

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter VII: Vayetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

Essay 12. A maidservant for Rachel

פסוק "וימתן לבן לרחל בתו את־בלהה שפֿחתו לה לשפֿחה". קושה אמאי ברסל אמר, "לה לשפֿחה", ובבלאה לא אמר אלא "לשפֿחה".

There is a verse: **“Laban had given to Rachel, his daughter, his maidservant Bilhah, as a maidservant for her”** (Gen. 29:29).

An earlier verse, Gen. 29:24, states: “Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to Leah, his daughter, as a maidservant.”

A difficulty is that why for Rachel, does it say, “as a maidservant for her” [לה לשפֿחה], but for Leah, it only says “as a maidservant” [שפֿחה]? Why does Gen. 29:29 include the extra word לה [la] [“for her”].

וגרסינו בפרק ה' דכתובות (דף ס"א ע"א) הכניסה לו שפֿחה אחת וכו' היא שפֿחה אחת וכו' ותימא ליה עיילית לה איתתא בתרימאי, משום דאמר לה היא טרסא לדידי ולדידה קמי דידיך מאן טרסא ע"כ.

There is a reading in the fifth chapter of tractate Ketubot (page 61a):

[The Mishnah states that] **“If she brought him one maidservant** [i.e., a wife brought the maidservant with her into the marriage, the maidservant will perform some of the tasks for the husband that the wife would otherwise be obligated to perform [i.e., grinding, baking, and washing clothes].”¹

She [must nevertheless] **perform the other** [tasks, such as cooking, nursing her child, making his bed, and spinning thread from wool]. [The Gemara asks hypothetically:] **Let** [the wife] **say to him: I brought you a woman in my place** [who can perform all the tasks I am supposed to do]. [The Gemara answers that this is not a valid argument] **because** [the husband] **can say to her: This** [maidservant]

* English translation: Copyright © 2023 by Charles S. Stein. Additional essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Mishnah Ketubot 5:5; Ketubot 59b, “If she brought him one maidservant [i.e., a wife brought the maidservant with her into the marriage, the maidservant will perform some of the tasks for the husband that the wife would otherwise be obligated to perform]. [Consequently, the wife] does not [need to] grind, and does not [need to] bake, and does not [need to] wash clothes.”

toils for me and for herself, [but] who will toil for you? [I.e., it is necessary for the wife to do some work in order to cover some of her own expenses].

- Ketubot 61a

ואם כן שפחת לאה הינה לה לטרוח בשביל יעקב ובשביל עצמה, אבל שפחת רחל לא הינה לה לטרוח בשביל יעקב, דכבר טרחה לדידיה שפחת לאה. ורחל הינה יכולה לומר לייעקב עיילית לה איתתא בקריקאי, ומשום הכי אמר "לה לשפחה" שיהיא הינה פטורה לעשות שום מלאכה מה שאין כן בלאה.

If so, then as Leah was the first to marry Jacob, the maidservant of Leah was obliged to toil for Jacob and for herself. Leah was thus obliged to do some chores. **But** then, as the second to marry Jacob, **the maidservant of Rachel was not obliged to toil for Jacob, for the maidservant of Leah was already toiling for him. Rachel therefore was able to say to Jacob, “I brought you a woman in my place,” and because of this, [Scripture] said, “a maidservant for her,” as [Rachel] was exempt from doing any of the work a wife normally performs for her husband, which was not the case for Leah.**

* * *