

Weekly D'var Torah

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Welcome to my D'var Torah on Parshat Vayishlach!

In Bereishit, chapter 35, while Rachel was traveling from Beth El to Ephrath, she went into labor. It was clear to her that she was not going to survive. The midwife told Rachel that her wish to be the mother of two tribes would be fulfilled because a son was being born. Before Rachel died, she gave her son a name, "Ben Oni", which means, "Son of My Suffering". Her husband, Yaakov, adjusted the name to "Ben Yamin". Rashi translates that as, "Son of the South" (literally, Son of the Right because the south is on the right side when facing the primary direction, east)", referring to the fact that he was the only one of Yaakov's sons born in Israel, which was south from where the family had come. Ramban translates it another way: "Son of My Strength". Either way, Yaakov gave the name a more positive meaning.

This is very personal for me! My name is Benyamin! What Rachel wanted is really hard to understand! Why would anyone name her child "Son of My Suffering?" How would he feel walking around with a name like that for the rest of his life? Perhaps Rachel felt that he would be inspired to live a meaningful life when he remembered how his mother gave her life that he could live. But, that could instead be too much weight for a child to handle, which may cause him to get depressed, or, in the worst case, commit suicide. Perhaps that is why Jacob decided to change the name to Benyamin.

It is wonderful to try to inspire someone. Inspiration can help a person do her best or be his greatest. But the inspirer has to be careful not to use too much pressure. Yaakov realized that remembering his mother's sacrifice could be motivational, but he changed the name to "Benyamin" because he realized, on the other hand, (pardon the pun), that it might be too much for their child to handle.