

Why did Rachel Steal Lavan's Terafim?

Source 1: Bereishit 30:27

30: 25 After Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Let me leave. I would like to go home to my own land.

30: 26 Let me have my wives and children, since I have earned them by working for you, and I will go. You are well aware of the service that I rendered you'.

30:27 'Haven't I earned your friendship?' replied Laban. 'I have made use of divination and have learned that it is because of you that God has blessed me'.

כה ויהי, בפֶּאֶשֶׁר יִלְדָה רַחֵל אֶת-יוֹסֵף;
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב, אֶל-לָבָן, שְׁלַחֲנִי וְאֶלְכָה,
אֶל-מְקוֹמִי וְלֹאֲרָצִי. כֹּו תִּנְהָ אֶת-נַפְשִׁי
וְאֶת-יְלָדַי, אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּי אִתָּךְ בְּהֵן--
וְאֶלְכָה: כִּי אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ, אֶת-עֲבַדְתִּי
אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ. כֹּו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לָבָן,
אִם-נָא מִצֵּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ; נַחֲשֵׁתִי
וַיְבָרְכֵנִי יְהוָה בְּגִלְגָּלְךָ

Source 2: Bereishit Ch. 31:17-35

31: 17 Jacob began the journey, placing his children and wives on the camels.

31: 18 He led away all his livestock, and took all the goods he had acquired, including everything that he had bought in Padan Aram. He was heading to see his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

31:19 Meanwhile, Laban was away, shearing his sheep. Rachel stole the fetishes that belonged to her father.

31: 20 Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramaean, and did not tell him that he was leaving.

31: 21 He thus fled with all he owned. He set out and crossed the Euphrates, heading in the direction of the Gilead Mountains.

31: 22 On the third day, Laban was informed that Jacob had fled.

31: 23 He took along his kinsmen and pursued [Jacob] for seven days, intercepting him in the Gilead Mountains.

31: 24 God appeared to Laban the Aramaean that night in a dream, and said, 'Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob'.

31: 25 Laban then overtook Jacob. Jacob had set up his tents on a hill, while Laban had stationed his kinsmen on Mount Gilead.

31: 26 Laban said to Jacob, 'How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war!

31: 27 Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing! Why, I would have sent you off with celebration and song, with drum and lyre!

31: 28 You didn't even let me kiss my grandsons and daughters goodbye. 'What you did was very foolish.

31: 29 I have it in my power to do you great harm. But your father's God spoke to me last night and said, 'Be very careful not to say anything, good or bad, to Jacob'.

יִזְ) וַיִּקָּם יַעֲקֹב וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת בָּנָיו וְאֶת
נְשָׁיו עַל הַגְּמָלִים. (יח) וַיִּנְהַג אֶת כָּל
מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת כָּל רֶכֶשׁוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ
מִקְנֵה קְנִינֹו אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּפָדוֹן אֲרָם
לָבוֹא אֶל יִצְחָק אָבִיו אֶרְצָה כְּנָעַן.
(יט) וְלָבָן הַלֵּךְ לְגֹזֵז אֶת צֹאנוֹ וַתִּגְנֹב
רַחֵל אֶת הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ. (כ)
וַיִּגְנֹב יַעֲקֹב אֶת לֵב לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי עַל
בְּלִי הַגִּיד לוֹ כִּי בָרַח הוּא. (כא)
וַיְבָרַח הוּא וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וַיִּקָּם וַיַּעֲבֵר
אֶת הַנְּהָר וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת פְּנָיו הַר הַגִּלְעָד.
(כב) וַיִּגַּד לְלָבָן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי
בָרַח יַעֲקֹב. (כג) וַיִּסַּח אֶת אַחֲיו עִמּוֹ
וַיִּרְדְּף אַחֲרָיו דָּרָךְ שְׁבַעַת יָמִים
וַיִּדְבֹּק אֹתוֹ בְּהַר הַגִּלְעָד. (כד) וַיָּבֹא
אֱלֹהִים אֶל לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי בַחֲלֹם
הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַשְׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן
תִּדְבֹּר עִם יַעֲקֹב מְטוֹב עַד רָע. (כה)
וַיִּשַׁג לָבָן אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעֲקֹב תִּקַּע אֶת
אָהָלוֹ בְּהָר וְלָבָן תִּקַּע אֶת אַחֲיו בְּהָר
הַגִּלְעָד. (כו) וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לְיַעֲקֹב מָה
עָשִׂיתָ וַתִּגְנֹב אֶת לְבָבִי וַתִּנְהַג אֶת
בָּנֹתַי כַּשְּׂבִיּוֹת חָרָב. (כז) לָמָּה
נַחֲבֵאתָ לְבָרַח וַתִּגְנֹב אֹתִי וְלֹא הִגַּדְתָּ
לִּי וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשָׂרִים בְּתוֹךְ
וּבְכִנּוֹר. (כח) וְלֹא נִטְשָׁתָנִי לְנֶשֶׁק
לָבָנִי וּלְבָנֹתַי עִתָּה הַסְּפַלְתָּ עִשׂוֹ.
(כט) יֵשׁ לְאֵל יָדַי לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם רָע
וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם אָמַשׁ אָמַר אֵלָי
לֵאמֹר הַשְׁמֵר לָךְ מִדְּבַר עִם יַעֲקֹב
מְטוֹב עַד רָע. (ל) וְעִתָּה הַלֵּךְ הַלַּכְתָּ
כִּי נִכְסֹף נִכְסַפְתָּה לְבַיִת אָבִיךָ לָמָּה

31:30 'I realize that you left because you missed your parents' home. But why did you have to steal my gods?'

31:31 Jacob spoke up. '[I left this way] because I was afraid,' he said. 'I thought that you might take your daughters away from me by force.'

31:32 **If you find your gods with anyone here, let him not live!** Let all our close relatives here be witnesses. See if there is anything belonging to you and take it back.' Jacob did not realize that Rachel had stolen them.

31:33 **Laban went into the tents of Jacob, Leah, and the two handmaids, but he found nothing. When he left Leah's tent, he went into Rachel's.**

31:34 **Rachel had taken the fetishes and placed them inside a camel cushion, sitting down on them. Laban inspected the entire tent, and found nothing.**

31:35 [Rachel] said to her father, 'Do not be angry, my lord, but I cannot get up for you. I have my female period.' Laban searched, but he did not find the fetishes.

גִּנְבַת אֶת אֱלֹהֵי. (לא) וַיַּעַן יַעֲקֹב
וַיֹּאמֶר לְלֵבֹן כִּי רָאִיתִי כִּי אָמַרְתִּי כִּי
תִּגְזֹל אֶת בְּנוֹתַי מֵעַמִּי. (לב) עִם
אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת אֱלֹהֵיךָ לֹא יִחְיֶה
נֶגֶד אַחֵינוּ הִכָּר לָךְ מָה עִמָּדִי וְקַח
לָךְ וְלֹא יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי רָחֵל גִּנְבָתָם.
(לג) וַיָּבֵא לֵבֹן בְּאֵהָל יַעֲקֹב וּבְאֵהָל
לֵאָה וּבְאֵהָל שְׁתֵּי הָאִמָּהוֹת וְלֹא
מָצָא וַיֵּצֵא מֵאֵהָל לֵאָה וַיָּבֵא בְּאֵהָל
רָחֵל. (לד) וְרָחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת
הַתְּרָפִים וַתִּשְׂמֶם בְּכַר הַגִּמְלָה וַתֵּשֶׁב
עֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּמְשָׁשׁ לֵבֹן אֶת כָּל הָאֵהָל
וְלֹא מָצָא. (לה) וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל אָבִיהָ
אֵל יָחַר בְּעֵינַי אֲדֹנָי כִּי לֹא אוּכַל
לָקוּם מִפְּנֵיךָ כִּי דָרְךָ נָשִׁים לִי
וַיִּחַפֵּשׂ וְלֹא מָצָא אֶת הַתְּרָפִים.

Source 3a): Rashi Bereishit 31:19

ותגנוב – להפריש את אביה מעבודה זרה נתכוונה.

She stole them – she intended to separate her father from idolatry

3b) Midrash Bereishit Rabba 74:5

ותגנוב רחל את התרפים אשר לאביה, והיא לא נתפונה אלא לשם שמים, אמרה
מה אנא מזיל לי ונשבוק הדין סבא בקלקוליה, לפיכך הצרף הכתוב לומר: ותגנוב
רחל את התרפים אשר לאביה.

She intended this for the sake of Heaven, saying, “Why would I leave and leave this elder (Lavan) following his morally destructive ways...

3c) Midrash Tanchuma Vayetze Ch. 12

כדי לעקוב עבודה זרה מבית אביה נתפונה

Support for the idea that the terafim were associated with idolatry:

Source 4: Shoftim/Judges 18:14

(יד) וַיַּעֲנוּ חַמְשֵׁת הָאֲנָשִׁים הַהִלְכִים לְרַגְלֵךְ אֶת הָאָרֶץ לִישׁ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵל
אַחֵיהֶם הִידְעָתֶם כִּי יֵשׁ בְּבֵתָיִם הָאֵלֶּה אִפּוֹד וַתְּרָפִים וּפְסָל וּמִסְכָּה וְעֵתָה
דָּעוּ מָה תַעֲשׂוּ

14 Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren: 'Do ye know that there is in these **houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image?** now therefore consider what ye have to do'.

The Ibn Ezra's question:

Source 5: R. Avraham Ibn Ezra

והנה התרפים קראם לבן אלהיו. ויש אומ' שרחל גנבתם לבטל ע"ז מבית אביה. ואילו היה כן, למה הוליכה אותם עמה, ולא טמנתם בדרך?

Toldot Yitzchak tries to solve this dilemma:

Source 6: Toldot Yitzchak

ור"א הקשה אם כן למה הוליכה אותם עמה ולא טמנתם בדרך. ונ"ל להשיב שלא מצאה זמן להטמינם בדרך, לפי שהיו ליעקב שפחות ועבדים רבים וי"ב בנים, והיו רואים אותה עושה כן, והיתה רוצה שאפילו יעקב לא ידע זה עד שיגיעו למקום חפצם, ואז ימצא בביתה מקום וזמן.

The Abarbanel's difficulty with this interpretation:

Source 7: Abarbanel

השאלה הי"א איך נתפתתה רחל לגנוב את התרפים אשר לאביה האם חשבה להרחיקו מעכו"ם כדבריהם ז"ל באמת סכלות גדול יהיה זה לה בחשבה כי לעת זקנתו בתו תטה את לבו ועם היות שנגנבו ממנו התרפים יעשה לו אלהים אחרים תחתיהם ...

Summary:

- *Rashi and Midrash: to distance Lavan from idolatry*
- *Ibn Ezra: Why did she not get rid of them along the way?*
- *Toldot Yitzchak: Life happens!*
- *Abarbanel: How was she supposed to achieve this with her father, in middle/advanced age would abandon his beliefs? He could also make or acquire others!*

Source 8: After the incident at Shechem: Bereishit Ch. 35

א וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב, קוּם עֲלֵה בֵּית-אֵל וַשֶּׁב-שָׁם; וַעֲשֵׂה-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ--לְאֵל הַנְּרָאָה אֲלֵיךָ, בְּבָרְחֶךָ מִפְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אַחִיךָ. 1 And God said unto Jacob: 'Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, who appeared unto thee when thou didst flee from the face of Esau thy brother.'

ב וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ, וְאֶל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ: הַסְּרוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר, אֲשֶׁר בְּתֹכְכֶם, וְהִטְהַרוּ, וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמַלְתֵיכֶם. 2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him: 'Put away the strange gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments;

ג וְנִקְוָמָה וְנֵעְלָה, בֵּית-אֵל; וְאֶעֱשֶׂה-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ, לְאֵל הָעֵנָה אֲתִי בְיוֹם צָרְתִי, וַיְהִי עִמָּדִי, בְּדַרְךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכֹתִי. 3 and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.'

ד וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶל-יַעֲקֹב, אֶת כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם, וְאֶת-הַנְּזָמִים, אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם; וַיִּטְמֹן אֹתָם יַעֲקֹב, תַּחַת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר עִם-שָׁכֶם. 4 And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth which was by Shechem.

Source 9: Ralbag – what was included in the אלהי נכר?

(ב) והנה השגיח יעקב ועיין בענין תיקון ביתו באופן שימִשֵׁךְ להם העֵזר האלהי, וראה שכבר היו בביתו מאילולי עיר שכם ועצביהם, וציוה שיסירו את אלהי הנכר אשר בתוכם ויטהרו ויחליפו שמלותיהם, כי המקום אשר הם הולכים בו הוא קדוש, ולזה ראוי שיהיו נקיים מכל טומאה.

(ג) ועוד שהוא יעשה שם מזבח לאל אשר פדה אותו מכל צרה, ולזה ראוי שיקדשו עצמם בדרך שתדבק השגחתו בהם.

(ד) והם נתנו ליעקב את כל אלהי הנכר אשר בידם, ואת הנזמים אשר באזניהם שהיו מוכנים לעשות מהם אלילים — או אולי היו מתשמישי עבודה זרה — והנה קבר אותם יעקב תחת האלה אשר עם שכם, כדי שלא יהנה מעבודה זרה כלל.

Presumably, according to them, Rachel had by that point destroyed the terafim on her own.

A different approach – Source 10: Rashbam

ותגנוב רחל את התרפים – שלא יגידו ויודיעו ללבן כי רוצה יעקב לברוח, כעניין שנאמר אין אפוד ותרפים (הושע ג' ד'), כי התרפים דברו און (זכריה י' ב'). רגילים היו לקסום בהם.

Rashbam points to Zekharyah 10:2 which mentions "terafim speaking" and links them with magicians ("הקוסמים"), and to Hoshea 3:4, which pairs them with the "אפוד", another object associated with prophecy and fortune-telling.

Source 11: Ibn Ezra seems to follow Rashbam on this...

והקרוב שהיה לבן אביה יודע מזלות, ופחדה שמא יסתכל במזלות לדעת אי זה דרך ברחו.

Source 12: Ramban – used for divination but given ‘greater’ powers by Lavan and his ilk...

והקרוב מה שאומרים שהם כלים לקבל השעות ויקסמו בהם לדעת עתידות והמלה נגזרת מלשון רפה ידים (שם ב יז ב) נרפים אתם נרפים (שמות ה יז) יקראו אותם "תרפים" לרמז בשמם כי דבורם כמו נבואה רפה תבא ברב ותכזב לעתים רחוקות כמו שאמרו (זכריה י ב) כי התרפים דברו און והנה יעשו אותם קטני אמנה להם לאלהים לא ישאלו בשם הנכבד ולא יתפללו אליו רק כל מעשיהם בקסמים אשר יגידו להם התרפים

Ramban suggests that the term comes from the fact that their words are like a weak prophecy (נבואה רפה) and not very reliable.

If the terafim were magical objects, it is not clear why Lavan refers to them as gods. Ramban asserts that many people would turn their terafim into gods, much the way the Israelites strayed after the "אפוד" set up by Gidon.² Thus, too, Lavan might have considered the terafim as gods,⁸ even if they were not originally intended as such. Radak similarly suggests that Lavan referred to the objects as gods because he trusted in them as one would in the word of God.

What is problematic about this interpretation, given verses we already saw above?

31: 22 On the third day, Laban was informed that Jacob had fled.

31: 23 He took along his kinsmen and pursued [Jacob] for seven days, intercepting him in the Gilead Mountains.

1. Why did Rachel not get rid of them immediately?
2. What does this interpretation assume about Rachel's belief in the power of these objects?

This is brought out by the view of the Source 13: Baalei HaTosafot:

ותשב עליהם - דחקה את התרפים בכח שלא יצעקו

There is also skepticism on the part of some of our commentators on the possibility that these terafim could actually even come close to predicting anything:

Source 14: Ralbag

בשעות ידועות יתעורר בה הכח הדמיוני אשר לקוסם וישמע כאילו קול נמוך מדבר אליו בענין העתידות אשר תשוטט מחשבתו בהם; לא שזאת הצורה תדבר, כי זה בלתי אפשר, כי הדיבור לא יהיה בזולת כליו אשר שם בו ה' יתעלה בטבע.

These things could not talk – that's impossible, because speech was only granted by God to one who has the natural 'tools' to speak

Source 15: Rav Yaakov Medan,
The Theft of the Terafim and the Covenant at Mitzpa-Gal'ed

...I wish to propose a third possibility, which focuses not only the *terafim* themselves as idols or as instruments of divination, but rather on the implications of the theft. From Mesopotamian archaeological sources,⁽¹⁾ it seems that *terafim*, owing to their "sanctity" in the eyes of their owners, were used as receptacles for storing pledges and contracts of sales, loans, and other monetary agreements. The significance of storing such documents inside the *terafim* was that the "god" would testify in an argument between a creditor and a borrower who denied a loan and refused to pay, or between a buyer, who had paid the price of his purchase, and the seller, who denied the sale and was unwilling to hand over the field.

We might therefore propose that Lavan had placed somewhere inside the *terafim* the work agreement between himself and Yaakov, which Yaakov had now breached by fleeing from Lavan's house. Lavan should have been able to take the agreement, which was a binding contract, follow Yaakov to wherever he went, and demand of the local judges that Yaakov be returned to his service - perhaps even that he become his eternal slave, in the wake of his violation of the agreement. In the haste of the escape, Rachel did not have time to search for this particular document; she took all the *terafim*, containing all of Lavan's documents, to prevent this scenario from being realized.

If this is so, there is some similarity between what Rachel did and what happened at the time of the building of the Second Temple. King Cyrus (Koresh) gave the Jews permission to rebuild the Temple, but he or his successor later rescinded this license following slanderous reports by other inhabitants of the land.

Some eighteen years later, the prophets Chaggai and Zekharia sought to continue the building, despite the rescinding of the license. When the governor of the neighboring province arrived, demanding explanations, the Jewish elders showed him the edict permitting the building - but said nothing of its later cancellation.

A search of the archives of the king of Persia was conducted, but the document cancelling the license to the Jews had disappeared, and King Darius (Daryavesh) permitted them to continue the construction, even going so far as to provide support and aid. The happy ending came about thanks to a missing document.

Here, too, the work agreement between Lavan and Yaakov disappeared with the theft of the *terafim*, and Lavan had no way of forcing Yaakov back into his service. But Rachel paid for this with her life.

Source 16: Bereishit Ch. 35

טז וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל, וַיְהִי-עוֹד
כְּבֵרֶת-הָאָרֶץ לָבוֹא אֶפְרָתָה; וַתֵּלֶד
רָחֵל, וַתִּקַּשׁ בְּלִדְתָּהּ. 16 And they journeyed from Beth-el; and there was
still some way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel
travailed, and she had hard labour.

יז וַיְהִי בְהַקְשָׁתָהּ, בְּלִדְתָּהּ; וַתֹּאמֶר
לָהּ הַמִּיֻלְדֶּת אֶל-תִּירְאִי, כִּי-גַם-זֶה
לְךָ בֵּן. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour,
that the mid-wife said unto her: 'Fear not; for this also
is a son for thee.'

יח וַיְהִי בְצֵאת נַפְשָׁהּ, כִּי מָתָה,
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ, בֶּן-אוֹנִי; וְאָבִיו, קָרָא-
לוֹ בְנִימִין. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing--
for she died--that she called his name Ben-oni; but his
father called him Benjamin.

Moisè Tedeschi Moshe Yitzhak Ashkenazi Hebrew: (משה יצחק אשכנזי) was an Italian rabbi and Bible commentator. He is primarily known for writing the commentary Hoil Moshe. Tedeschi was born on June 6, 1821 and died June 17, 1898. He lived nearly all his life in Trieste, Italy. At age 10 his father died, and the family was reduced to "limited but quiet" circumstances. His teachers included Shemuel Chayyim Zalman and Samuel David Luzzatto. As an adult, he worked as a teacher in the local Jewish schools and later for individuals. For a brief period in 1861, he served as a rabbi of Spoleto.

Source 16: Commentary of Ho'il Moshe

ורחל לקחה את התרפים – התרפים לא היו ע"ז ממש אלא ניחוש שעל ידם תתברך עקרת הבית בפרי בטן... ועכ"פ נכנסים תחת סוג האלילים כמו שנכנסים הניחושים תחת סוג ע"ז, לפי שמיחסים פעולת הבורא אל הנבראים, ויצדק לומר עליהם למה גנבת את אלהי, ובזה יובן איך היה שרחל לקחה אותן, וגם היה נמצא אחד מהם בידי מיכל העקרה (ש"א י"ט, י"ג).

The Hoil Moshe asserts that Rachel wanted more children,²⁴ and hoped that the terafim would help.²⁵ He suggests that the barren Michal²⁶ had terafim in her house for the same reason.

Source 17: Ibn Ezra – a real cleansing of foreign gods, including the stolen Terafim

(ב-ד) ויאמר יעקב לביתו ואל כל אשר עמו הסירו את אלהי הנכר אשר בתוכם – כי עד עתה לא אמ' להם זה והנה רחל גנבה את התרפים אשר לאביה, כי על תורת אביהם היו כולם, הנשים והבנים, וככה כתי' שם: "אלהי אברהם ואלהי נחור ישפטו בנינו אלהי אבהם" (בראשית ל"א: ג). והטהרו – שתרחצו עצמכם, בעבור כי עד עתה עבדתם אלהי הנכר; על כן: והחליפו שמלותיכם – כענין: "והסירה את שמלת שביה" (דבי כ"א: ג). כי העובד ע"ז כל מלבושיו וכל תכשיטיו טמאים, ואסורים אפילו בהנאה, על כן נתנו לו הזמים ויעקב טמנם.

"**עם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יִחֶיהָ**" and Rachel's early death – *If Rachel really took the idols for her own use, and especially if she worshiped them as idols, it is easy to posit a connection between Yaakov's curse and Rachel's demise. Soon after they are "found" in Shekhem, she dies in childbirth.*

Source 18: Rav Yehuda Rock, Yaakov's Oath and Rachel's Terafim

If we accept the above explanation – suggesting that Rachel had (or expressed) no view, either negative or positive, with regard to the *terafim*, it would seem that she transgressed in holding onto them and not discarding them. But the Ibn Ezra's explanation presents some difficulty, since it assumes details that have no basis in the verses themselves. Apparently, he is correct in concluding that there was no intention on Rachel's part of protesting, preventing or halting her father's idolatrous practices. However, we are led to the opposite conclusion – Rachel wanted the *terafim* for herself. When someone steals something, the most basic motivation is that he wants the thing for himself. *Terafim* represent, in the Torah, a magical means of knowing the future, and there were people – such as Lavan – who went so far as to deify them (31:30). But their primary use was for telling the future, and not necessarily as deities for worship (see Ramban on 31:19). Therefore, we cannot suggest that Rachel worshipped them as her father did; we conclude that she wanted them merely for the purposes of divining.

Essentially it seems that Rachel did accept the God of Yaakov, and her appeals concerning childbirth were to Him. But her fundamental approach was one that had been molded and steeped in magical practices, and this influenced the manner in which she related to Divine Providence. Rachel saw no real contradiction between worshipping God and divining through the *terafim*. From the context of the *parasha* it seems that the use of the *terafim* was meant to somehow aid Rachel's efforts to give birth.

(It is interesting to note that one generation later, when Yosef recreates for his brothers their situation when they sold him, this time with Binyamin in the role of victim, he leads them to think that Binyamin has stolen the royal goblet that he uses for divination. The brothers, it appears, justified their treatment of Yosef by regarding him as the "son of Rachel – who stole the *terafim*." Yosef tests whether they will abandon Binyamin, who has "stolen" the goblet of divination, in the same way that they cast him out of the family as the son of someone who had stolen vessels of divination.)

Immediately after Yaakov is commanded to go up to Beit El, we are told: "Yaakov said to his household and to all who were with him: Remove the foreign gods that are in your midst... and they gave Yaakov all the foreign gods that were in their possession... and Yaakov buried them under the oak that was at Shekhem" (35:2-4). The Torah testifies that within Yaakov's household there were foreign gods, and that all of them were handed over to Yaakov and buried. This, then, must have included Rachel's *terafim*. Perhaps the words "to his household" hint to Rachel and the *terafim*, as the *Midrash Sekhel Tov* suggests (Baber edition, p. 198). In any event, even if the text is not hinting specifically to her, she is certainly included in the scope of the operation. Thus, at this point she abandons her sin.

It is clear from the context that the meanings of the two names are connected with the circumstances of Rachel's death (since the names are given not immediately after the tidings - "This is another son for you"; rather, we are first told, "And it was as her soul departed - for she died -..."). Let us examine the significance of these two names.

First - Ben Oni. The word *on* usually means "strength." This is clearly not relevant here, for - as noted - the meaning of the name appears to be related to the tragic circumstances of the birth. In [Bereishit Rabba \(82,9\)](#) we read: "*Bar tza'ari*" (The son of my sorrow) in Aramaic." In other words, "Ben Oni" is a name in Aramaic meaning "the son of my sorrow." The Ramban rejects this interpretation, insisting that the name cannot be an Aramaic one, since the names of all of Yaakov's other children are in Hebrew. Both the Ramban and the Ibn Ezra explain the name as being related to *aninut* - mourning. This interpretation, too, is problematic, since mourning is the reaction of the living to a death, not the feeling of the deceased himself just before his death.

It would seem logical, then, to understand the name as being derived from the word *aven* - אָוֵן, meaning vanity, or falsehood. This word is used specifically with reference to the meaninglessness of *terafim*: "For *terafim* have spoken falsehood, and the wizards have foretold lies, and the dreams tell falsehood; they comfort vain" ([Zekharya 10:2](#)). Likewise, "Rebellion is like the transgression of witchcraft, and stubbornness is like falsehood and *terafim*" ([I Shemuel 15:23](#)). "*Aven*," then, is related to the word "*ein*," or "*ayin*" (denoting negation). It appears that Rachel understood that her suffering and her death in childhood were a result of her sin concerning the *terafim*, in particular, and the vanity and falsehood of her attempt to influence, through magic means, the heavenly system in general (and even though she had repented, she still needed atonement). Rachel gave voice to this understanding in the name that she gave to her son, thereby expressing regret for her actions and accepting Divine justice.