# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

## VAYEITZEI 5785

When the Torah tells us that in order to marry Rachel, Yaakov will have to serve Lavan for seven years, we read a verse which has dumfounded many of our commentators and left them somewhat incredulous. "So, Yaakov worked for Rachel seven years, but they appeared to him like a few days because of his love for her" (29:20). But isn't the reality quite the opposite; when one longs for something precious, does not the wait seem like an eternity? And yet, here we are told that, for Yaakov, the seven years seemed like but a few days!

Among the answers proffered is the clever response of the Tzeida LaDerech (R. Yissachar Dov Eilenberg, 16-17th c.) who asserts that the seven-year period was indeed experienced as interminable - like living each of the individual 2557 days of the seven-year span separately. Another solution, suggested by the S'forno (ad loc.) , understands YAMIM ACHADIM to refer to how Yaakov viewed his dowry obligation to Lavan. "Is Rachel's value to be measured by only seven years of labor? Why, she is worth far more than seven years. In fact, the seven years seem like a pittance - but a few days - YAMIM ACHADIM, compared to the inestimable treasure she truly is!"

But perhaps one of the most meaningful and psychologically insightful explanations comes from Malbim's commentary on that verse. And while his answer appears in earlier sources, his explication of the matter is articulated best. But first, let us frame Malbim's response in philosophical terms. How does one experience duree - the passage of time? One can either perceive time quantitatively as chronos, with one minute following the next in numerical mathematical sequence. Or, time can be experienced qualitatively as elan vital, a term coined by French philosopher, Henri Bergson, to mean a creative pulsating force, a dynamic living experience in which every moment has intrinsic significance. To count time chronologically is to position oneself at some temporal point between past and future for some practical utility, e.g., I need to keep an appointment, to catch a plane, to spend an hour preparing a proposal, etc. However, to experience time means to cultivate a time awareness which allows one to actually live within a moment, when the past and future can magically conflate into the present. When, for example, at the simcha of your child's wedding, you can almost feel the presence of time embracing you: past memories of your child flood the mind and future pictures of the young

married couple dance in your happy imagination.

If this distinction holds, we can return to Malbim's explanation. A time period can seem endless when the focus of one's attention is the satisfaction you crave. In such a case, you simply want to countdown the days until the pleasurable item/event is attained. The greater the desire and anticipated enjoyment, the longer the wait seems. And this for the following reason: If my reason for waiting is primarily self-serving, then until that object is realized, I experience a vacuum, an absence. Something is missing; and when I become acutely aware of this "blank", this unfulfilled benefit and prize so eagerly anticipated, I am quickly totally focused on the anxiety - the itchiness - of the "wait", and then time goes by so very slowly.

If, as Malbim contends, the main purpose of marriage is the satisfaction of consensual desire, be it physical or psychological, the chronological awareness of the "wait" will appear endless. The ever-mounting tension and impatience will make days seem like years. The emotional ache in panting for the climactic culminating joy, much like any pain, will be experienced as taking forever. But, what if the focus of one's attention is about the other; what if my foremost consideration is not about how some distant event will make me feel, but rather on the event itself in the here and now, on the person right now without obsessing whether he/she will lavish me with pleasure later on. If my time awareness is outer-directed, oriented toward appreciating the other, then every deed and effort, every present moment spent is filled with meaning and thus with incredible joy. I experience constant and instantaneous pleasure by virtue of that person's very existence, a person whom I admire and revere. And although the relationship has not actually consummated in marriage, the simple presence of my future partner - a Rachel, aglow with righteousness and goodness - is enough to afford me boundless happiness and appreciation. In a word, when you are happy in the moment, time flies by very quickly!

Malbim then continues. Why did Yaakov love Rachel? True, he was away from home and felt terribly lonely, and Rachel would certainly provide the companionship he so desperately longed for. But, for Yaakov, Rachel was not simply an object of future physical desire and psychological comfort. She was destiny in the here and now! Something far more momentous was afoot. Yaakov could sense it, even intuit a tomorrow of imposing and magnificent providence. And in that future, Yaakov knew and could

foresee that Rachel was to be his companion in the realization of that destiny. And so, he worked "for her, because of her" - because of who she was - her stellar virtues and beautiful attributes. That Yaakov could not be with Rachel in marriage and had to wait seven years was of minor, secondary importance. His love for her was such that every minute of work was suffused with her presence. It was as if she was by his side in the field, while he tended the flocks in the meadow - everywhere! And so, precisely because Yaakov bonded virtually with Rachel at every instant, the seven years flew by - YAMIM ACHADIM!

With this interpretation of Malbim, an important truth about enhancing the quality of our lives is immediately disclosed. If, as we age, we "mark time", count down the days and years, finish off our yesterdays, with our tomorrows nothing more than a "couch potato" existence, then our time feels empty. There is only so much entertainment and physical indulgence a person can stomach. Soon, the vacant hours and minutes weigh heavily upon our consciousness and we want to "kill time". It goes by so very slowly. But, if instead, we choose to break out of our self-chosen selfhood and invite other people into our lives, not just to satisfy our needs, but to join with them toward accomplishing something of lasting value, then each of our days transforms into something unique and special. There is a flush of meaning and purpose that actually feels it can last forever. Instead of wanting to "kill time", when we are "we", we will now want to hold onto every moment and experience the sheer wonder of it all. In a word, when we invite others into our world, we happily discover that we've succeeded in stretching our years into days - YAMIM ACHADIM. And if that "we" includes just myself and Gd, well, I've captured infinity in the moment and my every day is truly ACHADIM - unique and memorable!

The poet (William Blake) put it so beautifully when he said:

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand*

*And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,*

*Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand*

*And Eternity in an hour.*

And as the great Psalmist advised that although: "The days of our years are seventy; or if by reason of special strength, eighty years... it is soon cut off, and we fly away... So [therefore], teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom" (T'hilim 90:10,12). 👋