**Vayeitzei 5776: A Rocky Road**

By Rabbi Joshua (dreamily known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

Yaakov, fleeing from his brother Eisav, who is resolved to kill him, goes to the house of Lavan, and marries his two daughters, Rachel and Leah. He has children from his wives and their concubines, raising a large family, but it is only after Rachel has her first child that he decides that he can leave Lavan's house and move on with his family. Rashi explains that Yaakov believed that it was only through Yosef that he could defeat Eisav. There is a midrash which says that we have a tradition that the seed of Eisav will only fall through the seed of Rachel. What is it about Rachel that would be passed on to her progeny and bring about Eisav's defeat? I believe that we can answer this question by visiting the dream that Yaakov had on his way to the house of Lavan and the circumstances surrounding it.

In Yaakov’s dream, he saw a ladder set in the ground and reaching to the sky, with divine angels ascending and descending on it. The basic image was one of working on this earth to achieve, ultimately, a spiritual end, the building of a Jewish home. Yaakov took a stone and placed it under his head before lying down. The midrash says that he took twelve stones, and they all combined into one stone. This symbolized the basic unity of the twelve tribes that would emerge from his children. Although each had different roles to play, they would all work together in unity, advancing the spiritual goals of the Jewish people. This unity was in contrast to the hatred propagated by Eisav, who sought to kill Yaakov. The unity needed to combat Eisav was passed on from Rachel, as we will explain.

Although Rachel was Yaakov’s first love, and he sought to marry her first, Lavan tricked Yaakov and brought Leah to be married. Rachel, although wishing to merit a part in the establishment of Yaakov’s family, did not want her sister to be embarrassed, and therefore aided in the subterfuge, allowing deception to occur. This demonstration of love and desire for family unity was passed on to Rachel's son Yosef, who sought to restore the unity of his family despite the mistreatment that he suffered at the hands of his brothers, who sold him into slavery and took him for dead. It was this aspiration for family unity that the seed of Rachel provided that would ultimately enable Yaakov to defeat Eisav.