

## **Shabbat Va Yeishev Take This One for This**

### **Jewish Women's Aid Shabbat - January 2026**

When I heard that Jewish women take on average around two years longer than others to talk about domestic abuse and ask for help, I knew how this makes sense. When it comes to violence within the family and other ordinary human problems like mental health and physical disabilities, we are just like everybody else. We are at the same risk.

But there are parts of Jewish life that make it difficult to speak about abuse within the family. Families, after all, are our basic strength. The places of our ideals. In some parts of the Jewish community, where lives are families that are a bit more traditional, with close networks, between home, school and *shul*. It isn't easy to disrupt so much closeness. The Jewish world is still struggling, in parts, to treat women as equals, for example, in divorce. It is still possible for Orthodox men to refuse their ex-wives a *get*, even after the divorce has long passed through the civil courts.

If the ways of living that we have nurtured for so long are also keeping women trapped in abusive marriages, are making girls vulnerable in their early twenties, knowing that boys and men vulnerable too, then it is time to think about how to build the culture that changes the conversation.

There is a diagram I find myself drawing so often, especially for our *b'nei mitzvah* in this season, who are grappling with this founding story from the book of Genesis. It's quite bizarre when you think about it. Jacob who loves Rachel, ends up with Leah. Rachel brings her servant into the marriage, and not to be outdone Leah does too. The whole story is as an explanation for the twelve sons of Jacob, not ot mention of course a daughter as well, and unsurprisingly, how they all come to hate and resent Joseph. <sup>1</sup>

How do they end up in this place?? The girl's father tells Jacob that marrying the younger daughter before the elder is simply not done. He should work another seven years for Rachel but needs to wait only

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 29:20-35

for the ending of the bridal week to be married to her, two women at once, as our bar mitzvah later says, strictly against Jewish law.

*Maleh shehua **zot***, fulfil this bridal week, *v'nitnecha lecha gam et **zot***, and I will give you his one.

Serve me seven more years Laban says. So, Jacob waited out the bridal week, *v'yimal shevua **zot***, and Laban gave him Rachel as a wife.

The three times use of the word **zot**, this, a way of pointing out someone or something feminine, is so telling. **Zot**, this woman, **zot** this week, for **zot**, that woman.

How do we change the conversation? By naming how these women are seen as equivalent objects, with no inner life, their feelings do not matter. They simply have no choice in it. Who had it worse? Leah who was swapped for her beloved younger sister, or Rachel, who knew it was happening but could do nothing. Torah is not only the record of our culture, it is the culture in which we live. Sometimes you must emerge from the depths to **name** the waters you are swimming in.