

- (2) And he looked and behold, a well in the field, and there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks and there was a large stone over the mouth of the well.
- (3) When all the flocks would gather there, they [the shepherds] would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep.
- (4) Yaakov said to them, “My brothers, where are you from?” They said, “We are from Charan.”
- (5) He said to them, “Do you know Lavan, the son of Nachor?” They said, “We know [him].”
- (6) He said to them, “Is he well?” They said, “He is well. Look! His daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.”
- (7) He said, “The day is still long. It is not the time to gather in the livestock. Water the flock and go out and graze [the animals].”
- (8) They said, “We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered and they roll the stone off the mouth of the well. Then we may water the sheep.”
- (9) While he was still talking to them, Rachel came with the sheep that belonged to her father because she was a shepherdess.
- (10) When Yaakov saw Rachel, the daughter of Lavan, his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Lavan, his mother’s brother, he approached and removed the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan, his mother’s brother.
- (11) Yaakov kissed Rachel; he raised his voice and wept.

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## YAAKOV MEETS RACHEL AT THE WELL

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### Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Yaakov ask the shepherds where they came from (verse 4)? Wasn’t it obvious that they came from the nearby town of Charan?
2. Why does he address them as “*my brothers*”?
3. In verse 6, what is the connection between the words,

- (ב) וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה בָּאָר בִּשְׂדֵה וְהִנֵּה־שָׁם שְׁלֹשָׁה עֲדָרֵי־צֹאן רֹבְצִים עֲלֶיהָ כִּי מִן־הַבָּאָר הֵּוּא יִשְׁקוּ הָעֲדָרִים וְהָאֶבֶן גְּדֹלָה עַל־פִּי הַבָּאָר.
- (ג) וַנֶּאֱסָפוּ־שָׁמָּה כָּל־הָעֲדָרִים וַגִּלְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבָּאָר וְהִשְׁקוּ אֶת־הַצֹּאן וְהִשִּׁיבוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן עַל־פִּי הַבָּאָר לְמִקְוָה.
- (ד) וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם יַעֲקֹב אַחֵי מַאִין אַתֶּם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִחֶרֶן אֲנַחְנוּ.
- (ה) וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הִידַעְתֶּם אֶת־לָבֵן בֶּן־נָחוֹר וַיֹּאמְרוּ יָדַעְנוּ.
- (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל בָּתוּלָה בָּאָה עִם־הַצֹּאן.
- (ז) וַיֹּאמֶר הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גְּדוֹל לֹא־עֵת הָאֶסֶף הַמְּקִנָּה הַשְּׁקוּ הַצֹּאן וּלְכוּ רְעוּ.
- (ח) וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נוֹכַח עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵאָסְפוּ כָּל־הָעֲדָרִים וַגִּלְלוּ אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבָּאָר וְהִשְׁקִינוּ הַצֹּאן.
- (ט) עוֹדְנוּ מְדַבֵּר עִמָּם וְרָחֵל בָּאָה עִם־הַצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ כִּי רְעָה הִיא.
- (י) וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת־רָחֵל בַּת־לָבֵן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ וְאֶת־צֹאן לָבֵן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּגַּל אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבָּאָר וַיִּשְׁקוּ אֶת־צֹאן לָבֵן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ.
- (יא) וַיִּשְׁקוּ יַעֲקֹב לְרָחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קִלּוֹ וַיִּבֶן.

*“He (Lavan) is well,” and the continuation of the verse, “Look! His daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep?”*

4. In verse 6 it just says: *“Rachel is coming with the sheep,”* whereas in verse 9 it says: *Rachel came with the sheep that belonged to her father because she was a shepherdess.* Why is all that additional information necessary?
5. Why is Lavan consistently described as Yaakov’s *mother’s brother* in verse 10?
6. Why did Yaakov kiss Rachel, and why did he then cry (verse 11)?

When Yaakov got to Charan and saw the shepherds lounging beside the well, he did not realize that they were unable to remove the stone from the well until more shepherds would arrive (because it was so heavy). Rather, he thought that they were being lazy and negligent regarding their work, and he wanted to express his disapproval of this improper behavior.<sup>28</sup> However, he felt that it was imprudent to criticize them immediately, for he was a stranger to them and they would not take kindly to his comments.<sup>29</sup> He therefore decided to engage them initially in polite conversation, asking, “Where are you from?” This, even though he knew that they came from the nearby town of Charan. [This answers Question 1.] He then continued the casual conversation by asking them if they knew Lavan, and if he was well. Only then did he feel ready to express his criticism (verse 29:7): “*The day is still long. It is not the time to gather in the livestock.*”

Answer to  
Question 1

Yaakov was also concerned that the shepherds might misinterpret his question about where they were from. They might reason that Yaakov thought that they were bad people and was trying to ascertain what unethical city they came from. He therefore began his words by calling them “*my brothers*,” implying that they were his moral equals. [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to  
Question 2

The shepherds responded to Yaakov’s inquiry about Lavan, saying, “*He is well (שָׁלוֹם).*”<sup>30</sup> *Look! His daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.*” What is the connection between those two statements?

We may find the answer to this question by contrasting our episode to one that occurred hundreds of years later. In the time of Moshe, the Torah tells us, the daughters of Yisro were

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28. As the Alshich notes, this point is made by the Midrash in *Bereishis Rabbah* 70:11, commenting on verse 29:7.

29. The Alshich compares this to the people of Sedom’s reaction to Lot’s criticism of their plans to molest his guests (see *Bereishis* 19:8–9).

30. Lit., in peace. See further.

shepherding their father's sheep, and came to the well to draw water. The shepherds of Midian chased them away (according to the Midrash,<sup>31</sup> they also threatened them with bodily harm) and Moshe saved them.<sup>32</sup> The reason for all this enmity, the Midrash explains, is that the people of Midian were angry at Yisro for having rejected idolatry, to the point that they excommunicated him.<sup>33</sup> In our case, the shepherds described Lavan to Yaakov with the term שָׁלוֹם, meaning: Lavan lives in peace with his neighbors; there is no enmity or conflict between him and anyone else. To prove their point, the shepherds continued, "Look! His daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep. The fact that Lavan's daughter feels safe enough by herself to join us proves that what we are saying is true." [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to  
Question 3

Verse 9, with all its additional information about the sheep belonging to Lavan and Rachel being a shepherdess, comes to teach us a specific lesson: one who becomes associated with a *tzaddik* will benefit greatly. Our Sages<sup>34</sup> noted that until Yaakov came to Charan, Lavan had no male children and no wealth. Yaakov's presence then caused a blessing to descend upon Lavan's household. The Torah alludes to this here when it tells us that these were *the sheep that belonged to her father* — in other words, these were the only sheep he had and that is why, as young as she was, Rachel was able to watch over all of them. And from the words, *because she was a shepherdess*, we see that Lavan had no sons, for otherwise he would not have sent his young daughter out to the fields. [This answers Question 4.]

Answer to  
Question 4

Verse 10 then describes Lavan as *his (Yaakov's) mother's brother* three times. Why all the repetition? The Torah is telling us that

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31. *Shemos Rabbah* 1:32.

32. *Shemos* 2:16–17.

33. The Midrash there says that as part of this excommunication, no one was permitted to shepherd Yisro's sheep; this is why his daughters had to do so.

34. *Bereishis Rabbah* 73:12.

(12) Yaakov related (טָאָר) to Rachel that he was her father's brother and that he was Rivkah's son; she ran and related [this] to her father.

(13) When Lavan heard the news about Yaakov his sister's son, he ran toward him and hugged him (וַל — lit., to him) and kissed him (וַל); he brought him to his house and he (Yaakov) recounted all these things to Lavan.

(14) Lavan said to him, "Nevertheless you are my flesh and blood!" He (Yaakov) stayed with him for a month.

(15) Lavan told Yaakov, "Are (אֵינִי) you my brother that you are working for me for free? Tell me what your payment is."

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Yaakov did not remove the stone from the well and water the sheep out of a desire to marry the beautiful Rachel, but solely because she was *the daughter of Lavan, his mother's brother*, and because the sheep belonged to *Lavan, his mother's brother*. There was no self-interest in his actions; all his actions were because they were *the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother*. [This answers Question 5.]

We asked above (Question 6) why Yaakov wept when he kissed Rachel. Perhaps we can compare this to an incident recorded in the Gemara<sup>35</sup> concerning R' Akiva:

R' Akiva saw the wife of the wicked Turnus Rufus. He spat, laughed and wept. He spat because she came from a putrid drop [of semen]; he laughed because she was destined to convert and marry him; he cried because such beauty would [eventually] rot in the earth.

The real reason he spat was in order not to be seduced by her outstanding beauty.<sup>36</sup> By reminding himself of her putrid origin, and concretizing this thought with the act of spitting, he

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35. *Avodah Zarah* 20a.

36. The *Ran* in *Nedarim* 50b tells us that she had adorned herself and specifically gone to find Rabbi Akiva with the intention of making him sin.

(יב) וַיִּגְדַּע יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל כִּי אָחִי אָבִיָּהּ הוּא וְכִי בְּוֶרְבֵּקָה הוּא וַתִּרְצֶה וַתִּגְדַּע לְאָבִיָּהּ.

(יג) וַיְהִי כְשִׁמְעַתְּ לָבֵן אֶת־שִׁמְעַתְּ יַעֲקֹב בְּוֶאֱחָתוֹ וַיִּרְצֶה לְקַרְאָתוֹ וַיַּחֲבֹק־לוֹ וַיִּנְשָׁק־לוֹ וַיְבִיאֶהוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיְסַפֵּר לְלָבֵן אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה.

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לָבֵן אַךְ עַצְמִי וּבִשְׂרֵי אֶתָּה וַיֵּשֶׁב עִמּוֹ חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים.

(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר לָבֵן לַיַּעֲקֹב הֲכִי־אָחִי אֶתָּה וַעֲבַדְתָּנִי חָנָם הֲגִידָה לִּי מֵהַמְּשַׁכְּרָתָהּ.

was able to control his *yetzer hara*. Yaakov did not need to do this, since he had complete control over his *yetzer hara*.<sup>37</sup> But the other two actions of R' Akiva do have their parallel here: Yaakov laughed with joy for the same reason as R' Akiva — he foresaw that Rachel was his true soul-mate and that he was destined to marry her. Indeed, this is why he kissed her, for according to Kabbalah, a kiss creates a connection between two souls. And Yaakov cried for the same reason as R' Akiva as well, namely, that Rachel was exceedingly beautiful and he knew that this physical beauty would eventually wither away. [This answers Question 6.]

Answer to  
Question 6

## YAAKOV MEETS LAVAN

Consider the following questions:

1. Why did Yaakov tell Rachel (verse 12) that he was *her father's brother* when in fact he was her father's nephew? And why did he then add separately that *he was Rivkah's son*? It would have been more natural for Yaakov to combine both points in a single statement.

37. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 79:1.