

ECHOES OF RASHI

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN
Ram Yeshivat Har Etzion
Maggid Shiur All Parsha and All Daf, OU.org

L'zecher Nishmat **Imma Morasi Shulamis bat HaRav Shmuel Tzvi Halevi a"h**

NATURE COOPERATES WITH JEWISH HISTORY

וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיָּלֶן שָׁם כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ... (כ"ח:י"א)

He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set....

רש"י: "כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ" - הָיָה לוֹ לִכְתֹּב וַיָּבֹא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּלֶן שָׁם, כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ מַשְׁמַע שֶׁשָּׁקְעָה לוֹ חַמָּה פִּתְאוֹם, שֶׁלֹּא בְּעוֹנָתָהּ, כְּדֵי שֶׁיָּלִין שָׁם:

"For the sun had set." – It should have written, "The sun set and he tarried there all night," but the words "he tarried there all night because the sun set" imply that the sun set suddenly – not at its proper time – in order that he should tarry there overnight.

"Vayifga bamakom vayalen sham ki va hashemesh." On a simple level, the phrase "ki va hashemesh" seems unnecessary. Of course the sun set, and that is why he went to sleep. The Torah could have written more plainly, "vayavo hashemesh vayalen sham." The sun set, and he lay down. Instead, the pasuk is phrased more dramatically, as if the setting of the sun is the cause of his stopping, not just the background to it.

Rashi explains that the sun set prematurely to force Yaakov to stop. The sun sets in order to halt Yaakov. He is about to continue on his journey, but night falls earlier than expected, forcing him to remain in that place.

Chazal describe different versions of how this unfolds. In one version, Yaakov has already passed the site of Yerushalayim and begins to retrace his steps. In another, the distance itself is bridged, and the place comes toward him. Either way, the result is the same: He is brought to this location and held up there.

This is not simply a matter of convenience. It is necessary that Yaakov sleep in this place, daven there, recognize "beis Elokim v'zeh sha'ar hashamayim," and that he experience the vision of the "sulam mutzav artzah." These are formative moments for him and his descendants, the Jewish people. For them to occur in the right place, the natural order is adjusted. Even the sun's movement is adjusted to the needs of Jewish history.

At this point in Sefer Bereishis, once the Avos have been chosen, the world itself begins to move in relation to that story. The cosmos itself now serves a purpose centered on the emergence of Am Yisrael.

The adjustment here is striking. In Tanach, we are more familiar with the sun being held back, as in the days of Yehoshua, to allow a battle to be completed.2 In Yehoshua's time, the sun was held back to help win a war. Here, the sun sets early simply to ensure that Yaakov sleeps in a particular place. Yet that night will shape

Jewish history. Where he lies down, what he sees, and what he understands about that place will shape everything that follows.

There is an earlier hint of this in the story of Avraham, when Rashi describes Hashem intensifying the heat of the day so that travelers would not come and Avraham could rest.3 But that is an adjustment within the natural pattern, a hotter day within a system that already includes heat. Here, the sun itself sets ahead of time. The order of day and night is altered so that Yaakov will stop exactly where he must.

A STONY PILLOW

...וַיִּקַּח מֵאַבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא: (כ"ח:י"א)

...And he took from the stones of that place, he put them under his head and lay down in that place.


Rav Yehuda Amital zt"l

רש"י: "וַיָּשֶׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו" - עֲשָׂאָן כְּמִין מַרְזֵב סָבִיב לְרֹאשׁוֹ, שֶׁיָּרֵא מִפְּנֵי חַיּוֹת רָעוֹת; הִתְחִילוּ מְרִיבוֹת זוֹ אֶת זוֹ, זֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת עָלַי יָנִיחַ צַדִּיק אֶת רֹאשׁוֹ וְזֹאת אוֹמֶרֶת עָלַי יָנִיחַ; מִיָּד עֲשָׂאָן הַקָּבָ"ה אֶבֶן אַחַת, וְזֶהוּ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיִּקַּח אֶת הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר שָׂם מְרַאֲשֹׁתָיו:

"He put them under his head." – He arranged them in the form of a drainpipe around his head for he was afraid of wild beasts. They (the stones) began quarrelling with one another. One said, "Let this righteous man rest his head upon me," and another said, "Let him rest it upon me." Immediately, the Holy One, blessed be He, made them into one stone! This explains what is written (Bereishis 28:18), "And he took the stone that he had put under his head" (Chullin 91b).

My Rebbe, Rav Amital, offered a fascinating interpretation of this Midrash. He understood the quarrel between the stones as a metaphor for the competing needs of different people within a community, each seeking attention and recognition.

Each stone represents a different person, with different needs, different perspectives, and different expectations. And each one feels that their voice should be the one that is central; that their need is the most pressing; that their view should take priority.

Life as part of a community is complicated. When you're dealing with many people, you're dealing with many legitimate needs, and they don't always align. You can't always satisfy everyone, and you can't always create perfect harmony. There are tensions and competing claims, and they don't easily resolve.

When you're younger, you imagine that a community can function in a way where everyone is fully satisfied, where everything can be balanced. Over time, you

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realize that it's not so simple. There are many "stones," many voices, and they don't naturally come together.

Rav Amital explained that Yaakov's concern was whether a single person, lying there alone, could possibly carry all those needs, all those "stones." But once they merge into a single stone, a single collective, once there is a shared framework, those differences can begin to be reconciled. Within that larger unity, what cannot be contained by one person can find its place.

So far, Rav Amital understood the stones as representing different people within a community. But he also offered a second interpretation, applying the same Midrash to the competing demands within our own personal lives. Life presents us with many "stones," many directions that call for our attention and our commitment. You cannot place your head on all of them at once.

The head represents decision, focus, and the place where a person rests his identity. Even in yeshiva, we experience this in small ways. Should I invest more in Gemara learning or in Tanach? In *iyun* or in *bekius*? Those are modest tensions, but they are only a preview of what awaits later.

As life unfolds, the choices become heavier. Time is limited, and the demands are real. How much does a person invest in family, in Torah, in the broader needs of Am Yisrael, in personal growth, in professional responsibility? These are not conflicts between good and bad, but between competing goods. Each "stone" has a claim. Each one says, "place your head here." And the frustration of not being able to do everything can weigh heavily.

Rav Amital taught that this tension is not a failure: It is part of being human. Even Yaakov Avinu stands before multiple claims that cannot all be fulfilled at once. The Midrash reminds us not to expect a life without conflict. On the contrary, conflict often signals that a person is reaching for something meaningful. The task is to navigate that tension honestly and with balance, knowing that no resolution will be perfect.

This is a familiar Rashi, one we heard when we were young and perhaps passed over quickly. Rav Amital returned to it and uncovered its depth. Rav Amital used this familiar Rashi to teach us about the difficult choices we face as individuals and the challenge of holding a community together.



LEAH AND YITZCHAK

וַתַּהַר לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאָה ה' בְּעָנְיִי (כ"ט:ל"ב)

Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuven; for she declared, "For God has seen my affliction."

רש"י: "וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן" - רַבּוֹתֵינוּ פֵּרְשׁוּ, אָמְרָה רְאוּ מַה בֵּין בְּנִי לְבֶן חָמִי שֶׁמָּכַר הַבְּכוֹרָה לְיַעֲקֹב, וְזֶה לֹא מָכָרָהּ לְיוֹסֵף וְלֹא עֵרֵעַ עָלָיו, וְלֹא עוֹד שֶׁלֹּא עֵרֵעַ עָלָיו אֶלָּא שֶׁבִּקֵּשׁ לְהוֹצִיאוֹ מִן הַבּוֹר. (ברכות ז):

"And [she] named him Reuven." – Our Rabbis explained it thus: she said, "See (ראו) the difference between (בין) my

son and my father-in-law's son, who himself sold the birthright to Yaakov and yet wished to kill him afterward. This (my son) did not sell it (his birthright) to Yosef, yet he did not raise any protest to him being regarded as the first-born. And not only did he not raise a protest, but he even wished to take him out of the pit and rescue him from death" (Berachos 7b).

When Leah names Reuven, we understand her intention simply: Hashem saw my suffering. Rashi, based on the Gemara in Berachos, offers another interpretation: Leah is asking us to notice the difference between Reuven and Esav.

Leah, with ruach hakodesh, understands that Reuven will lose the bechorah to Yosef. The details will unfold later, but she already sees the direction. And she frames it as a comparison: Look at the difference between my son and my father-in-law's son.

Her father-in-law is Yitzchak, and his bechor is Esav, being the first twin to emerge. When Esav loses the bechorah, he responds with anger and violence. Leah says that her son will be different. He will also lose the bechorah, but he will not become destructive. He will not turn against his brothers. He will even try to save Yosef from the pit. He will not succeed, but he will try. "Re'u ma bein bni l'vein ben chami."

The comparison between Reuven and Esav also creates a surprising parallel between Leah and Yitzchak. Rashi is careful in the language. She speaks of "ben chami," my father-in-law's son, not her mother-in-law's. That choice is revealing. One would expect her to identify with Rivkah; instead, she identifies with Yitzchak.

Leah and Yitzchak live within conditions they do not control. Yitzchak plans to give the berachos in a certain way, yet events shift around him. Leah is brought into a marriage she did not choose and remains secondary in Yaakov's emotional world.

Yaakov and Rachel appear to occupy the center of the story, while Leah seems secondary. Yet Leah becomes the primary mother of the family. Yitzchak likewise plays a decisive role despite events unfolding differently from what he had planned.

We all encounter circumstances we cannot control. The question is whether we continue struggling against them or invest our energies where we can make a difference. What is beyond me, and where can I act? Where can I build? Where is my place? Some people spend their lives chasing to control what will not change. Others recognize the boundary and invest their strength where it can bear fruit. Leah does this, Yitzchak does this. Within the limits imposed upon them, they create something lasting.

Leah and Yitzchak could not control all the circumstances of their lives, but they built something lasting within those limitations. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Echoes of Rashi** is available at: taraginbooks.com.

Dr Muriel Metzger MD, MSc
Endocrinologist-Diabetologist
Emek Refaim 64, Jerusalem, 077-5560562
Nahal Tzeelim 6, Ramat Beit Shemesh, 02-9701100
Osteoporosis, Diabetes, Thyroid & Hormonal dysfunctions