
Tears and prayers

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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Vayeitzei 5782



When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?"— **Bereshit 30:1-2**¹ I AM A DEAD WOMAN — One may infer from this that he who is childless may be regarded as dead **Bereshit Rabbah 71:6**² But I wonder. If so, why was Jacob angry with her? And why did he say, Am I in G-d's stead? for G-d hearkens to the righteous. [I wonder concerning] that which Jacob said [to Rachel,

as quoted in Rashi: "You say that I should do as did my father, who prayed on behalf of Rebekah, but I am not circumstanced as my father was. My] father had no children at all. I, however, have children. It is from you that

He had withheld children and not from me." Do not the righteous pray on behalf of others? There were Elijah and Elisha who prayed on behalf of strange women. It would appear that on account of Jacob's answer, our Rabbis took him to task, saying in Bereshith Rabbah: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Jacob, 'Is this the way to answer a woman who is oppressed by her barrenness? By your life! Your children are destined to stand before her son Joseph!'" — **Ramban on Bereshit 30:1**³ Compassionate language occurs when we take a moment to reflect on the experience of the individual we are communicating with and in place of imposing evaluation, judgement or criticism, we respond with empathy. According to Brene Brown: "Empathy is a way to connect to the emotion another person is experiencing; it

doesn't require that we have experienced the same situation they are going through." It is a means of connecting with people so they know they are not alone in their struggle. Empathy does not mean always knowing what to say. At times stating that you want to lend support but do not know what words to use can be the most empathetic response. The most important thing to remember is that statements of empathy do not start with the words, "At least..." Silver lining statements that begin with "at least" help the speaker feel better

...**"Give me children, or I shall die."**

הָבֵה לִי בָנִים וְאִם-אֵין

מִתֵּה אֲנִי

Bereshit 30:1

about the situation, not the person being comforted. Compassionate language is not second nature to most of us. In order to use it, we must practice it. The following are some

examples of reactionary language, and alternatives that you can use in the form of compassionate language. — **Kol Tikvah Hear our voices**⁴ As you remembered Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Hannah, and You have heard the voices of the righteous men and women when they beseeched You, so too please listen to our outcry (to help the men and women of our community). Fulfill our wishes for good and accept with Your mercy and desire our prayers. And so may it be Your will, and let us say Amen. — **Dr Yael Levine, The Fertility Prayer**⁵

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