

Jacob and the Shepherdess of Haran

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Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel...that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept (Genesis 29:9-11).

In every love story there is an unforgettable moment when two people look at each other and time stands still. This is what happened to Jacob, and it changed his life. Until he met Rachel Jacob had been selfish, focusing on what he could get out of life. Then he saw her and everything began to change. He worked for her for seven years, and his love made him incredibly patient. He became a family man. He amassed a fortune. Life became more than just concentrating on Jacob.

To some of us there comes a moment like this, when we stand on the brink of eternity and recognize our love for someone, and know it is a love that will never die. To all who go to heaven there is going to be that moment, because whatever our married state (or lack of it) on earth, we will find that most wonderful love here or hereafter, and it will be ours forever.

But there is another love which is represented in this story. It is our love affair with beautiful, uplifting truths, truths which give meaning to our lives, lift us above ourselves, cause us to work and strive for something that has the stamp of eternity on it. If we work only for ourselves, then what we have done dies with us—or perhaps it dies a lot earlier. If we find a dream outside of ourselves and follow it, our life can become beautiful, and our dreams have the flavor of eternity.

In the Word, Jacob stands for a natural, ordinary human being with loves that are purely natural. He has been taught to behave well, he has been blessed by the Lord with affections for goodness. But he is interiorly selfish. We all are at first. We have dreams and hopes for goodness. We believe in God, and want to follow Him. But that goodness has no real direction, and, left to itself, it turns inward toward the question, “What’s in it for me?”

Jacob did a lot of selfish things. He bargained for his brother's birthright and stole his blessing. He thought he was a pretty special person—he even bargained with Jehovah, promising that Jehovah would be his God and he'd give a tenth of all he earned to Him as long as Jehovah looked after him. The implication was that Jehovah would be lucky to have Jacob worshiping Him! Because of his selfishness, Jacob had to flee his home and spend twenty years in exile. But in exile his precious moment came. He met the love of his life.

What does this mean in our daily lives? We, too, start life as rather selfish beings. We have some lovely dreams. We want to be good married partners, good parents, caring friends, competent doctors or lawyers or automobile mechanics or designers or members of a community, serving people and making a difference in the world. But even our good dreams are rooted in self-love, self-actualization, self-aggrandizement. We want to do these worthwhile things in life, but we're aware that if we do them we may become important, loved, esteemed, wealthy, admired, and our excitement instinctively dwells on these possibilities. And if we're not appreciated as much as we

think we ought to be, our dreams sometimes fade away. Since they are not getting us what we really want in life, we wonder, “What’s the use?”.

As Jacob left his home and went to a far country, so we find ourselves drifting into a set of interests that seem far removed from true idealism. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church says that this is a “state far removed from heavenly things.” But the Lord has a surprise in store.

Jacob came to a well covered up by a great stone. The well represents the Lord’s Word. The Lord has told us in His Word how to realize our dreams. He has given us all the values, all the guidelines to ensure that we can become wonderful, caring, lovable people. But we often don’t grasp these teachings. Even when we study the Word, it may not open up our life for us or show us the path to true goodness. There is a huge stone—self-interest—on the mouth of the well.

Then the Lord gives us His gift. He sends Rachel, the beautiful shepherdess, to inspire us. Spiritually, Rachel represents the love for what the Heavenly Doctrine calls “interior truth.” It is a love for truths which uplift and inspire, which speak of human goodness and kindness and mercy. Interior truth shows not just *that* we should love, but *how* we should love!

Think of this! As Jacob was growing up in Canaan, so Rachel was growing up in Haran. She was his destiny, and he didn’t know it until he met her. The amazing fact is that from our birth the Lord has been nurturing a love for interior ideals inside of us. We don’t know it, because it is part of His secret gift to us. That love grows, silently, we do not know how. We go through life, cutting our own path, sometimes drifting a long way from heaven, doing things we regret. But there are times—more than one time—when the Lord touches our hearts, and we feel the pull of beautiful ideals. We see the spiritual Rachel—we love the truths which speak to the deepest values of human life, and we want to know more.

Here is an important lesson. Without understanding the deeper truths of the Lord’s Word our goodness can never be truly beautiful. We need those truths to inspire and uplift us. There is a passage in the Heavenly Doctrine which makes this point strongly. It says:

The natural human being can know and also perceive what good and truth are, but only the natural and social variety of good and truth. He cannot know or perceive spiritual good and truth. Knowledge of these has to come from revelation, and so from the Word. For example, from the rational faculty present in everyone a person may know that one ought to love one’s neighbor and worship God; but how you ought to love your neighbor and worship God, and so what constitutes spiritual good and truth, you cannot know except from the Word (Arcana Coelestia 3768).

The awareness of the truths of spiritual life needs to be taught to us by the Lord Himself. Therefore He has given each of us a love for ideals—the love that makes people put self aside in order to follow a dream. Jacob saw Rachel, and he found the strength to move that great stone all by himself and water her father’s flock. And he kissed her and wept for joy. What a lovely picture this is of a selfish man finding something greater than himself and being humbled to tears because of it. Every one of us has felt the love of wonderful ideals. Sometimes they move us to tears. Sometimes they inspire us with huge determination. What they need to do is cause us to seek after the truth which will allow us to realize our dreams!

If you want to be a doctor you need the truths to make that dream a reality. Without the knowledge of medical science your longing is meaningless. If you truly love healing, you will find that knowledge exciting. So, too, if you truly long to be a kind, loving person, you will find the deeper truths of the Word even more exciting. You probably have already, many times.

When you first begin to study to become a doctor, you probably have no real insight into how to be truly effective. You probably don't know where and how and in what field you will practice. But as you learn, your love for healing finds direction and focus and purpose. The knowledge you have imbibed tells you where to go with this love of yours. It is exactly the same in spiritual life. When we start we have no idea where we are going to wind up, what loves are going to move us and define us. It is the truths that the Lord leads us to see which determine the direction of our lives. They give our love a special quality. We can understand this when we realize that our sense of what is good and right is totally different from that of anyone else. It is uniquely our own, and so our goodness is uniquely our own.

The love for the truths that we see in our own way is our spiritual Rachel. It causes us to become wise, and in so doing we realize dreams far in excess of what we had planned for ourselves.

Jacob worked for seven years for Rachel, and they were like a few days because of the love he had for her. This is an amazing image of a man deeply in love, waiting for the fulfillment of his joy. Now people are not often engaged for seven years. But almost every worthwhile endeavor we have undertaken has probably been longer than seven years in the making, and we were patient and determined because we loved the goal so much! Think of how long parenting goes on. Think of any truly great dream you have had and of how long it took to become real, and of how you were prepared to put in the time to make it happen. And our spiritual development is not just lifelong; it goes on developing forever. We know that; we must be patient, like Jacob, knowing that we will develop slowly.

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches that the heavenly marriage between our longings and the truth that makes them real is never between good and truth of the same degree or level. It is always between higher truth and lower good. So in the internal meaning of the story, Rachel was a step above Jacob.

What does this mean? Take friendship and popularity as an example. A young woman wants to have lots of friends and be popular. So she goes to a seminar on how to win friends and influence people. It's a good seminar. She applies what she learned there and becomes very popular. She realizes her goal. But she has made no spiritual progress! She can remain a deeply selfish person and still be popular.

But if she marries this wish to be popular and have friends with the moral truths about how to be a good friend and how to care for others—still more, if she marries this desire to the spiritual truths about how to care for a friend's eternal welfare—then her wish to be popular and have friends is uplifted and made beautiful. It becomes a love for the good of the other person.

Take another example of the attraction to the opposite sex. A young man wants to be popular with the opposite sex. So he reads books and goes to courses and listens to others and learns how to attract young women. He applies what he has learned and is successful and popular with women. But there

is no spiritual progress. He remains a deeply selfish person, interested in his own benefits from this knowledge. But if he learns from the Lord's New Word about chastity and about the true feminine and what it is to be truly masculine, if he learns what an enduring love can be and uses that knowledge, then his natural longing to be attractive to the opposite sex is uplifted and made beautiful. The marriage of that longing with the truths from the Word prepares him for a spiritual love of the one woman who is to be his wife to eternity.

The *heavenly marriage* is always between uplifting, spiritual truth, and the longings of the natural mind. This is the key to the story of Jacob's love for Rachel, the abiding love which governed his life. Even so we fall in love with beautiful truths that speak to our highest dreams, and these truths show our natural longings how to become eternal loves.

There is, of course, much more to this story. Why was Jacob tricked into marrying Leah? What did she represent? Why did Leah bear children, while for a long time Rachel was childless? The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us this. In very brief summary, Leah represents lower truth. She represents the truth of the literal sense of the Word, which tells us how to behave, what to do on the way to heaven. Rachel speaks of the wonderful dream that is at the top of the mountain. Leah speaks of the steps we must take today to walk across the plain and up the foothills toward the mountain. We long for the high dream, and this is what keeps us going through the nitty-gritty of life. The practical truths, represented by Leah, help us not to stumble along the way to finding our dreams. Sometimes we are impatient with what seem to be unrealistic dreams, and are tempted to abandon Rachel. At other times, we are tempted to hope that our ideals can be reached without the practical truths; we scorn the lower levels of thought and action. But we need them both. And Leah—the practical—comes first.

Jacob thought that he chose Rachel. He didn't. His love for Rachel chose him. For the sake of that love he became a different man. He worked seven years for her, and then seven more. His love for her chose him and defined his life. When we long for true values, we think we are choosing them, and, in a sense, we are because we have to fight for them. But really our love for them chooses us. That's why the Lord said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.... These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:16-17).

The Lord chose us for love. He shows us the way to that love by inspiring us to love beautiful truths. So let us follow our dreams, know where to find the path to them. Interior truth—the truth of the internal sense of the Word—is the Lord's gift to all people in His Second Advent. The truths that will direct and enable every possible human dream are waiting for us to discover them. We need only answer the call of our own deeper affections and seek them. They are there.

He has chosen each one of you to live a life of love for one another. He has chosen you by inspiring within you a love for the Word which teaches such a life. Follow that love, and there is nothing you will ask of your Father that He will not give you.

Amen.

Lessons: Genesis 29:1-20 selections; John 15:9-17; *Arcana Coelestia* 3762, 3804, 3798