

## **The Answer Is “No.” Would You Like to Know Now or Later?**

**Living in your imagination is highly seductive. It’s also pointless.**

By [Aharon Loschak](#)



That was the question my life coach presented to me one afternoon. We were going through some strategies on how to best pitch an idea to someone I figured would like the opportunity. I was hopeful about my chances with this person, but according to my calculations, the “right” time to ask had not yet arrived. I was waiting around for the perfect opportunity, and then . . . well, my imagination was coming up with endless possibilities.

And it was then that my coach asked me the question: “If the answer is going to be ‘no,’ when would you like to find out? Now, or in six months?”

Put that way, there was only one thing I could do. I picked up the phone, popped the question, and—warning, this isn’t a happy ending—I got a resounding “no.”

### **A Land of Endless Opportunity**

The ending might be anti-climactic, but I learned something that day. I learned that as seductive as it is to live in my own head, it’s ultimately pointless. For months I was nursing a dream of large checks and photo ops. And what was it, really?

Nothing. Zip. Zero.

But it was so tantalizing. As long as I was still in the world of my own imagination, I was basically Superman, with endless opportunity. It’s so comfortable there, so inspiring, so limitless! Why would anyone want to leave that golden land?

It’s understandable. But as much as we all love the chance at reaching infinity, reality is grounded not in our heads, but in the world around us. To live in *this* world, we must squeeze and contain our thoughts into finite, limited, boring words and see what happens. Sometimes the answer is “no,” sometimes you get lucky with a “yes.” That’s not as important as the fact that once you’ve asked, you’ve finally moved into the world of real results.

## **Leah the Fruitful, Rachel the Barren**

I found hints to this idea in an interesting narrative that plays out in the Parshah.<sup>1</sup> We read of a woebegone Jacob fleeing for his life and finally arriving at his uncle's house. Once there, he sets his sights on his future wife, his uncle Laban's daughter Rachel.

Here the Torah tells us that Laban in fact had two daughters, the other of whom was named Leah. Though Leah was older, Jacob always loved Rachel, and it was for her hand in marriage that he toiled seven brutal years for his uncle. Yet he was duped into marrying Leah, and it was only after he agreed to break his back for another seven years that he was allowed to marry his original love, Rachel.

But as much as Jacob loved Rachel, it was Leah who was having all the kids. Once, twice . . . six times she gave birth before Rachel even had the merit to fall pregnant.

Yet, although Leah bore him the majority of his children, Jacob maintained his primary residence with Rachel. Never wavering from his love, he insisted on remaining with Rachel, and considered her his "mainstay." Eventually Rachel did give birth,<sup>2</sup> but it was only after much heartache and even more time.

This is all very intriguing, but the question is, why did Rachel have such bad luck? Why was Leah giving birth to so many kids, while Rachel was barren for so long? And if Jacob saw that Leah was the one with the blessing of children, why did that not command more of his attention? Of course, Rachel was his original love, but surely the reality of so many children ought to have impacted his decisionmaking?

## **Living in Your Head Will Bear You Endless Children**

Kabbalah teaches us that Leah is a metaphor for the world of thought, while Rachel is a metaphor for the world of speech. It was for this reason that while Leah had so many children, Jacob always really loved Rachel.<sup>3</sup>

You see, in the world of thought, the wonderful, creative and fertile world of the imagination, there are so many "children" to be had. As long as you're still living in your own head, with no one to take you to task and no pesky reality to get in the way, you can keep on having an endless amount of "kids."

But that world is an *imaginary* world. It's a universe that exists only in your head, in your own wild and limitless imagination, but not in the world that everyone else is living in. As such, as much as it hurts to recognize this, it's not a world that makes a difference to anyone else—including, ultimately, yourself.

It's extraordinarily tempting. There are so many "kids" in your imaginary world. They're smiling, attractive and prolific. But they're stuck in your head. They're "thought kids."

Leah's actual kids were, of course, real. But metaphorically speaking, they represent grandiose plans in our head, trapped as they are somewhere on the highway between thought and speech.

Rachel is the world of speech. The cold, hard world where creativity and imagination must be recorded on paper and articulated for others to hear. Once you start doing that, the theoretical kids start vanishing rapidly, and all of a sudden you find yourself attending the funeral of so many lost hopes, dreams and creative bursts.

That could be downright depressing.

But the good news is that the ideas that survive—the one or two “children” whom Rachel did indeed bear—are real. If you’ve managed to squeeze your ambitions and plans into a properly articulated speech, document or painting, you’ll know that it’s finally going to happen. It is now in the *real* world.

Think about when you’re working on your weekly schedule. For those of you who don’t have weekly planners or a good app on your phone, opting to juggle it all inside your head instead, you’ll know what I’m talking about: When you consider your work hours, the outing with your friend, your “me-time” watching television and the errand you have to run, somehow it all seems to work. “Yeah, I got this. I’ll squeeze it all in, and have time to take my oldest kid out for ice cream, too.”

But then reality happens, and whoops! There’s not enough time. The work hours pile up, something goes on too long, an unexpected emergency comes up, and the ice cream outing is a long-forgotten promise.

But if you take the time to speak it out, to put a pen to paper, to use a good working app, and actually go through the week and map out your schedule, you have a good chance at succeeding. Sure, you may have to knock off a few things you were planning to do, but whatever remains on your schedule is now a good bet.

That is why Jacob loved Rachel so much. As much as Leah was so prolific, her efforts represented something that lacks true impact on our terrestrial landscape. Jacob loved Rachel because while she was indeed far less prolific, the ultimate product was real.

Be like Jacob. Resist the temptation of the many “thought children” you’ll bear in your own head, and cross the bridge into the reality of articulating your dreams.

Footnotes

[1.](#)

Genesis 29.

[2.](#)

[Genesis 30:22.](#)

[3.](#)

*Torah Ohr*, Vayetze 22d–23b.

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