

WRJ CENTENNIAL



D'var Torah

Women's Voices Deepen Our Jewish Legacy

Sisters by Birth (Leah and Rachel) and Sisters by Choice (NFTS/WRJ)
Parashat Vayeitzei (Genesis 28:10 – 32:3)

Men and women can be blinded by love, but love and the fulfillment of love provides men and women with contentment. This is what Jacob discovered when he fell in love with Rachel, but was deceived into marrying Leah first. With both women, his lot was content, and he fathered thirteen children. Jacob's name would later become Israel. Two women, their handmaids, many children - the Twelve Tribes of Israel!

Regardless of the unethical behavior of Laban, father of Leah and Rachel, whose trickery first affected Jacob's marriages and later cheated Jacob out of the livestock that he had earned when he was in Laban's service, Jacob was content to remain 20 years with his wives' family. Eventually, however, he was compelled to move onward and away from the land of Laban. Jacob shared with Rachel and Leah that an angel of God had visited him in a dream saying, 'I am the God of Beth El, where you anointed a monument, where you made Me a vow; now get up, leave this land and return to your native land.' (Genesis 31:13) Both Rachel and Leah responded, 'now do just what God has commanded you!' (Genesis 31:16). With that, Jacob moved his entire brood – his wives and their handmaids, his children, his slaves, and his livestock.

Moving forward means accepting challenges and taking risks. That's exactly what WRJ has done over the years. Propelled by a living vision, NFTS /WRJ continues to move forward, performing *mitzvot* and providing fulfillment to the women who served from 1913 to 2013 with the hope of continuing to provide fulfillment to the women of 2113. Let there be no doubt that God's hand guides the *mitzvah* work of women today just as God led our matriarchs, our patriarchs and our many ancestors on their journeys. Jacob was not the last patriarch; just as Leah and Rachel were not the last matriarchs. Strong, bright, capable women leaders today are continuing our post biblical journey, and they succeed because they do it together!

Moreover, in the words of Dolores Wilkenfeld, WRJ Past President (1985 – 1989), "Just as Jacob, Leah, and Rachel learned the lesson of patience, we, too, understand that *leadership requires patience* -- patience with people, patience with process, patience with the pace of progress. Perhaps, most importantly, we must have patience with ourselves and develop a sense of perspective that allows us to take pleasure in the journey even as we take pride in its ultimate results."

Leah and Rachel, sisters by birth!

Women of Reform Judaism, sisters by choice!

Leah and Rachel were *Stronger Together*... and the future of our people was stronger for it. So too, the women of WRJ - sisters who are *Stronger Together* - will make the future of Reform Judaism stronger as well. With God's help all is possible. Amen!

This d'var Torah was written by WRJ executive committee member Cynthia Roosth Wolf for adaptation and use by sisterhoods/women's groups during the 2013 WRJ Centennial year. We are grateful to Cynthia and Michael Wolf and Family for generously sponsoring this Centennial project.