

YAAKOV MEETS LAVAN

Chapter 29

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

(ב) וַיַּגִּד יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל כִּי אָחִי אָבִיהָ הוּא וְכִי בֶן רִבְקָה הוּא וְתָרַץ וַתַּגִּיד לְאָבִיהָ.

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

(ג) וַיְהִי כַשְׁמֹעַ לָבָן אֶת שְׁמֵעַ יַעֲקֹב בֶּן אָחִיתוֹ וַיָּרֶץ לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיַּחֲבֹק לוֹ וַיִּנָּשֶׁק לוֹ וַיְבִיאוּהוּ אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וַיְסַפֵּר לָלָבָן אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה.

Consider the following questions:

- 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 Rivka's son* instead of simply stating both points together?
- Why did Rachel rush to tell her father rather than her mother? When Rivka had met Avraham's servant Eliezer at a well, she ran to tell her mother.
- Why does it say (verse 13) that Lavan *heard the news about Yaakov* rather than "he heard what Yaakov had said to Rachel"? And what was this news that caused Lavan to suddenly run toward Yaakov – which he had not done until this point?
- Why does the Torah say לוֹ וַיִּנָּשֶׁק לוֹ, literally, *he hugged to him and he kissed to him*, instead of וַיַּחֲבֹק וַיִּנָּשֶׁק, which would be the regular way of saying that he hugged and kissed him?

Yaakov was concerned about the stark contrast between how he was arriving to Lavan's family and how Eliezer had come to the same family years earlier when sent by Avraham. When Eliezer, a mere servant, had come to take Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak, he had come with ten camels laden with treasures and gifts. In contrast, Yaakov, who was a master and not a servant, was coming penniless. What would his relatives think? He therefore felt it necessary to tell Rachel that the reason he had no gifts was that he was fleeing from Esav who wanted to kill him for having stolen his blessing. But he worried that this would make him seem like a thieving, deceitful person, especially since he had needed to trick his own father in order to receive the blessing. Yaakov therefore conveyed to Rachel everything that had happened – but only in a brief, hinting manner. "It is true that I am your *father's brother* – i.e., I am similar to him. Just as he is well known as a master of deceit, I too am capable in the art of deceit, which I used to take Esav's blessing. But there is a difference between us. I am *Rivka's son*. I am the son of the righteous Rivka and I take after her. All the deceit that we practiced was for the sake of Heaven."

Yaakov used two separate expressions in describing to Rachel who he was because they conveyed completely different aspects of his identity. He was her *father's brother* in the deception he used to get the blessing; but he was *Rivka's son* in righteousness. **[This answers Question 1.]**

To explain why Rachel ran to tell her father about Yaakov's arrival rather than her mother, our Sages (*Bereishis Rabbah* 70:13) felt compelled to say that Rachel's mother was no longer alive. But perhaps there is a different explanation. Rivka had received beautiful jewelry as a gift from Eliezer. She was afraid that if she went straight to her father (Besuel), he would suspect something immodest had occurred and get angry at her before she had a chance to explain what had happened. Rivka therefore went first to her mother, who would listen to her more patiently, and would then explain things to her father. But Rachel came home from the well **without** gifts; she just had some news to tell. She therefore went straight to her father. After all, Yaakov was his blood-relative, not her mother's; and, in addition, it was her father, not her mother, who would naturally be the one who would go out to greet the guest and accompany him back to their house. **[This answers Question 2.]**

Lavan heard Rachel say that Yaakov had arrived with no camels bearing gifts (as Eliezer had), and he saw that Rachel had not received any rings or bracelets. He therefore assumed at first that Yaakov had brought gifts but had been robbed on the way. And since Yaakov had nothing to give them, there was no point in running out to greet him. However, Lavan then heard reports from various sources that Yaakov had single-handedly removed the massive stone covering the well, something which normally required the combined efforts of all the local shepherds. Someone who was strong enough to move such a huge stone would surely be able to overpower any attackers. Furthermore, he heard that the water in the well had risen toward Yaakov to help him water the sheep. If Yaakov was worthy of such miracles, then certainly God would have protected him on his mission. This is the meaning of the words, *When Lavan heard the news about Yaakov*. It is not referring to what Yaakov had told Rachel; it is referring, rather, to Yaakov's exploits at the well. **[This answers Question 3.]**

It was now clear to Lavan that Yaakov could not have been robbed; he **must** have precious gifts with him. If they were not visible, it must simply be that Yaakov was hiding them somewhere. Lavan therefore ran out to meet him. As the above Midrash explained, Lavan hugged Yaakov tightly to see if he could feel any gems on his person, and kissed him to see if there was something hidden in his mouth. The Sages learned this from the unusual wording of the phrase, *וַיִּחַבֵּק לוֹ וַיִּנָּשֶׂק לוֹ*, which may be translated: *He hugged for himself and he kissed for himself*, that is, for his own benefit. **[This answers Question 4.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 – 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKodosh" (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.