Vayeitzei

The Most Romantic Statement in the Tanach

In Parshat Vayeitzei, Yaakov met Rachel at the wellside. It was a case of love at first sight, but the two of them had to wait for seven long years before they could get married. The Torah describes that period of waiting:

"וַיִּהְיוּ בְעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֲחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ"
"And they seemed to him but a few days because of his deep love for her."

What a beautiful statement, but does it actually make sense? After all, seeing as he loved her so much, surely those long years of waiting were even longer in his mind? Sforno gives a wonderful perush. He says that the key term here is:

"בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ"
"his love for her"

You see, Ya'akov was in this relationship because of his respect for Rachel. He considered it a privilege to be able to share his life with her. Sometimes, when it comes to a sensation of love, people only think about what they can receive out of the relationship. But here we find a genuine expression of love. The Hebrew word:

"אַהֲבָה"
"love"

comes from the root:

"הָב"
"give"

So true love is when one values that opportunity to share one's life with another. For Yaakov, to wait for seven years for his Rachel - that was like but a few days.

The Sefat Emet gives a very different and masterful perush. He says that the term:

"יָמִים אֲחָדִים"
"but a few days"

actually appears in identical form in the previous parsha at the end of Parshat Toldot. There we find Rivka telling her son, Yaakov, that Eisav, his twin brother, was intending to kill him. Yaakov would need to flee for his life to his uncle Lavan in Mesopotamia, and then Rivka added:

"וְיָשַׁבְתָּ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אֲחָדִים"
"And you shall say with him for but a few days"

- until the anger of your brother will subside. But surely that didn't make sense. Eisav hated Yaakov with such intensity; he wouldn't get over it after but a few days. And indeed, we find that after many years he still hated Yaakov and wanted to kill him. So what did she mean?

Explains the Sefat Emet "יָמִים אֲחָדִים" means days of אֶחָד. Within the Torah, the primary usage of אֶחָד relates to Hashem, for example:

"שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד"
"Hear Oh Israel, the Lord is our God, The Lord is one."

And Rivka's message to her son Yaakov was: you're going now into an alien environment. Don't become influenced by that environment. Instead, remain true to Hashem, who is אֶחָד. Don't enable your experiences to compromise your faith and your commitment to your ideals and values.

And therefore, after seven years waiting for Rachel, Yaakov contemplated that period of waiting, and he said, yes. These were only "but a few days"'. My relationship with her has been pure and sacred. I have succeeded in living up to the expectations my mother had of me to always ensure that אֶחָד, Hashem, who is one, would be at the centre of my existence.

So therefore, from these two great commentaries, we can learn: let us not focus primarily on what we are going to receive, but rather on what we can give others.

And secondly, let us guarantee that wherever we happen to be in the world, on every day, let's enable the אֶחָד, our consciousness of the existence of Hashem, to motivate and to inspire each and every deed of ours.

Shabbat Shalom.

This is a transcript of a video, which is available to view via chiefrabbi.org/dvar-torah