

“Rachel Weeps for Her Children”: Justice and Mercy in Eikhah Rabbah

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Torah in Motion – Tisha b'Av 5785

1. Jeremiah 31:14-16

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל מְבַכָּה עַל-בָּנֶיהָ מֵאַנָּה לְהַנָּחֵם עַל-בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ: {ס}
כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מְנַעִי קוֹלְךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לַפְּעֻלָּתְךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב:
וְנִשְׁתַּקְּנָה לְאַחֲרֵיתָךְ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגְבוּלָם:

Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone.

Thus said the LORD: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your labor, declares the LORD; they shall return from the enemy's land. And there is hope for your future, declares the LORD; your children shall return to their country.

2. Eikhah Rabbah *petihta* 24

Abraham said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Master of the universe: Why did You exile my children, deliver them into the hand of the nations, kill them with all kinds of uncommon deaths, and destroy the Temple, the place where I elevated my son Isaac as a burnt offering before You?’

The Holy One blessed be He said to Abraham: ‘Your children sinned and violated the entire Torah and the twenty-two letters that are in it.’ That is what is written: “All Israel have violated Your Torah” (Daniel 9:11).

Abraham said before the Holy One blessed be He: ‘Master of the universe, who will testify against Israel that they violated Your Torah?’ He said to him: ‘Let the Torah come and testify against Israel.’ Immediately, the Torah came to testify against them.

Abraham said to it: ‘My daughter, you have come to testify against Israel that they violated your mitzvot, and you have no shame before me? Remember the day that the Holy One blessed be He circulated you among every nation and they did not want to accept you, until my descendants came to Mount Sinai and accepted you and honored you. Now you come to testify against them on their day of distress?’ Once the Torah heard this, it stood to one side and did not testify against them.

[Continues with the letters of the alphabet, Abraham similarly convinces them against testifying.]

אָמַר אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם מִפְּנֵי מָה הִגְלִית אֶת בְּנֵי וּמִסְרָתָן בְּיַד הָאֻמּוֹת וְהַרְגוּם בְּכָל מִיתוֹת מְשֻׁנוֹת, וְהִתְרַבְּתָ אֶת בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ מְקוֹם שֶׁהֻעֲלִיתִי אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנִי עוֹלָה לִפְנֵיךְ.

אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבְרָהָם בְּנִיךָ חָטְאוּ וְעָבְרוּ עַל כָּל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל עֲשָׂרִים וּשְׁתַּיִם אוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁבָּהּ, הֲדָא הוּא דְכָתִיב (דְּנִיאל ט, יא): וְכָל שִׁשְׁרָאֵל עָבְרוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתָךְ.

אָמַר אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם מִי מַעִיד בָּהֶם בִּישְׁרָאֵל שֶׁעָבְרוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתָךְ, אָמַר לוֹ תְּבֵא תּוֹרָה וְתַעֲיִד בָּהֶם בִּישְׁרָאֵל, מִיָּד בָּאָה תּוֹרָה לְהַעֲיִד בָּהֶן, אָמַר לָהּ אַבְרָהָם בְּתִי אַתְּ בָּאָה לְהַעֲיִד בָּהֶן בִּישְׁרָאֵל שֶׁעָבְרוּ עַל מִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְאִין לָךְ בִּשְׁת פָּנִים מִפְּנֵי, זָכְרִי יוֹם שֶׁהִתְחַזְּרִיתְךָ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל כָּל אֲמָה וְלָשׁוֹן וְלֹא רָצוּ לְקַבֵּלְךָ עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ בְּנֵי לֵהר סִינַי וְקִבְּלוּ אוֹתָךְ וּבִבְדוּךְ, וְעַכְשָׁו אַתְּ בָּאָה לְהַעֲיִד בָּהֶם בְּיוֹם צָרָתָם. כִּינּוֹן שֶׁשִּׁמְעָה תּוֹרָה כֹּךְ עֲמָדָה לְצַד אֶחָד וְלֹא הַעֲיִדָה בָּהֶן...

Immediately, **Abraham** began speaking before the Holy One blessed be He and said: 'Master of the universe, at one hundred years You gave me a son. When he achieved cognition and was a thirty-seven-year-old young man, You said to me: Sacrifice him as a burnt-offering before Me. I became like a cruel person to him and had no mercy on him. Rather, I, myself, bound him. Will You not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my descendants?'

Isaac began and said: 'Master of the universe, when my father said to me: "God, Himself, will see to the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8), I did not delay fulfillment of Your words, and I was bound willingly upon the altar and extended my neck under the knife. Will You not remember this on my behalf and have mercy on my descendants?'

Jacob began and said: 'Master of the universe, did I not remain in Laban's house for twenty years? When I departed from his house, the wicked Esau encountered me and sought to kill my children, and I endangered my life on their behalf. Now they are delivered into the hand of their enemies like sheep to slaughter after I raised them like chicks and suffered the travails of child raising on their behalf, as most of my days I experienced great suffering for their sake. Will You not now remember this on my behalf to have mercy on my descendants?'

Moses began and said: 'Master of the universe, was I not a loyal shepherd over Israel for forty years? I ran before them like a horse in the wilderness, yet when the time came for them to enter the land, You decreed against me that my bones would fall in the wilderness. Now that they have been exiled you sent to me to lament them and weep over them.'

This is the parable that people say: From the goodness of my master it is not good for me, and from his evil it is bad for me...

Immediately, Moses went and Jeremiah was before him, until they reached the rivers of Babylon. They saw Moses and said to each other: 'The son of Amram has come from his grave to redeem us from the hand of our adversaries!'

A Divine Voice emerged and said: 'It is a decree from before Me.' Immediately, Moses said to them: 'My children, to return you is impossible, as the decree has already been issued. Rather, the Omnipresent will return you speedily.'...

מִיד פֶּתַח אֲבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוא ואמר רבונו של עולם למֵאֵה שָׁנָה
נָתַתָּ לִי בֶן, וְכִשְׁעָמַד עַל דַּעְתּוֹ וְהָיָה
בְּחוּר בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים אָמַרְתָּ
לִי הַעֲלֵהוּ עֹלָה לִפְנֵי, וְנַעֲשִׂיתִי עָלָיו
כְּאֶזְרִי וְלֹא רַחֲמֵתִי עָלָיו, אֲלֵא אֲנִי
בַּעֲצָמִי כִפַּתֵּתִי אוֹתוֹ, וְלֹא תִזְכֹּר לִי
זֹאת וְלֹא תִרְחַם עַל בְּנִי?

פֶּתַח יִצְחָק וְאָמַר רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם,
כְּשֶׁאָמַר לִי אָבָא (בראשית כב, ח):
אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה לוֹ הַשָּׂה לַעֲלֹה בְנִי, לֹא
עֲכַבְתִּי עַל דְּבָרֶיךָ וְנִעֲקַדְתִּי בְּרִצּוֹן לְבִי
עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּפִשְׁטֵתִי אֶת צְנֹאֲרִי
תַּחַת הַסִּפִּי, וְלֹא תִזְכֹּר לִי זֹאת וְלֹא
תִרְחַם עַל בְּנִי?

פֶּתַח יַעֲקֹב וְאָמַר רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, לֹא
עָשָׂרִים שָׁנָה עָמַדְתִּי בְּבֵית לָבָן,
וּכְשִׁיצְאֵתִי מִבֵּיתוֹ פָּגַע בִּי עֶשָׂו הָרָשָׁע
וּבְקִשׁ לְהַרְגֵּנִי אֶת בְּנֵי וּמִסְרֵתִי עֲצָמִי
לְמִיתָה עֲלֵיהֶם, וְעַכְשָׁו נִמְסְרוּ בְּיַד
אוֹיְבֵיהֶם כְּצֹאן לְטִבְחָהּ, לְאַחֵר
שֶׁגִּדְלָתִים כְּאֶפְרוֹחִים שֶׁל תְּרִגּוּלִים
וְסִבַּלְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם צֶעַר גָּדוֹל בָּנִים, כִּי
רַב יָמֵי הָיִיתִי בְּצֶעַר גָּדוֹל בַּעֲבוּרָם,
וְעַתָּה לֹא תִזְכֹּר לִי זֹאת לִרְחַם עַל
בְּנִי?

פֶּתַח מֹשֶׁה וְאָמַר רְבוּנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, לֹא
רוּעָה נֶאֱמָן הָיִיתִי עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲרַבְעִים
שָׁנָה וְרִצְתִּי לִפְנֵיהֶם כְּסוֹס בַּמִּדְבָּר,
וּכְשֶׁהִגִּיעַ זְמַן שִׁיכְנֹסוּ לְאֶרֶץ גְּזֵרֶת עָלִי
בַּמִּדְבָּר וְפָלוּ עֲצָמוֹתַי, וְעַכְשָׁו שָׁגְלוּ
שְׁלַחַת לִי לְסַפֵּד וּלְבַכּוֹת עֲלֵיהֶם, זֶהוּ
הַמִּשְׁלַל שְׂאוֹמְרִים בְּנֵי אָדָם מְטוֹב
אֲדוֹנִי לֹא טוֹב לִי וּמִרְעֵתוֹ רַע לִי...

מִיד הַלֵּךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיִּרְמְיָה לִפְנָיו, עַד
שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְנִהְרוֹת בָּבֶל, רָאוּהוּ לְמֹשֶׁה
וְאָמְרוּ זֶה לִזֶּה כֹּה בָּא בֶן עַמָּרָם מִקְבְּרוֹ
לְפָדוֹתֵינוּ מִיד צָרִינוּ, יִצְתָה בַת קוֹל
וְאָמְרָה גְּזֵרָה הִיא מִלְּפָנֶיךָ.

מִיד אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה בְּנֵי לְהַחְזִיר
אֲתֶכֶם אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁכֶּפֶר נִגְזְרָה גְּזֵרָה,
אֲלֵא הַמָּקוֹם יַחְזִיר אֲתֶכֶם בְּמַהֲרָה
וְהִנֵּנִם אוֹתָם...

When Moses came to the patriarchs of the world, they said to him: 'What have the enemies done to our descendants?' He said: 'Some of them they killed, some of them they tied their hands behind them, some of them were bound in iron chains, some of them were stripped naked, some of them died on the way and their carcasses were left for the bird of the heavens and the animals of the earth, and some of them were cast in the sun hungry and thirsty.'

Immediately, they all began weeping and lamenting: 'Woe over what has befallen our children! How have you become like orphans without a father; how do you lie in the afternoon and in the summer without garment and without covering; how have you walked on mountains and on gravel with shoes removed and without sandals; how have you carried bundles filled with sand; how have your hands been bound behind you; how have you been unable to swallow even the spittle in your mouths?'...

He also said before Him: 'Master of the universe, You wrote in Your Torah: "An ox or a sheep, it and its offspring you shall not slaughter on one day" (Leviticus 22:28). But have they not killed many, many children and their mothers, and yet You are silent!'

At that moment, **Rachel our matriarch** interjected before the Holy One blessed be He and said: 'Master of the universe, it is revealed before You that Your servant Jacob loved me abundantly and worked for my father seven years for me.'

When those seven years were completed and the time for my marriage to my husband arrived, my father plotted to exchange me with my sister for my husband. The matter was extremely difficult for me when I became aware of that plot, and I informed my husband and gave him a signal to distinguish between my sister and me so that my father would be unable to exchange me. Afterward, I regretted what I had done and suppressed my desire. I had mercy on my sister, so that she would not be led to humiliation. In the evening they exchanged me with my sister for my husband, and I transmitted to my sister all the signals that I had given to my husband, so that he would think that she is Rachel.

Moreover, I entered beneath the bed on which he was lying with my sister. He would speak with her and she would be silent, and I would respond to each and every matter that he

פניו שָׁבָא מֹשֶׁה אֶצֶל אֲבוֹת הָעוֹלָם
אָמְרוּ לוֹ מָה עָשׂוּ הָאוֹיְבִים בְּבָנֵינוּ,
אָמַר לָהֶם, מֵהֶם הָרְגוּ, וּמֵהֶם כָּפְתוּ
יָדֵיהֶם לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם, וּמֵהֶם אִסּוּרִים
בְּכַבְלֵי בְרוֹזָל, וּמֵהֶם נִפְשָׁטִים עֲרֻמִּים,
וּמֵהֶם מָתוּ בַדֶּרֶךְ וְנִבְלָתָם לְעוֹף
הַשָּׁמַיִם וּלְבִהֲמַת הָאָרֶץ, וּמֵהֶם
מְשֻׁלְכִים לַחֲמָה רָעִבִים וְצָמְאִים,

מִיָּד פָּתְחוּ כָלֶם וּבָכוּ וְקוֹנְנוּ בְקִינּוֹת וַי
עַל דָּמָטָא לְבָנוּ, הִיכִי הָגִיתוֹן כִּנְתָמִי
בְּלֹא אָבָא, הִיכִי דְמַכִּיתוֹן בְּטִיְהֶרָא
וּבְקִינָטָא בְּלֹא לְבוּשָׂא וּבְלֹא כֶסֶף. הִיכִי
סָגִיתוֹן בְּטוֹרֵי וּבְחֻצָּי חֲלִיצֵי מְסֻאָנִי
וּבְלֹא סְנָדָלָא. הִיכִי טַעֲנִיתוֹן מוֹבָלִי
טַעוֹנֵי דְחֵלָא, הִיכִי הוּוּ יָדִיכוֹן בְּפִיתוֹן
לְאַחֲרִיכוֹן, הִיכִי לֹא בִלְעָתוֹן רוֹקָא
בְּפִמִּיכוֹן...

וְעוֹד אָמַר לְפָנָיו רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם,
כְּתוּבָתְךָ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ (ויקרא כב, כח):
וְשׁוֹר אוֹ שֶׂה אֵתוּ וְאֵת בָּנוּ לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ
בְּיוֹם אֶחָד, וְהִלָּא כָּכָר הָרְגוּ בָנִים
וְאִמּוֹתֵיהֶם כְּמָה וְכְמָה וְאֵתָה שׁוֹתָק.

בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה קִפְצָה רַחֵל אִמְנּוּ לְפָנֵי
הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְאָמְרָה רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל
עוֹלָם, גְּלוּי לְפָנֶיךָ שִׁיעָקֵב עֲבָדְךָ
אֶהְבֵּנִי אֶהְבָּה יְתָרָה וְעָבַד בְּשָׁבִילִי
לְאָבָא שִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים, וּכְשֶׁהִשְׁלִימוּ אוֹתָן
שִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים וְהִגִּיעַ זְמַן נִשְׂוָאִי לְבַעְלִי,
יַעֲזֹר אֲבִי לְהַחֲלִיפֵנִי לְבַעְלִי בְּשָׁבִיל
אֲחוֹתִי, וְהִקְשָׁה עָלַי הַדָּבָר עַד מָאֵד כִּי
נִדְעָה לִי הַעֲצָה, וְהוֹדַעְתִּי לְבַעְלִי
וּמְסָרְתִי לוֹ סִמְן שִׁיכִיר בֵּינִי וּבֵין
אֲחוֹתִי כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יוֹכֵל אֲבִי לְהַחֲלִיפֵנִי,
וּלְאַחֵר כֵּן נִחַמְתִּי בַעֲצָמִי וְסִבַּלְתִּי אֶת
תַּאֲוָתִי וְרַחֲמֵתִי עַל אֲחוֹתִי שְׁלֹא תִצָּא
לְחֶרֶף, וְלַעֲרֹב חֲלָפּוֹ אֲחוֹתִי לְבַעְלִי
בְּשָׁבִילִי, וּמְסָרְתִי לְאַחֲוָתִי כָּל הַסִּמְנִין
שֶׁמְסָרְתִי לְבַעְלִי, כְּדִי שִׁיְהֵא סְבוֹר
שִׁיְהֵא רַחֵל.

וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָּא שֶׁנִּכְנַסְתִּי תַּחַת הַמֶּטֶה
שִׁיְהֵא שׁוֹכֵב עִם אֲחוֹתִי וְהָיָה מְדַבֵּר
עִמָּה וְהִיא שׁוֹתֶקֶת וְאֲנִי מְשִׁיבָתוּ עַל
כָּל דְּבָר וְדָבָר, כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יִכִּיר לְקוֹל
אֲחוֹתִי וְגַמְלָתִי חֶסֶד עִמָּה, וְלֹא קִנְיָתִי
בָּהּ וְלֹא הוֹצֵאתִיהָ לְחֶרֶף. וְמָה אֲנִי

said, so that he would not identify my sister's voice. I performed an act of kindness for her, I was not jealous of her, and I did not lead her to humiliation. If I, who is flesh and blood, was not jealous of my rival, and I did not lead her to humiliation and shame, You who are a living and eternal merciful King, why were You jealous of idol worship that has no substance, and You exiled my descendants, and they were killed by sword, and the enemies did to them as they pleased?'

Immediately, the mercy of the Holy One blessed be He was aroused and He said: 'For you, Rachel, I will restore Israel to its place.' That is what is written: "So said the Lord: A voice is heard in Rama, wailing, bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be consoled for her children, as they are not" (Jeremiah 31:14). And it is written: "So said the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, as there is reward for your actions.... And there is hope for your future, the utterance of the Lord, and your children will return to their borders" (Jeremiah 31:15-16).

שְׁאֵנִי בְּשֹׁר וְדָם עֶפֶר וְאֶפֶר לֹא קִנְאֵתִי
לְצָרָה שְׁלִי וְלֹא הוֹצֵאתִיהָ לְבוֹשָׁה
וּלְחֶרֶף, וְאַתָּה מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, רַחֲמֶיךָ,
מִפְּנֵי מָה קִנְאֵת לְעַבֹּדֶת כּוֹכָבִים שְׁאֵין
בָּהּ מִמֶּשֶׁשׁ, וְהִגְלִיתָ בְּנֵי וְנִהְרְגוּ בַּחֶרֶב
וְעָשׂוּ אוֹיְבִים בָּם כְּרָצוֹנָם.

מִיד נִתְגַּלְגְּלוּ רַחֲמֵיךָ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא וְאָמַר, בְּשִׁבִּילֶךָ רַחֵל אֲנִי מַחְזִיר
אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִקְוָמוֹ, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב
(יִרְמְיָה לֹא, טו): כֹּה אָמַר ה' קוֹל
בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל
מִבִּפְּהָ עַל בְּנֵיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנָּחֵם עַל בְּנֵיהָ
כִּי אֵינָנּוּ. וְכָתִיב (יִרְמְיָה לֹא, טז): כֹּה
אָמַר ה' מְנַעֲי קוֹלֶךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינֶיךָ
מִדְּמָעָה כִּי לֹשׁ שֹׁכֵר לִפְעֻלָּתוֹ וְגו',
וְכָתִיב (יִרְמְיָה לֹא, יז): וְיֵשׁ תִּקְוָה
לְאַחֲרִיתוֹ נֹאֵם ה' וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם.

3. Bereshit Rabbah 73:4

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת רַחֵל (בראשית ל, כב), מָה זָכִירָה זָכָר לָהּ, שֶׁתִּיקָתָהּ לְאַחֲוָתָהּ, בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהָיוּ נוֹתְנִין לוֹ אֶת לֵאָה הָיְתָה יוֹדַעַת וְשׁוֹמֶקֶת .

"Now God remembered Rachel [God heeded her and opened her womb]" (Gen. 30:22). What did God remember for her? Her silence on her sister's behalf. In that moment that they gave Leah to him, she knew and was silent. Therefore, God remembered Rachel.

4. Bereshit Rabbah 82:10

דָּבָר אַחֵר, (בראשית ל, יט): וַתָּמָת רַחֵל וַתִּקָּבֵר בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרַת, מָה רָאָה אַבְיָנוּ יַעֲקֹב לְקַבֵּר אֶת רַחֵל בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶפְרַת, אֵלָּא צָפָה יַעֲקֹב אַבְיָנוּ שֶׁהִגְלִיּוֹת עֲתִידוֹת לַעֲבֹר שָׁם, לְפִיכָךְ קִבְּרָהּ שָׁם כְּדִי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה מְבַקֶּשֶׁת עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמִים, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (יִרְמְיָה לֹא, יד): קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל מִבִּפְּהָ עַל בְּנֵיהָ.

Another matter, "Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Efrat" – what did Jacob see that led him to bury Rachel on the way to Efrat? It is because Jacob foresaw that the exiles were destined to pass there. This is why he buried her there, so she would ask for mercy upon them. That is what is written: "A voice is heard in Rama, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15).