**Vayechi 5776: On the Road**

By Rabbi Joshua (petitionally known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

***Please continue to have Rabbi Hoffman, יהושע בן יונינה, in mind in your prayers for a refuah sheleimah.***

Yaakov, sensing that he is soon to die, speaks to his son Yosef, and asks to be buried, not in Egypt, but in the land of Canaan with his fathers. Yosef swears to him that he will do so. Some time later, Yaakov is laying on his death bed, and Yosef comes with his two sons to see him. Among other things, Yaakov tells Yosef that when he was returning home from Padan Aram, Rachel, Yosef’s mother, died on the road, and he buried her there. The midrash, as brought by Rashi, explains that Yaakov realized that the commitment he requested from Yosef to bury him with his fathers was inconsistent with his burial of Rachel on the road to Efras, rather than bringing her to the Me’aras HaMachpelah, the ancestral burial place. What he is telling Yosef is that there was a purpose for her being buried in that location.

The midrash explains that, many years later, when the Jews would be exiled to Bavel, they would travel on that road, and Rachel, being buried there, would petition on their behalf. God will accept her petition, and eventually bring the nation back from exile. This scenario is derived from several verses in Yirmiyahu (31:14-16). “A voice on high is heard” refers to Rachel’s petition, and the children will return to their borders is part of God’s positive response. Interestingly, these verses are read in the synagogue as part of the haftarah on Rosh Hashanah. Why is this so?

Rachel’s petition, says the midrash, was based on a cogent argument that Rachel put forth, that God exiled the people because they brought an idol, a rival to God so to speak, into the Temple. Rachel countered however, that she had willingly allowed, and aided, a rival, her sister Leah, into Yaakov's tent. In that merit her descendants should be treated leniently for having brought a rival into the Temple. The relevance of Rachel’s petition to Rosh Hashanah, then, is to teach us that if we want God to treat us with mercy, we must act toward him in a similar way.

This principle applies to the realm of comportment between people, as well, as can be seen from Rachel’s son, Yosef.  The midrash says that Yosef was released from prison on Rosh Hashanah. Why is it important for us to know that? Rav Lipa Geldwerth explained that Yosef’s release from prison came as a result of his reputation for dream interpretation, and knowledge of that was triggered by Yosef asking two prisoners, “Why are your faces downtrodden today” (Bereishis 40:12).

The message, then, is that if we want God to act toward us kindly on Rosh Hashanah, we must act kindly, ourselves.  Yosef, as Rachel’s son, exhibited mercy in his dealings with others just as his mother did, further making him the one who, as Yaakov hoped, would be able to bring all of the brothers together to function as a unit in their universal mission.