish education from the Azrieli Graduate School.

In loving memory of
our beloved mother
Rachel Gutman a"h
רחל בת יצחק הלוי ע"ה
אשת חיל ואשת חסד
on her yahrzeit י"א כסלו

May the Torah learning
in this issue be לעילוי נשמתה

Greatly missed by her
children and grandchildren
Tzippy Grunstein, Eli Gutman,
Tova Hoffman,
Frieda Brodsky and families