

Parashat Vayishlach

Sharon Rimon



BURYING RACHEL ON THE WAY

- Why does Jacob bury Rachel on the road to Bethlehem instead of in the Cave of Machpela?
- Is there a connection between the trials in Rachel's life, the circumstances of her death, and her place of burial?
- Jeremiah comforts Rachel, who weeps for her sons. Why, of all of our Matriarchs, is Rachel the one weeping?

And they traveled from Beit El, and it was some distance before they arrived at Efrata, Rachel gave birth and had difficulty with her labor. And it was as she had difficulty, and the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for this, too, is a son for you. And it was as her soul departed, for she was dying, she named him Ben Oni, and his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died and was buried on the way to Efrata, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a monument on her grave, which is the monument of Rachel's tomb until this day. (Gen. 35:16-20)

ויסעו מבית אל ויהי עוד כבֶּרֶת הָאָרֶץ לְבוֹא אֶפְרָתָה וַתֵּלֶד רָחֵל וַתִּקְשׁ בְּלִדְתָהּ: וַיְהִי בְהִקְשׁוֹתֶיהָ בְּלִדְתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמִּילֶדֶת אֵל תִּירָאִי כִּי גַם זֶה לְךָ בֵּן: וַיְהִי בְּצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מָתָה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶּן אוֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא לוֹ בְנִימִין: וַתָּמָת רָחֵל וַתִּקְבֹּר בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָתָה הוּא בֵּית לְחָם: וַיִּצַב יַעֲקֹב מִצֵּבָה עַל קִבְרֹתֶיהָ הוּא מִצֵּבַת קִבְרַת רָחֵל עַד הַיּוֹם.

A. Rachel's Burial on the Way to Hebron

Jacob's Journey from Haran to Hebron

Our *parasha* describes Jacob's return from Padan Aram to Canaan. On his way, he crosses the Ford of Jabbok (Gen. 32:23) and travels to Succoth (33:17), Shechem (33:18) and Beit El (35:5). From there he continues southward, toward his father Isaac, who lives in Hebron (35:27).¹ In Hebron Jacob's journey ends, as he settles there: "And Jacob settled in the land of his father's residence, in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 37:1).

What Happened Along the Way

On the way from the Jabbok crossing to Hebron, a number of events take place: in Shechem Dina is raped and Laban's idols are taken (Gen. 34; 35:1-4); in Beit El Jacob builds an altar to give thanks to God and receives God's blessing (Gen. 35:6-14); on the way from Beit El to Hebron Rachel dies and the incident concerning Reuben and Bilha occurs (Gen. 35:16-20, 22). Although the final destination of the journey is

¹ Even though Jacob had left Isaac in Be'er Sheva (Gen. 28:10), by the time he returned Isaac was living in Kiryat Arba (Hebron). Through this move, Isaac followed in his father Abraham's footsteps, as we read previously regarding Abraham: "And Abraham came to eulogize Sarah and weep for her" (Gen. 23:2), upon which Rashi comments: "And Abraham came' – from Be'er Sheva" (Rashi ad loc.). Apparently, at the end of his life, Isaac left his work and returned to his family's property in Hebron. It is possible that the verse describing Jacob's return alludes to this: "And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre of Kiryat Arba, which is Hebron, **where Abraham and Isaac lived**" (Gen. 35:27). This indicates that Isaac, following Abraham's example moved to Kiryat Arba in his old age.

Hebron,² the Torah chooses to detail all of the stops along the way and the events that occurred at each place. This indicates that these events are significant to Jacob's settling in the Land of Israel; in a sense, they are actually a preparation for it.³

Rachel's Death During the Journey

Rachel's death is one of the final episodes described during the journey to Hebron. The story is a tragic one: Rachel, who had so desired children (Gen. 30:1-8),

² Jacob was not commanded to return specifically to the city of his father and grandfather, as the text simply states: "And God said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your forefathers and to your homeland, and I will be with you'" (Gen. 31:3). The *Emek Davar* notes: "'Return to the land of your forefathers' – [God] did not command him to return to his father's house, but to the land of his forefathers" (*Emek Davar* ad loc.). Jacob decided of his own initiative to travel to Hebron, a choice seemingly due to his homesickness: "And now, you surely left **because you longed greatly for your father's house**; [but] why have you stolen my gods?" (Gen. 31:30).

³ Each episode must be examined and understood separately. Some potential interpretations:

The rape of Dina: Upon his arrival in the land of Canaan, Jacob is forced to deal with its inhabitants and their tendency toward sexual immorality – one of the reasons why the land "vomited them out" (Lev. 18:24-25).

Removing the idols: This is clearly a necessary preparation for settling the Land of Israel properly.

Building the altar in Beit El: This fulfills the oath that Jacob made when fleeing Esau (Gen. 28:20-22). At the same time, Jacob receives God's blessing regarding land and descendants (Gen. 28:13-15), which entitles him to settle the land.

The journey: The path of Jacob's travels leads from Padan Aram, through Shechem and Beit El, to Hebron. It is interesting to note that Abraham followed the exact same path during his journey to Canaan (Gen. 12:4-8; 13:1-3, 18). Each of these places must hold some unique significance as part of a journey to settle in the Land of Canaan.

ultimately dies in childbirth. This narrative raises two major questions:

1. Why was Rachel buried during the journey?
2. What is the significance of Rachel's dying in childbirth?

B. Burial Along the Way – Unavoidable

Logistical Difficulties in Transporting the Body

The Torah does not explain why Jacob buried Rachel while traveling. The simplest explanation is a pragmatic one: Jacob and his sons were traveling and had not yet reached their final destination. Since it would be difficult to carry Rachel with them the rest of the way to Hebron and they could not arrange a more appropriate burial, they buried her on the road.

Jacob Apologizes to Joseph

The story of Rachel's death and burial is mentioned again in Jacob's words to Joseph before his death:

<p>And I, as I came from Padan [Aram], Rachel died with me on the road in the land of Canaan, some distance before Efrata, and I buried her there, on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem. (Gen. 48:7)</p>	<p>וַאֲנִי בָבָאִי מִפָּדָן מֵאֶרֶץ אֲרָם מָתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד בְּבֵרַת אֶרֶץ לְבָא אֶפְרָתָה וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרָת הוּא בֵּית לְחָם:</p>
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Joseph already knows that Rachel died and was buried

during the journey, so why does Jacob mention this before his death? Perhaps it is troubling him; he is not satisfied with the circumstances of Rachel's burial and he is apologizing to Joseph. This is how Radak⁴ interprets the verses:

<p>The meaning of this was to apologize to Joseph that] Jacob[did not bury] Joseph's [mother as Leah was buried ,so that] Joseph[would not hold this against him ,as] Jacob [had commanded]Joseph [to take him and bury him in the Cave] of Machpela]. He said to him that he had done no wrong in this, since she had died on the way, and his pace was slow due to his considerable family and property; and he could not have left his family and property to carry her to Bethlehem, and definitely not to the Cave [of Machpela]... and if he had carried her at this pace she would have begun to</p>	<p>המאמר בזה היה להתנצל אל יוסף שלא קבר אמו במערה כמו שקבר את לאה, שלא יתפוש עליו בזה והוא צווה לו שישאהו ויקברוהו במערה, אמר לו כי לא פשע בזה, כי מתה בדרך, והוא היה הולך לאט לרגל המלאכה ולא יכול לעזוב ה מ ל א כ ה ולנשאה לבית לחם כל שכן למערה... ואם היה נושאה לרגל</p>
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4 Rashbam and Ibn Ezra suggest similar explanations, and Ramban admits that this is "the simple reading" of the text. Rabbenu Hananel and Hizkuni (in his second explanation) also suggest that Jacob was forced to bury Rachel on the way, but not because of the difficulties of traveling per se. Rather, since Rachel was soaked in the blood of the birth, it would have been impossible to travel any distance with her.

decompose... and he did not have the means to mummify her, for there were no doctors with him and she had died during the journey, and he buried her respectably during the journey, and placed a monument on her grave... (Radak on Gen. 48:7)

המלאכה היתה מסרחת... גם לא היה בידו לחנוט אותה כי לא היו רופאים עמו ובדרך מתה, וקברה בדרך בכבוד והציב מצבה על קבורתה...

Jacob Requests to be Buried in Israel

According to Radak, Rachel's burial on the way was unavoidable.⁵ Later, when Jacob asks of Joseph to ensure that he is buried next to his forefathers, he expresses his feelings of guilt and apologizes to Joseph for not doing the same for Rachel.

...please do not bury me in Egypt; and I shall lie with my fathers, and you shall take me from Egypt and bury me in their burial place. (Gen. 47:29-30)

...אל נא תקברני במצרים: ושכבתי עם אבתי ונשאתני ממצרים וקברתני בקברתם:

Jacob places great significance on his place of burial by requesting to be buried where his forefathers are buried, although he himself buried Rachel during his journey. He apologizes to Joseph and explains that this was done because he had no choice.

Practical Reasons are Not Sufficient

However, this pragmatic explanation is unsatisfactory. Could this be the only reason for Jacob's burying

5 The words "some distance before Efrata" hint that there was a considerable distance between the place where Rachel died and the city of Efrata, which led to her being buried on the spot (see Rashbam on Gen. 48:7).

Rachel during his journey? Why doesn't Jacob, who attaches such great importance to burial places, make sure that Rachel's body is brought to Hebron once his sons have settled there?⁶ After all, this is exactly what he commands Joseph to do with *his* body – bring it to the Land of Israel after he passes away!⁷

C. Interpretations of Ramban and Hizkuni

Marrying Two Sisters is Unacceptable in Israel

A few commentators attempt to find a more substantial reason for Rachel's burial along the way. Ramban explains:

Jacob's intention in not burying her in the Cave [of Machpela] was so as not to bury two sisters there, for he would be ashamed in front of his forefathers. And he had married Leah first, under circumstances in which it was permissible, and Rachel [he married] because of his love for her and the oath that he had taken to marry her. (Ramban on Gen. 48:7)

...הכוונה ליעקב שלא הוליד אותה למערה כדי שלא יקבור שם שתי אחיות, כי יבוש מאבותיו. ולא היה הנשאת לו ראשונה בהיתר, ורחל באהבתו אותה בנדר אשר נדר לה לקחתה.

6 Transferring a body from place to place for (re)burial was not uncommon at the time (see for example Gen. 50:13; Ex. 13:19; II Sam. 21:12).

7 Still, there is a significant difference between Rachel's burial during the journey and Jacob's burial in Egypt: while Rachel was not buried in the Cave of Machpela, she was still buried

According to Ramban, Rachel's burial on the road was not because she happened to die during the journey. Rachel was not buried in the Cave of Machpela because Jacob felt that it would be inappropriate for him to be buried with two sisters who were both his wives.⁸ Jacob understood this to be the reason for Rachel's sudden death as they entered the Land of Israel – because **in Israel it is unacceptable to be married to two sisters.**⁹

The reason that Rachel died, as opposed to Leah, was that Leah was Jacob's first wife, and so there was no impropriety surrounding the circumstances of their marriage. However, once Jacob married Rachel,

in the Land of Israel. Jacob does not want to be buried outside of Israel, so he asks Joseph not to bury him in Egypt. Still, Jacob emphasizes to Joseph, "And you shall take me from Egypt and **bury me in their burial place,**" indicating that it is not only burial in Israel that matters to him, but also burial in the same place as his father and grandfather.

8 See Ramban's commentary on Gen. 26:5:

...שלמד אברהם אבינו כל התורה כולה ברוח הקודש... ושמר אותה כולה... ושמירתו אותה היה בארץ בלבד. ויעקב בחוצה לארץ בלבד נשא שתי אחיות...
...For our Patriarch Abraham had learned all of the Torah through divine inspiration...and kept all of its commandments...and his keeping of them was only within the Land of Israel. And Jacob married two sisters only outside of Israel... (Ramban on Gen. 26:5)

9 This point appears in Ramban's commentary on Lev. 18:25 as well:

והשם לו לבדו נתכנו עלילות שמתה רחל בדרך בתחילת בואם בארץ, כי בזכותה לא מתה בחוצה לארץ, ובזכותו לא ישב בארץ עם שתי אחיות.
And only God determines outcomes, such that Rachel died on the way, after they had already entered the Land of Israel; for she merited not to die outside of Israel, and [Jacob] merited that he did not reside in Israel with two [wives who were] sisters.

the situation became unacceptable and could not be allowed to continue in the Land of Israel.

According to Ramban, Rachel's death and burial during the journey were part of the preparation for settling in the Land of Israel, where it is inappropriate to marry two sisters.

Burying Rachel on Benjamin's Land

Hizkuni interprets this narrative from a different perspective:

I still did not have ownership of the cave, for Esau disputed it, and so I buried her on the way. But when I buried Leah, Esau left and allowed me everything. "And I buried her there" – since I knew that this land would be part of her son's portion...and if I had buried her in the Cave [of Machpela] it would have been disrespectful, since this was in the portion of Judah, Leah's son. (Hizkuni on Gen. 48:7)

...עדיין לא הייתי מוחזק במערה, שהרי עשיו מערער עליה, לפיכך קברתי בה בדרך. אבל כשקברתי את לאה הלך לו עשיו והניח לי הכל. "ואקברה שם" – כי ידעתי כי אותו גבול יעלה בחלק בניה...ואם קברתי במערה אין זה כבודה שהרי היא בחלק יהודה בן לאה.

According to Hizkuni, Rachel's burial on the road was due to necessity on one hand, since Jacob did not have complete ownership of the cave, but on the other hand, there was a fundamental reason for it – Rachel should be buried in Bethlehem, part of her son Benjamin's portion of land.¹⁰ This interpretation

¹⁰ There is considerable disagreement over the exact location

emphasizes Rachel's strong connection with her sons.

Is Rachel Different from the Other Matriarchs?

However, this explanation also raises a question: what would have happened had Rachel died in Hebron, once Jacob already completely owned the Cave of Machpela? Would she still have been buried in what was to become Benjamin's portion? Isn't Rachel considered one of the mothers of the nation of Israel, worthy of being buried with the rest of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs? Does she have a bond only with her biological sons?

of Rachel's tomb; this issue is already raised by Ramban (see Ramban on Gen 35:18; 48:7). According to tradition, Rachel's tomb is near Bethlehem in Judah's portion, and the verse "and [she] was buried on the way to Efrata, which is Bethlehem" refers to this place.

However, Samuel's words to Saul: "As you leave me today, you will find two people beside Rachel's tomb on the border of Benjamin, in Tzeltzah" (I Sam. 10:2), imply that Rachel was buried in Benjamin's portion. This is also a possible interpretation of the verse in Jeremiah: "A voice is heard in Ramah... Rachel weeps for her sons" (Jer. 31:14) – Rachel's burial place is near Ramah, which is a city in Benjamin's territory.

For more on this topic, see Noga HaReuveni, "Matzevet Kevurat Rachel," in *Or Chadash Al Yirmiyahu*; Yoel Elitzur, "Peshet Atonot Shaul UBe'ayat Kevurat Rachel," *Sinai* 92 (5743); Naava Gutman, "Im Kevurat Rachel BeGvul Binyamin BeTzeltzach," *Megadim* 14.

D. Rachel's Prayer for the Exiled

RACHEL WEEPS FOR HER CHILDREN

The best-known interpretation of Rachel's burial is that of Rashi:

Rachel – Buried on the Way to Pray for the Exiled

"And I buried her there" - and I did not take her even to Bethlehem to bring her into the Land of Israel,¹¹ and I knew that in your heart you bear ill will toward me. But know that **according to God's will I buried her there**, so that she will be of help to her sons when Nebuzaradan exiles them and they take the same road where Rachel leaves her grave and weeps and **asks for mercy on their behalf**. As it is written: "A voice is heard in Ramah... Rachel weeps for her children (Jer. 31:14)." (Rashi on Gen. 48:7)

וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם - ולא הולכתיה אפילו לבית לחם להכניסה לארץ, וידעתי שיש בלבך עלי. אבל דע לך, שעל פי הדיבור קברתייה שם, שתהא לעזרה לבניה כשיגלה אותם נבוזראדן והיו עוברים דרך שם יצאת רחל על קברה ובוכה ומבקשת עליהם רחמים. שנאמר (ירמיהו ל"א, יד) "קול ברמה נשמע רחל מבכה על בניה".

According to Rashi, Jacob's words to Joseph attach the greatest significance to Rachel's burial place. Jacob explains that he buried Rachel on the way neither because of the unavoidable circumstances

¹¹ As Rav Chavel comments (see the *Torat Hayyim* edition of Genesis), Rashi does not mean that Rachel was buried outside of Israel. Rather, she was not buried in "land that was settled" (see Ex. 16:35), i.e., not in a civilized place.

nor because of her inferior status compared to Leah, Rather, Rachel was buried there **to pray for her children as they were exiled.**

This interpretation is based on a *midrash*,¹² which must be studied carefully in order to understand its significance: why is Rachel the one who asks for mercy for her sons? Why is such great importance attached to one's burial place and how does this affect the prayers of the person buried there? After all, it is the deceased's soul that comes before God to pray, not the body!

The *midrash* states:

...[Joseph] said to [Jacob], "Why did you not bring her in to bury her with you?" For Joseph was distraught over this. His father began to answer him, "...Truly, as strongly as you wanted your mother to be brought in for burial, so

...אמר לו: למה לא נכנסה לקבורה עמך? שהיה יוסף מיצר על הדבר מאוד. התחיל אביו משיבו עליה: ...חייד, כשם שהיית מבקש שתכנס אמך לקבורה כך אני הייתי מבקש...

12 See the continuation of this *midrash* (*Pesikta Rabbati* 3, summarized in *Bereshit Rabba* 82:10):

מה ראה אבינו יעקב לקבור את רחל בדרך אפרת, אלא צפה יעקב אבינו שהגלות עתידות לעבור שם לפיכך קברה שם כדי שתהא מבקשת עליהם רחמים, הדא הוא דכתיב: "קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על בניה".

Why did Jacob see fit to bury Rachel on the way to Efrat? He saw that the future generation of the exile was to pass there, and so he buried Rachel there so that she would ask for mercy on their behalf, as it is written: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeps for her children." (Jer. 31:14)

I wanted it..." [Joseph] said to him, "Why did you not bring her; was it the rainy season?" He answered, "No... it was between Passover and Shavuoth, when the land is [soft and dry] as sifted flour and is easily traversed." Joseph said to him, "Tell me to do so, and I will bring her up now and bury her," and Jacob said, "You cannot, my son, **for I buried her only according to God's will**, for I, too, desired to bring her in and bury her, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not allow me to do so... and why not? Because it was known to Him that the Temple would ultimately be destroyed and His children would be exiled, and they will go to the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and ask them to pray on their behalf and this will not help them, and as they walk along the way they will embrace Rachel's tomb, and she will be standing and asking for mercy from the Holy One, Blessed be He, on

אמר לו: שמא מה שלא הכנסת אותה לקבורה שמא עונת גשמים הייתה? אמר לו: לא... בין פסח לעצרת היה בזמן שהארץ מנופה והולכת ובאה ככברה שיכולים להלוך, אמר לו יוסף: גזור עכשיו ואני מעלה אותה וקוברתה, אמר לו יעקב: אין אתה יכול בני, **שלא קברתיה שם אלא על פי הדיבור**, שאף אני בקשתי להעלותה ולקבורה ולא הניחני הקדוש ברוך הוא... ולמה? שגלוי וצפוי לפניו שסוף בית המקדש עתיד ליחרב ובניו עתידים לצאת בגולה והם הולכין **אצל אבות ומבקשים מהם שיתפללו עליהם ואינם מועילין להם**, וכיון שהם הולכין בדרך הם באין ומחבקין קבורת רחל, והיא עומדת ומבקשת רחמים מן הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומרת לפניו: "רבונו של עולם! שמע בקול בכייתי ורחם על בניי או

their behalf, saying to Him: תן לי האוניא שלי, מיד הקדוש ברוך הוא שומע בקול תפילתה. מנין? שכן כתב: "בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על בניה" (ירמיה ל"א, יד), וכתב: "ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאום ה' ושבו בנים לגבולם" (שם, טז).

And immediately God would hear her prayer. How do I know this? For it is written: '...mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeps for her children' (Jer. 31:14), and afterwards it says, 'And there is hope for your future,' says God, 'and your children shall return to their borders' (Jer. 31:16)." (*Pesikta Rabbati 3 – Bayom Hashemini*)

The *midrash* describes a conversation between Jacob and Joseph stemming from Joseph's grief over his mother's burial during the journey. The *midrash* emphasizes that Jacob was also pained by the fact that Rachel was not buried in the Cave of Machpela. Joseph raises the possibility of bringing Rachel's body to the Cave of Machpela; if she were only buried on the way due to technical considerations, this could be easily fixed. Jacob's answer indicates that Rachel's burial on the road has significance, and was not only due to difficult circumstances as most commentators suggest. According to the *midrash*, Jacob explains to Joseph that Rachel's burial place is not inadequate or inferior, and it was definitely not chosen for lack of other options; in fact, it is actually of great

13 Bill or contract.

importance: God Himself wanted Rachel to be buried on the way so that she would be able to pray for her children as they were exiled.

RACHEL'S LOVE FOR HER CHILDREN

Rachel Weeps for Her Children

The source for the idea expressed in the *midrash* that Rachel is destined to pray for her exiled children comes from the Bible itself:

Thus says God: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeps for her children; she refuses to be comforted over her children, for they are gone." So says God: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your actions will be rewarded," says God, "and they shall return from the land of their enemies. And there is hope for your future," says God, "and your children shall return to their borders." (Jer. 31:10-16)

כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנְחִם עַל בְּנֵיהָ כִּי אֵינָנּוּ: כֹּה אָמַר ה' מִנְעֵי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתֶיךָ נָאִם ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֲרָץ אוֹיֵב: וְיֵשׁ תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ נָאִם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם:

Jeremiah describes Rachel's prayer for her children as they are exiled and God's promise to her that they will return. Why is it specifically Rachel who prays for her children?¹⁴

14 One possible explanation is suggested in *Bereshit Rabba* 71:2: "ורחל עקרה" – רחל היתה עיקרו של בית. תני רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: לפי שכל הדברים תלוין ברחל לפיכך נקראו ישראל על שמה – "רחל מבכה על בניה". "And Rachel was barren [akkara]" – Rachel was the core

From
Rachel's
Prayer to the
Prayer of the
Patriarchs

The *midrash* describes a slightly different scenario: while the nation of Israel is being exiled, they ask the Patriarchs to pray on their behalf – but the Patriarchs' prayers are not answered. However, when they pass by Rachel's tomb and **embrace it**, she prays on their behalf and is answered.

In contrast to Jeremiah's words, in which only Rachel prays on behalf of her children, in the *midrash* all of the Patriarchs pray and only Rachel is answered. What is special about Rachel? Why is only her prayer answered?¹⁵

[*ikkar*] of the home. Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai taught: "As all things depended [*talui*] on Rachel, so the nation of Israel was called by her name: 'Rachel weeps for her sons.'"

Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai's statement is somewhat difficult to understand. A possible explanation is suggested in *Rut Rabba* 7:14, which paraphrases his words:

תני רשב"י: לפי שאמרו דברים כנגד רחל לפיכך נקראו בנים לשמה דכתיב:
"רחל מבכה על בניה".

Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai taught: "Since they spoke against Rachel, so her sons were called to her, as it is written, 'Rachel weeps for her sons.'"

Rachel's merit stems from the fact that they "pinned [*talui*] things on her" – they blamed her and spoke against her. Jacob asks Rachel, "Am I instead of God, Who has prevented you from having children?" Leah says, "Is it not enough that you took my husband?" (The use of the word *talui*, literally "pinned" or "hung," in the context of blame appears many times in statements by the Sages; see for example tractate *Bava Batra* 151b: "Do not blame [*titlu*] Rav Nahman in vain.") Since they blamed Rachel and shamed her, God is attentive to her prayers.

15 The *midrash* (*Eicha Rabba*, *Petichta* 24; see also *Tanna Devei Eliyahu* 30) describes each of the Patriarchs' prayers. Rachel's prayer is as follows:

"רבש"ע, גלוי לפניך שיעקב עבדך אהבני אהבה יתירה, ועבד בשבילי לאבא שבע

While the *midrash* does not explicitly give a reason, it reveals a difference between Rachel and the other Patriarchs and Matriarchs. The *midrash* states about the others: "They will go to the Patriarchs and

שנים, וכשהשלימו אותן שבע שנים, והגיע זמן נשואי לבעלי, יעץ אבי להחליפני לבעלי בשביל אחותי, והוקשה עלי הדבר עד מאד, כי נודעה לי העצה, והודעתני לבעלי ומסרתי לו סימן שיכיר ביני ובין אחותי, כדי שלא יוכל אבי להחליפני, ולאחר כן נחמתי בעצמי וסבלתי את תאוותי, ורחמתי על אחותי שלא תצא לחרפה, ולערב חלפו אחותי לבעלי בשבילי, ומסרתי לאחותי כל הסימנים שמסרתי לבעלי, כדי שיהא סבור שהיא רחל... וגמלתי חסד עמה, ולא קנאתי בה, ולא הוצאתיה לחרפה, ומה אני שאני בשר ודם עפר ואפר לא קנאתי לצרה שלי ולא הוצאתיה לבושה ולחרפה, ואתה מלך חי וקיים רחמן, מפני מה קנאת לע"ז שאין בה ממש והגלית בני, ונהרגו בחרב, ועשו אויבים בס כרצונם?!"
מיד נתגללו רחמיו של הקב"ה ואמר: "בשבילך, רחל, אני מחזיר את ישראל למקומן".

"Master of the Universe, it is known before You that Your servant Jacob loved me very much, and worked for my father for seven years to have me. And when he completed those seven years, and it was time for me to marry my husband, my father schemed to exchange me for my sister. This was extremely difficult for me, for I knew of the scheme and told my husband of it and gave him a sign so he would be able to distinguish between me and my sister, so that my father could not switch between us. And later I regretted this and overcame my desire, and I took pity on my sister so that she would not be shamed, and that evening my sister took my place beside my husband, and I had given my sister all of the signs I had given my husband, so that he would think she was Rachel... And I did her a kindness, and I did not envy her or shame her. And I am only flesh and blood, dust and ashes, and I did not envy my rival or shame her; but You, Merciful King, living and enduring, why do You envy the idols, which have no real substance, and exile my children, allowing them to be killed by the sword as their enemies do with them as they please?!"

And God's mercy was immediately awakened, and He said: "For you, Rachel, I will return the nation of Israel to their place."

This *midrash* explains that God is willing to answer Rachel's prayers since she overcame her jealousy and was merciful, and she is merely asking God to do the same.

Matriarchs and ask them to pray on their behalf and this will not help them.” The Jewish people ask the Patriarchs to pray on their behalf; however, when they reach Rachel’s grave, their actions are described differently: **“And they embraced Rachel’s tomb.”** They do not ask Rachel to pray for them; they only embrace her grave.

**Rachel’s
Love for Her
Children**

The *midrash* expresses the warmth and love that characterize Rachel’s relationship with her children – elements which are further highlighted by the nation’s request of the other Patriarchs, which is not characterized by the same special affection and closeness. Rachel, who is not even asked to pray, does so of her own initiative:¹⁶ “...and she will be standing and asking for mercy from the Holy One, Blessed be He, on their behalf, saying to Him: ‘Master of the Universe! Hear my weeping and have mercy on my children, or give me my *uniya*.’” Rachel asks for mercy for her children and weeps for them, demanding of God: have mercy on them, or You will owe me my contract.¹⁷ The result: “Immediately, the Holy One, Blessed be He, listened to her prayers.”

16 Interestingly, this point is not mentioned when describing the other Patriarchs’ actions – they will be asked to pray and “this will not help [the Jewish people].”

17 What exactly does Rachel mean by this? What would God give her to repay His “debt”? It is possible that the heart of the matter is Rachel’s love for her children. Rachel asks God to observe the love and concern she has for them – the same love and concern that were evident in Rachel’s kindness to Leah, when she was willing to sacrifice her own happiness for her sister’s sake. God was “convinced” by this display of love and kindness, and His attribute of mercy prevailed.

This *midrash* highlights the unique bond of love between Rachel and her children. This love influences God to answer Rachel’s prayer and have mercy on her children.

What makes Rachel’s bond with her children so unique?

E. Rachel’s Way of Life

RACHEL’S BARRENNESS

**Struggle:
Anticipation for
Marriage**

In order to understand the exceptional nature of Rachel’s prayer, we must first understand her character. Jacob and Rachel’s meeting is the beginning of an extraordinary love, but in order to fully realize this love, Jacob must work for seven years (Gen. 29:18-20). At the end of these seven years of anticipation, Rachel and Jacob are finally set to wed. However, Laban interferes and violates their agreement, giving Leah instead of Rachel to Jacob (Gen. 29:23-24). The process is never completed – Rachel is left by the wayside, painfully disappointed – especially after her long period of anticipation. After committing to work an additional seven years for Laban, Jacob marries Rachel as well. But this is no longer the marriage Rachel hoped for:

**Struggle:
Becoming the
Second Wife**

And he came to Rachel too ,and וַיָּבֵא גַם אֶל רָחֵל
he loved Rachel, too, more than וַיֶּאֱהָב גַּם אֶת רָחֵל
Leah. (Gen .29:30) מִלֵּאָה.

The word “too,” which appears twice in this verse, encapsulates everything: Rachel is the second wife. Even if Jacob prefers her to Leah¹⁸, her life is far from easy. Her marriage is one of constant struggle.¹⁹

**Struggle:
Anticipation
for Children**

The tension between Rachel and Leah revolves around having children:

And God saw that Leah was despised, and He opened her womb, and Rachel was barren. (Gen. 29:31)

וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי שְׂנוֹאָה לְאֵה וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת רִחְמָהּ וְרַחֵל עֲקָרָה:

For Leah, having children is the key to Jacob's love:

And Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and she named him Reuben.

וַתֵּהָרַב לְאֵה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן:

18 The commentators tend to interpret this verse as meaning that while Jacob loved Leah, he loved Rachel more, despite the fact that she was his second wife and not “the wife of his youth.” This idea is expressed by the Ramban (see also Rabbenu Bahya quoted by Hizkuni, and Seforno):

“ויאהב גם את רחל” - הזכיר הכתוב שגם אהב רחל יותר מלאה, והטעם, בעבור כי הטבע לאהוב יותר האשה אשר ידע האדם בראשונה, כעניין שהזכירו חכמים בנשים (סנהדרין כב, ב) ואינה כורתת ברית אלא למי שעשאה כלי והנה יעקב אהב רחל מלאה שלא כדרך הארץ, וזה טעם “גם”.

“And he loved Rachel too” – the text mentions that he loved Rachel more than Leah since it is a man's nature to love his first wife more, as our Sages have stated (*Sanhedrin* 22b): “She does not form a bond with anyone but the first [man] she encounters.” In contrast to the usual nature of men, Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and this is why it says “too.”

19 Rachel's struggle takes on another meaning in light of Ramban's comments (see notes 8-9), according to which it was inappropriate to be married to two sisters within the Land of Israel. Therefore, Rachel could not be a full partner in settling the Land of Israel, and she died during the journey.

him Reuben, for she said, “God has seen my destitution, for now my husband shall love me.” And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son, and she said, “As God heard that I am despised and he has given me this one as well,” and she named him Simeon. And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son, and she said, “This time my husband will become attached me, for I have given him three sons,” and so she named him Levi. (Gen. 29:32-34)

כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאָה ה' בְּעֵנָי כִּי עֲתָהּ יֵאָהֲבֵנִי אִישִׁי: וַתֵּהָרַב עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאֶמֶר כִּי שָׁמַע ה' כִּי שְׂנוֹאָה אֲנִי וַיִּתֵּן לִי גַם אֶת זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן: וַתֵּהָרַב עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּאֶמֶר עֲתָהּ הִפְעֵם יִלְוֶה אִישִׁי אֵלָי כִּי יִלְדֹתַי לוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה בָּנִים עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ לֵוִי:

While Rachel does not need children to secure Jacob's love, her barrenness itself is a difficult obstacle for her:

And Rachel saw that she had not given Jacob children, and Rachel envied her sister... (Gen. 30:1)

וַתִּרְא רַחֵל כִּי לֹא יִלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנֵא רַחֵל בְּאֶחָתָהּ...

Barrenness is a difficult experience in itself,²⁰ but in Rachel's case there was an additional element of competition with Leah, which intensified her anguish.²¹

20 Apart from the basic desire to have children, barrenness usually led to a reduction of the barren wife's status vis-à-vis the other, fertile wives, as described in the case of Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16:4).

21 Rachel's struggle has two aspects: first, the natural female desire to have children; second, the Matriarchs were aware

**Is Jacob in
Place of God?**

Through her pain, Rachel cries to Jacob:

And she said to Jacob, "Bring me children, and if not, I will die." (Gen. 30:1)

וּתְאֹמַר אֶל יַעֲקֹב
הֲבֵי לִי בָנִים וְאִם אֵין
מִתָּה אָנֹכִי:

What does Rachel want from Jacob? Is he preventing her from having children? Why does she beg him to "give me children"? What can he do to help her?

Jacob responds:

And Jacob became angry with Rachel, and he said, "Am I instead of God, Who has prevented you from having children?" (Gen. 30:2)

וַיַּחַר אַף יַעֲקֹב
בְּרַחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲתַחַת
אֱלֹהִים אָנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר
מִנְעָה מִמֶּנִּי פְרִי בֶטֶן:

Why is Jacob angry with Rachel? She addresses him very harshly and holds him responsible for her barrenness, as though it were dependent on him. Jacob rebukes her for complaining to him, asking: "Am I instead of God?" – There is nothing I can do; God is the only one Who can grant you children.

RACHEL'S PRAYER

**Rachel's Line
Through Bilha**

Following this rebuke, we would expect Rachel to address God, as Sarah,²² Rebecca²³ and Hannah²⁴ did.

of the fact that they were building the House of Israel, the chosen people. Rachel was fighting for her right to participate in this process.

22 See *Bereshit Rabba* 45:4 (s.v. "And he came to Hagar").

23 See Gen. 25:21 and Rashi ad loc.

24 See I Sam. 1:1-11.

Rachel, however, acts differently:

And she said, "Here is my maidservant Bilha, come to her and she shall give birth on my behalf, and I too will be built through her." (Gen. 30:3)

וּתְאֹמַר הִנֵּה אִמָּתִי
בִלְהָה בֹּא אֵלֶיהָ
וְתֵלֵד עָלַי בְּרַפִּי
וְאִבְנָה גַם אָנֹכִי
מִמֶּנָּה:

Rachel gives her maidservant to Jacob, in the hope that "I too will be built through her." Why does she specifically refer to "building"?

In order to understand this point, let us consider a similar theme that appears in Sarah's narrative:

And Sarai, Abram's wife, had not given him children, and she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold, God has prevented me from having children; please, come to my maidservant, for perhaps I will be built through her," and Abram listened to Sarai. (Gen. 16:1-2)

וְשָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ אַבְרָם
לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵהָ
שִׁפְחָה מִצְרַיִת
וְשָׂמָה הָגָר: וַתֹּאמֶר
שָׂרַי אֶל אַבְרָם הִנֵּה
נָא עֲצֹרְנִי ה' מִלְדֹּת
בֹּא נָא אֵל שִׁפְחָתִי
אוּלַי אִבְנָה מִמֶּנָּה
וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל
שָׂרַי:

Ramban comments:

"[To] be built from her" – that she might have fulfillment from the children of her maidservant, or merit to have children for doing so. (Ramban ad loc.)

שֶׁתִּבְנֶה מִמֶּנָּה -
שִׂיחִיהָ לָהּ נַחַת רוּחַ
בְּבָנֵי שִׁפְחָתָהּ, או
זְכוּת שֶׁתִּזְכֶּה הִיא
לְבָנִים בְּעֵבוֹר כּוּן.

The children of Sarah's maidservant would be considered as her children.

Ramban also raises another possibility – that by giving Abram her maidservant, Sarah herself might merit to have a child.²⁵

From Sarah to Rachel

The parallels between the stories of Sarah and Rachel are striking: Sarah, too, was barren, and gave her maidservant to her husband. In both stories, the phrase “I will be built through her” is used – the purpose of giving the maidservant is so that the mistress will merit children.

Yet, it is these parallels that highlight the differences between these narratives: Sarah immediately declares, “God has prevented me from having children.” It is clear to her that her barrenness is of divine origin. In addition, when Sarah attempts to solve the problem by giving Abram her maidservant, she says, “Perhaps I will be built through her” – perhaps this will help, if God wills it. Since everything comes from God, he will decide whether or not Sarah's line will be established through her maidservant.²⁶

25 This idea is first expressed by Rashi:

“אבנה ממנה” - בזכות שאכניס צרתי לתוך ביתי.

“I will be built through her” – in merit of allowing my rival into my house. (Rashi on Gen. 16:2)

26 This is the *Gur Aryeh's* explanation of Rashi's comments:

שאני עושה זה כדי לקיים תולדותי, ומכניסה צרתי לביתי, אולי אבנה גם אנכי בזכות זה שיהיו לי בנים גם כן, אחר שהשם יתברך יראה שכל כך אני מתאוה להעמיד תולדות מאברהם.

I am doing this in order to have descendants, and allowing my rival into my home. Perhaps I too will be built in merit

Rachel, on the other hand, does not mention God's role in her inability to have children. When giving Jacob her maidservant, she categorically states, “I too will be built through her.”²⁷

Bilha's Children as Rachel's Children

When Bilha gives birth to Jacob's children, Rachel feels as though she has been successful, and she expresses this feeling when she names the children (Gen. 30:5-8).²⁸

The Mandrakes

However, Rachel's success is not complete, as she still has no biological children. She continues to pursue her goal of having children of her own:

And Reuben went during the wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and he brought them to his mother Leah,
וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמֵי קְצִיר חֲטִיִּם וַיִּמְצָא דוּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם אֶל לֵאָה אִמּוֹ

of this, and I will have children as well, after God sees how I desire to have descendants with Abraham. (*Gur Aryeh* on Rashi ad loc.)

27 However, some commentators, such as the *Emek Davar*, have suggested different explanations for these variations:

“אולי אבנה ממנה” – רחל אמרה ותלד על ברכי ואבנה גם אנכי ממנה. הכוונה בזה שהיא תגדל את הוולד ותהא כאלו ילדה. מה שאין כן שרה לא חפצה לגדל בן שפחה. על כן אמרה אולי אבנה. שיהיה לי איזה זכות וזכרון טוב באותו זרע.

“Perhaps I will” – Rachel said, “She shall give birth on my behalf, and I too will be built through her.” Her intention was to raise her maidservant's child as though she had given birth to him herself. This was not so with Sarah – she did not intend to raise the child of her maidservant. Therefore, she said, “Perhaps I will be built” – Perhaps I will have some merit due to this child. (*Emek Davar* ad loc.)

28 It should be noted that while Rachel does mention when naming the children that their birth was God's doing, and that He gave her these children, she does not address God directly, but in third person.

and Rachel said“ ,Please give me from your son’s mandrakes .”And [Leah] said to her, “Is it not enough that you took my husband? Shall you also take my son’s mandrakes?” And Rachel said, “So he shall lie with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes.” (Gen. 30:14-15)

ותאמר רחל אל לאה תני נא לי מדודאי בגנך ותאמר לה המעט קחתך את אישי ולקחת גם את דודאי בני ותאמר רחל לבן ישבב עמך הלילה תחת דודאי בגנך:

Mandrakes were thought to aid fertility²⁹, and Rachel intended to use them in an attempt to get pregnant. The results, however, are sadly ironic: it is Leah who becomes pregnant following this exchange, and Rachel remains barren.

Rachel's Prayer

Rachel endures a long, painful process of attempting to become pregnant, while her sister continues having children. Didn't Rachel pray? Did she not understand Jacob's rebuke? The verses here imply that instead of praying, she was only interested in practical solutions.³⁰

29 See the commentary of Ramban and Radak on verse 14.

30 Rachel's stealing Laban's idols (Gen. 31:19) can also be interpreted as an attempt to affect her fertility. In the *midrash Lekach Tov* (Gen. 31:33) Laban specifically suspects Rachel since she would be the most likely to use the idols: "He entered Rachel's tent twice, since he knew that **she would use the idols.**"

The *midrash Sekhel Tov* (Gen. 35:2) also states:

"הסרו את אלהי הנכר - חסר י, לימד שלא היו שאר נשיו חשודות בכך, זולתי רחל על תרפי לבן..."

"They removed [hesiru] the foreign gods" - [the Hebrew word *hesiru*] is missing the letter *yud*, which teaches that his other wives were not suspected, **besides Rachel, of [taking] Laban's idols.**"

However, another verse describing her labor states otherwise:³¹

And God remembered Rachel, and **God listened to her**, and he opened her womb. (Gen. 30:20)

ויזכר אלקים את רחל וישמע אליה אלקים ויפתח את רחמה.

The text does not describe Rachel's prayer, but the phrase "God listened to her" teaches us that she must have prayed beforehand.³² She might have prayed throughout all of her attempts to become pregnant, or she might have only prayed at the end, in desperation,³³ when she realized that nothing else could help her. In any case, the fact that her

Rachel may have used the idols as fertility aids, as extra-biblical sources indicate that this was common practice at the time. According to this interpretation, Laban's idols may have been referred to as *terafim* from the word *toref*, the Sages' euphemism for a woman's genitalia - see tractate *Berakhot* 24a. This would explain why Rachel, the barren wife, stole the idols. This might also explain why Saul's daughter Michal had idols in her possession, as mentioned in I Samuel 19:13. The verse in II Samuel 6:23 states that she died without children; it is possible that her idols were a fertility charm, similar to Rachel's. See also Rabbi Amnon Bazak, "*Galah Kavod MiYisrael*," *Megadim* 28 p. 9-18.

31 Some commentators explain that God responded to Rachel's deeds, rather than to her prayers. This is Rashi's interpretation, inspired by the *midrash (Bereshit Rabba)*:

ויזכר אלקים את רחל - זכר לה שמסרה סימניה לאחותה.

"And God remembered Rachel" - He remembered that she had given her sisters the signs. (Rashi on Gen. 30:22)

32 Seforno understands this verse according to its simple reading:

וישמע אליה אלקים - שהתפללה אחר שעשתה שני מיני השתדלות.

"And God listened to her" - for she prayed after she had made an effort twice. (Seforno ad loc.)

33 As the Seforno explains (see above).

prayers are only mentioned at the end of the process emphasizes that none of Rachel's other attempts were fruitful – only God's intervention in the wake of her prayer allowed her to finally have children.

**Progress,
Perseverance,
Prayer**

Rachel endures a long and painful process in trying to have children. Pregnancy and parenthood do not come easily to her – she must put in effort, persevere and pray in order to become a mother. At the same time, Rachel undergoes another progression – she recognizes the importance of prayer and improves herself. She understands that neither Jacob nor the mandrakes can solve her predicament. Rachel understands that her prayers are the key to having children.

**“God Shall
Add Another
Son to Me”**

This progression is evident from the name that Rachel gives her son – a name which is itself a prayer:

<p>And she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and she said, “God has gathered [assaf] my shame.” And she named him Joseph, saying, “God shall add [yosef] another son to me.” (Gen. 30:23-24)</p>	<p>וַתֵּהָרַ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסַף אֱלֹקִים אֶת־חַרְפְּתִי: וַתִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר יִסַּף ה' לִי בֶן אֶחָד:</p>
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RACHEL'S DEATH IN CHILDBIRTH ALONG THE WAY

**Death in
Childbirth
– Forever in
Progress**

As Rachel gives birth to her first son, she prays that God will give her another son. The second son God gives Rachel is Benjamin. He is the son born during our narrative, in *Parashat Vayishlach*, and it is during labor with him that Rachel dies. There is a unique

tragedy in the fact that Rachel, who waited for so many years to have children, died in childbirth. What meaning does this death convey? What are we to learn from it?

Rachel does not merit to reach the end of the journey and rest – she is always in **progress**. For her, death – the end of life – is bound to the beginning of another life. Rachel's entire life, therefore, symbolizes **a journey, a process**.

**The
Importance
of the
Journey**

Rachel's life is one long struggle, one long process; it is from Rachel that we learn the importance of the journey. Something easily acquired holds little value for a person; on the other hand, something that must be achieved through great effort, after a long period of deprivation, is far more appreciated. When a person puts in effort toward achieving or acquiring something, he **appreciates its value more**, and forms a stronger connection with what he has acquired. Even the process itself, whether or not it is successful, **contributes to a person's growth**.

F. Rachel's Unique Prayer

Rachel's prayer is unique in three ways:

**From
Deprivation
to
Appreciation**

A. Rachel, who was barren, understands particularly well the value of children. Therefore, her love for them is greater, and when they are exiled she weeps and shouts to the heavens, refusing to be comforted.

She is the Matriarch who prays for her children until her prayers are answered.

Desire Leads to Prayer

B. Rachel is also the Matriarch who learned the importance of prayer through personal experience.³⁴ Through the trials she endured, she ultimately understood that only addressing God in prayer can bring relief. This understanding through experience makes her prayers so powerful that God cannot help but listen.

Exile as Part of the Process

C. Exile can be understood as the end of the process: The covenant between the Jewish people and God was broken, which led to a disconnect between God and the Jewish people. When the nation was exiled, it faced the danger of assimilating into the surrounding peoples.³⁵ Rachel, who symbolizes the journey, gives

34 The *midrash* adds that Rachel's prayer was also the reason she was barren in the first place:

ולמה נתעקרו האמהות? ר' לוי משם רבי שילא דכפר תמרתא ורבי חלבו בשם ר' יוחנן: **שהקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן ומתאוה לשיחתן** שנאמר (שיר השירים ב'): "יונתי בחגוי הסלע", יונתי בחגוי - למה עקרתי אתכם בשביל "הראיני את מראיך השמיעיני את קולך".

And why were the Matriarchs barren? Rabbi Levi states in the name of Rabbi Shela of Kfar Timreta, and Rabbi Helbo states in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: **"God desires their prayers and their communication**, as it is written: 'My dove in the clefts of the rock' (Song of Songs 2:14). 'My dove in the clefts' - why have I made you barren, so that you shall 'show Me your countenance and let Me hear your voice' (ibid.)." (*Bereshit Rabba* 45:4)

35 This view was apparently common during the time of the exile, and is attested to in a number of places in the Prophets. For example:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי בְּנֵי אֲדָם הַעֲצֻמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כֹּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הִמָּה הִנֵּה אֹמְרִים יִבְשׁוּ עֲצֻמוֹתַי וְאֶבְדָּה תִקְוַתִּי נִגְרַנְנוּ לָנוּ.

the nation hope that exile is only one part of a larger progression, which will ultimately conclude with redemption.³⁶ This is Rachel's prayer - she begs God

And He said to me, "Man, these bones are all of the house of Israel; they have said, 'Our bones have dried and our hope is lost; we are cut off.'" (Ez. 37:11)

Radak explains:

זהו משל לכל בית ישראל שהיו בגלות זה כמה עד שנואשו מן הגאולה ואמרו יבשו עצמותינו ואבדה תקוותינו וגו' כלומר הרי אנו כעצמות יבשות שאין להם עוד תקווה.

This is a metaphor for all of the nation of Israel, who were in exile until they had despaired of redemption and said, "Our bones have dried and our hope is lost, etc.," meaning, we are as dry bones which no longer have any hope [of resurrection]. (Radak ad loc.)

Another description of the nation's despair can be found in the Talmud:

שמואל אמר: באו עשרה בני אדם וישבו לפניו (לפני יחזקאל). אמר להן: חזרו בתשובה! אמרו לו: עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה כלום יש לזה על זה כלום? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לנביא: לך אמור להן: "איזה ספר כריתות אמכם אשר שלחתיה או מי מנושי אשר מכרתי אתכם לו? הן בעונותיכם נמכרתם ובפשעכם שלחה אמכם" (ישעיהו נ', א)... "והעולה על רוחכם היו לא תהיה אשר אתם אומרים נהיה כגויים כמשפחות הארצות לשרת עץ ואבן. חי אני נאום ה' אלקים אם לא ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה ובחימה שפוכה אמלוך עליכם" (יחזקאל כ', לב-לג).

Shmuel said: Ten men came and sat before him (Ezekiel). He said to them: "Return and repent!" They said to him: "A servant whose master has sold him, and a woman whose husband has divorced her, do they lay any further claim to one another?" God said to the prophet: "Say to them, 'Where is the bill of divorce with which I sent your mother away? To which of My creditors did I sell you? You have sold yourselves through your sins, and your mother was divorced through your transgressions (Is. 50:1)... And what you imagine will surely not come to pass, as you say, "We will become like the nations of the earth and worship rock and wood." I swear by Myself,' says the Lord, 'that I will rule over you with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and outpoured wrath' (Ez. 20:32-33)." (*Sanhedrin* 105a)

36 Certain prophecies liken the people of Israel in exile to a barren woman:

not to allow the exile to be the end of the journey, but only one part of it.

Rachel's death during the journey is no coincidence – it represents the essence of her life. Her death and burial on the road symbolize her entire life, a life in progress, constantly moving forward. Her burial during the journey reminds her children, as they are expelled from the Land of Israel, that exile is only one stage of a process. Through Rachel, they understand the power of prayer to lead them through even the most difficult of journeys – and that ultimately, their prayers will be answered:

So says God: “Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your actions will be rewarded,” says God, “and they shall return from the land of their enemies. And there is hope

כֹּה אָמַר ה' מְנַעֵי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכֵי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמְעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְעֻלָּתְךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיְבֵי: וְיֵשׁ

הַנִּי עֲקָרָה לֹא יִלְדָה פֶּצְחֵי רִנָּה וְצִהְלֵי לֹא חָלָה כִּי רַבִּים בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְעוּלָה אָמַר ה'.

“Sing, barren one who has never borne a child; burst forth in song and rejoice, she who has never given birth, for more are the sons of the desolate woman than the married wife,” said the Lord. (Is. 54:1)

Metzudat David explains:

“רני עקרה” – את ירושלים, אשר היית כעקרה שלא ילדה, על כי אנשים כלו ממנה ואינם, הנה עתה בזמן הגאולה, רני ושמחי.

“Sing, barren one” – you, Jerusalem, for you have been barren and have not borne children, for your people have left you and are gone; now, at the time of the redemption, sing and rejoice. (*Metzudat David ad loc.*)

for your future,” says God, “and your children shall return to their borders.” (Jer. 31:15-16)

תִּקְוָה לְאַחֲרֵי־תֶךָ נְאֻם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בְּנֵי־לְגִבְיֹתָם.