

From Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Beginning of Desire*  
(New York: Schocken, 2011, pp. 374-379)

**Rachel's death "on the way" prepares her to serve her children on their way to exile (Jer 31:15-16).** That she is buried in a "no place" between the Land and exile "leaves her exposed, unplaced—and therefore responsive to her children's pain at their point of dispersal." **Her power of intercession, her tears, is seen in midrash as most powerful of all the ancestors, because she taught God about mercy in the face of "other wives"** (Leah, and foreign divinities worshipped by "her children" leading to exile)...

In Maharal's midrash, she is "speaking of theological issues... in terms of her most intimate experience. ... **The story of Jacob and Rachel's love for each other becomes a paradigm for metaphysical reality.**" **"she is the primary and ultimate symbol of integration, the dream mother of the Jewish people.** It is she, therefore, who suffers the diffusion and exile of her children"...

"In Maharal's reading, therefore, heroic complexity, **a kind of tragic optimism, radiates from the figure of Rachel, buried 'by the way.'** **It is this painful radiance, I suggest, that overwhelms Jacob's memory, just at the moment when he is about to synthesize the exiled fragments of his world.** ... Rachel can hold a position at the margin between reality and appearances, on the border between meaning and meaninglessness. For Jacob, the tension underlying such a position is sometimes unbearable. At the very moment of reintegration, it precipitates him into the blank."

"Unlike Rachel, however, Jacob's work is not to be the work of tears, but of words." cf. Amos 5:4; "Derisha, midrash, is the work of continuing translations in the face of mystery."