

Leah / לֵאָה

Heb: weary

When he had stayed with him a month's time, Laban said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her.—Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid.—When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.—Laban had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.—And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years.

The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben; for she declared, "It means: 'The Lord has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband will love me.'" She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This is because the Lord heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi. She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children." So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a concubine, and Jacob cohabitated with her. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, He has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan. Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, "A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali.

When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, Leah said, "What luck!" So she named him Gad. When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, Leah declared, "What fortune!" meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate." So she named him Asher.

Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." When Jacob came home from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. When Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son, Leah said, "God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah.

Then God said to

Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you." Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field, where his flock was, and said to them, "I see that your father's manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father has been with me. As you know, I have served your father with all my might; but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. God, however, would not let him do me harm. If he said thus, 'The speckled



mandrake
plant

shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop speckled young; and if he said thus, 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop streaked young. God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me (Genesis 31:1–9).

. . . Then Rachel and Leah answered him saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you."

Thereupon Jacob put his children and wives on camels; and he drove off all his livestock and all the wealth that he had amassed, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

Then Jacob instructed [his sons], saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites." – Gen. 49:29-32

Leah's Life in the Midrash

Another six years passed, and Rebekah received the joyful news that her sister-in-law Adina, the wife of Laban, who, like all the women of his house, had been childless until then, had given birth to twin daughters, Leah and Rachel.

Laban...and Rebekah, his sister, who had two sons, had agreed by letter while their children were still young, that the older son of the one was to marry the older daughter of the other, and the younger son the younger daughter.

The Book of Legends

AND LEAH'S EYES WERE יָכוֹן [also means *soft* or *tender*] She thought that her fate would be with Esau, so she would cry. Everyone would say: Rebekah has two sons, and Lavan has two daughters! The older daughter was [destined to marry] the older [son] and the younger [daughter] was [destined to marry] the younger [son].

- Rashi (11 century France)

GOD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED ...that Leah behaved in the manner of the "hated", since she was supposed to marry "the hater" (Esau)...Therefore Leah

cried and said: “May it be your will, God, that I do not become the possession of an evildoer.” Rav. Huna said: Prayer is a strong force, that it annulled the decree, and not only that, but that it made her come before her sister for marriage. Because of this, everyone would mock her: The unemployed people mocked her, the travelers mocked her, and even the ladies behind their backs mocked her, saying, “This Leah, her inside is not like her outside; she appears righteous but is not really righteous. For if she were righteous, she would not have cheated her sister, and would have let her marry first.”
- *Genesis Rabbah*

GOD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED Jacob did not hate her, he loved her! However, because he loved Rachel *more*, Leah was called hated in comparison.
- *Radak, late 12 cent. France*

During Rachel’s lifetime, her bed had always stood in the tent of Jacob. After her death, Jacob ordered the bed of Rachel’s handmaid Bilhah to be carried in. Reuben (the eldest of Leah and Jacob’s sons) grew very upset, and exclaimed, “Is it not enough that my mother was jealous of her sister in her lifetime; even after her death must she be jealous of her handmaiden?” He went and put his mother Leah’s bed in Jacob’s tent, instead of Bilhah’s.
- *Book of Legends*

Rabbi Hanina in the name of Rabbi Shmuel son of Rabbi Yitzchak said: When Jacob our Ancestor saw matters, that Leah had “cheated” her sister, he made up his mind to divorce her, but when she was blessed with children, he said: “To the mother of these I am divorcing?” And in the end he admitted he was wrong, and that is the meaning of the verse: (Genesis 47) “And Israel bowed low at the head of the bed,” – in that the head of the bed is a euphemism for Leah, as she was the first one of his conjugal bed, and thus the “head” of his wives. *Genesis Rabba 71:1*

