

# Matos

Another Woman...

*And the Children of Gad and Reuven came and said to Moshe and Elazar the Kohen and the leaders of the congregation... 'Give us that land, force us not to cross the Jordan.'*

Bamidbar 32:2, 5

Strangely enough, the tribes of Reuven, Gad and a portion of the tribe of Menashe decided that they wanted to live outside of the Land of Israel. The land just on the other side of the Jordan would be annexed to the Land of Israel, becoming holy, but they would not enter. What was it about this group and who they were that lead them to this choice?

When Leah wanted to give her maidservant, Zilpah, to Yaakov, as her sister, Rachel, had done with her maidservant, Bilhah, she never brought the subject up with him. Leah rather dressed her maidservant up in clothing that she had lent her, and Yaakov went to bed thinking that he was with his wife Leah. It was when the child was born that they declared, “*bagad*,” and thus, they named him Gad. Bagad, generally translated to mean “good fortune has come,” was also an allusion to the events that brought about Gad. After all, the word *bagad* means both “rebellion,” and “clothing” – both integral parts of Leah’s deceit.<sup>68</sup> What a strange way to act! Why would Leah not ask Yaakov’s opinion about Zilpah’s addition to the family, as Sarah had done when bringing in her maidservant, or as Rachel had done just several verses earlier?

Leah and Yaakov conceived on the very first try, the Torah tells us. The next morning, Yaakov awoke and discovered that it was Leah that he had married, rather than Rachel. Yaakov was thinking of Rachel, but his child was born of Leah. The Talmud teaches, and Jewish law maintains, that it is forbidden for a man to be intimate with his wife while thinking about any other woman. Not only that, but it asserts that such behavior has a negative impact on the soul of the child produced from such a union. Because Reuven and Gad were both children of such unions, teaches R. Menachem Azaria of Fano,<sup>69</sup> they therefore did not ultimately live

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68 Rema MiFano quotes this in *Assarah Maamaros* (“*Chikur Din*,” 3:18). See *Torah Shleima* (R. Mendel Kasher), where he quotes *Sefer Chasidim Hachadash*, quoting a Midrash. I have not been able to locate the Midrash in its original context. In fact, *Hakesav Vehakabbalah* (Bereishis 30:11) writes that the word *gad* means “covering,” for throughout her pregnancy, she was not noticeably pregnant! Thus, it may be that it was only when she actually bore a child that the deception was discovered.

69 *Assarah Maamaros* quoted above; see *Magen Avraham*, *Orach Chaim* 240:9, who quotes this and takes issue with him. Regarding the issue of Yaakov’s fathering a child while thinking of another woman, see Raavad’s *Baalei Hanefesh* (p. 121, Mossad Harav Kook ed.), where he deals with the subject at length. See *Maharsha* and *Aruch Laner* to Yevamos 34b. See also *Ohr Hachaim* to Bereishis 49:3–4, where he explains that this was related to Reuven’s episode later in life where he changes the bed of his mother with that of Bilhah. This was already asserted by *Sifsei Kohen al Hatorah* to Shemos 6:13, s.v. *O nomar*. Note the statement of Chida (*Maris Ayin* to Brachos 7b), where he quotes a parchment by “a giant of previous generations” who states that the effect that stray thoughts in intimate moments have on a child is dependent upon the thoughts of the mother, and her

in the Land of Israel, but rather, on the other side of the Jordan. Was this some sort of a punishment? From the Torah account, it seems that Moshe was ultimately satisfied that this group that wanted to live in the annexed area was not looking to make trouble as the spies had, and that their request was reasonable. Were they wrong?

In order to understand the dynamic at play here, we need to take a step back and look closely at Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov was a simple man, who could not trick another person.<sup>70</sup> His brother, Esav, was not so. He was a man of the field, wild and uncontrolled. But much of that was his misuse of his own nature. Esav was, in fact, was very similar in nature to King David, one of the greatest men of all time. The Torah describes their physical appearances as identical,<sup>71</sup> although it does not mention any excessive hair on King David, as it does regarding Esav, and it tells us that David had lovely eyes. Esav could have been a part of the Jewish people; he could have been a King David.<sup>72</sup> He was to be the brother who was out in the fields, caring for the physical well-being of the Jewish people, supporting his brother, Yaakov, who would be in the tents, teaching and studying. But Esav did not take to that role at all.

Though he asked his father questions about tithing salt,<sup>73</sup> presumably intimating that those tithes would go to Yaakov – where else? – he inwardly despised that responsibility, of partnering with Yaakov and devoting his material achievements to spiritual things, shirking it all and trading everything for a bowl of lentils. And yet, Yaakov was stuck. For, the Jewish people need both Yaakov and Esav. So Yaakov became Esav – changing his clothing and putting something on to disguise even his arms, he walked in to see his father, Yitzchak, and declared, “I am Esav.”<sup>74</sup> In fact, the very Yaakov about whom we were just told could not trick another person, turned into “as tricky as [Lavan].”<sup>75</sup> Yaakov was now both men – himself and Esav. He had taken on both roles.

Yaakov was meant to marry Rachel, the beautiful one. Leah was the one for Esav. When Leah would hear that she was destined for Esav, she would cry. She was righteous, and did not want to marry a wicked man. But great women like Leah do not simply cry out of despair. Leah cried in *tshuva*.<sup>76</sup> She thought, “If I can be destined for Esav, I had better get to work on improving myself.” For, an Esav should be all about turning the outside world into good.

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alone. Thus, he avoids the question of Raavad in *Baalei Hanefesh* and the others that we have quoted. However, this is difficult to reconcile with the Talmud in Nedarim 20b, “...so that I not think of another woman, thus bringing my children to *mamzer*[-like] status!” See also the comments of Chida in his *Chomas Anach* to Tazria 1 and *Hagabos Sfas Hachomah* there, as well as to Balak 1.

70 Rashi Bereishis 25:27

71 Compare Bereishis 25:25, to Shmuel I, 16:12 See *Zohar*, vol. 3, 50b, regarding the contrast.

72 In *Dvash Lifi* (4:14), Chida writes that really, Yaakov and David should have come out of Rivka rather than Yaakov and Esav! The idea is clear: Esav ought to have become a King David.

73 Rashi to Bereishis 25:27

74 Bereishis 27:19

75 *Ohr Gedalyahu* to Toldos, n. 11 (R. Gedalya Schorr)

76 *Takkanas Hashavin* 6:9 (R. Tzadok of Lublin). This seems implied in the Midrash Tanchuma, where it tells that she “cried *and fasted*.”

Leah woke up in the morning next to Yaakov for the first time, the day after their wedding. Yaakov turned to her and said, “How could you do this to me?” Leah replied, “I learned such behavior from you. Did you not say, ‘I am Esav?’”<sup>77</sup> Leah was not playing games with Yaakov. She explained to him, “If you want to become Esav, then you have to take me, for I am his destined wife.”<sup>78</sup> Yaakov had two sets of children. The children from Rachel, like her, were beautiful. Yosef was gorgeous.<sup>79</sup> This was not only skin deep; he was a Tzaddik. Yosef’s greatness is manifest in how he avoided a terrible sin with his master’s wife.<sup>80</sup> Binyamin, their other son, was one of the four people who died never having sinned at all.<sup>81</sup> Leah, on the other hand, who is Yaakov’s wife on his Esav side, has a group of children led by Yehuda. Yehuda is not a perfect man. He is a man who is a leader, and can do *tshuva*; he can learn from the outside world, make a mistake and immediately repent.<sup>82</sup> His descendant David is similarly inclined. His greatness is not in his perfection, but in his sincerity. If he falls, he gets up, admits his flaws and learns from his mistakes. Contrast this to children of Rachel, who are often perfect, but once they sin, have a terrible time admitting it and moving past it, as evidenced in King Saul’s loss of the throne.

Leah was coming into this side of Yaakov’s life, the side that Yaakov only achieved through deceit. It was a deceit of the outside world, but the aim was only truth, and only to achieve what is really right and good. We engage in the world on our own terms, trying to get the good from it, and to always discard the bad. This type of action was needed for Leah to make her way into this relationship. And when she brought her maidservant, Zilpah, into the family, she was bringing her in on the Esav side, as another mother sharing her mission,<sup>83</sup> and thus, she needed to be brought in the same way.

In fact, Yalkut Hamakiri, a collection of Midrashim, tells us of King David’s conception.

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77 Aggadas Bereishis, 49. See also Bereishis Rabbah 70:20 for a slightly different version of this midrash.

78 This explanation of the Midrash is advanced by Nezer Hakodesh at great length in his comments to Bereshis Rabbah 70:20. The same was later suggested by R. Yisrael of Kozhnitz in his *Avodas Yisrael* to Toldos. A similar one is found in *Kometz Hamincha*, 74, of R. Tzadok of Lublin.

79 Bereishis 39:6

80 Ibid., 39:12

81 Shabbos 55b according to Tosafos. R. Tzadok of Lublin (*Tzidkas Hatzaddik*, 257) explains that while those four people never sinned, they nevertheless had a “root of desire” in them, ultimately coloring their actions slightly, and thus, they did not die perfect, but rather as perfect as a man can be. See also R. Z. E. of Dinov (*Derech Pikudecha*, mitzvah 1, *Chelek Hadibbur*, 6) regarding why there is no blessing on marital relations: because it is impossible to be done completely for the sake of Heaven without any physical pleasure involved, as was explained by his ancestor the Noam Elimelech. He writes that this can be seen in Yishai, David’s father, who was perfect, and yet was described by King David as having conceived him merely for his own pleasure; see Rashi to Tehillim 27:10.

82 Bereishis 38:26

83 See *Magid Taaluma* (of *Bnei Yissaschar*) to Brachos 16b, s.v. *lo yadinan*, where he explains that Bilhah and Zilpah were like extensions of Rachel and Leah, each maidservant an extension of her mistress. He cites Rus 4:13: “Like Rachel and Leah, who built, the two of them, the House of Israel.” The Ben Ish Chai (in his *Ben Ish Chayil*, vol. 1, *tshuva* 2) makes the same point based upon that verse in Rus. See, however, *Tosafos Hashalem al Hatorah* (Shemos 28:1, 1, 3), where it is asserted that all the children of the maidservants are included in the children of Rachel.

Yishai, King David's father, who was another of the men to never sin in his life,<sup>84</sup> was planning to marry his maidservant.<sup>85</sup> But his wife slipped into the bed, and not realizing it, he impregnated her with King David. To his knowledge, however, he had only been with his maidservant, and not his wife. The family presumed David to be an illegitimate child, until Samuel the prophet came and chose him as the king. So, Yishai was not thinking of his wife either as David was conceived! Lot, the grandfather of Ruth, and great-great-grandfather of King David, was completely drunk and not aware at the time that Moav was conceived by his own daughter.<sup>86</sup>

Now, the group from Menashe: Ramban<sup>87</sup> teaches us that although the Torah calls the group "half of the tribe of Menashe," this, in fact, means "a significant segment of the tribe of Menashe," and proves that it was twenty-five percent of the tribe. Menashe was a child of Yosef and Osnas. He had four grandparents: Yaakov and Rachel were his paternal grandparents, and Dina and the rapist Shechem were his maternal grandparents! Shechem was 1/4 of their ancestry (and a rapist certainly has no relationship with the woman at all), and thus, 1/4 of the tribe of Menashe did not settle in the Israel along with Reuven and Gad.<sup>88</sup>

The nature of the children of Leah is to go out into the world and to change it. There were two kingdoms in ancient Israel: one was led by Efraim, who was from Yosef, one of Rachel's sons and one was led by the tribe of Yehuda, one of Leah's sons. The exile of Efraim (the ten lost Tribes) is behind a river, isolated, for they are not capable of mingling among the nations and discerning the good from within the milieu of good and bad. But those who are from Yehuda are mixed in among the nations. They are capable of making a mistake, but also of growing from it, turning negative experiences into positive ones, and sins into mitzvos, as authentic *tshuva* can. This exile is the one that we are in today. The children of Reuven, Gad and a chunk from Menashe<sup>89</sup> were not to live outside the Land of Israel as punishment. In a sense, they were the only ones who could truly annex a secular land and give it the holiness that it needed to become the Land of Israel.

We all are forced into the role of being both Esav and Yaakov. We engage in the world as Esavs, while at the same time, isolating ourselves as Yaakovs. It is this balance that has kept us alive. It is tricky, and often difficult to navigate. If we cannot be as tricky as they are, we will not go on. It is only from the confusion, and our ability to see the greatest of men, the Moshiach, coming from that line of confusion, that we ultimately will succeed in our quest to

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84 Shabbos 55b

85 Rema MiFano explains that this was because the law about a Jew marrying a person of Moabite descent was not yet perfectly clear in his time, and thus, he was separating from his wife for the time being, since he was a descendant of Ruth.

86 Bereishis 19:35

87 Bamidbar 32:33

88 See *Assarah Maamaros*, quoted earlier, where this is dealt with. Arizal explains slightly differently, that Menashe inherited his mother, and Ephraim, his father, and Osnas was half Dinah, and half Shechem; thus, one half of the children of Menashe could not be in the Land of Israel.

89 Fascinatingly, this presence of a "Rachel-side" child calls to mind the startling fact that Yehuda's main partner, majority supporter and member of the Yehuda exile, is the tribe of Binyamin.

annex the entire world to the Land of Israel.