Yaakov's Wives – Vayeitzei

הַשִּׁעוּר מֻקְדָּשׁ לִרְפוּאַת שִׁמְעוֹנָה בַּת שָׂרָה

Shiurim Main Menu

וַיֶּאֱהַב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבָדְךָ שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְּטַנָּה (בראשית כט, יח).

The Gemara (בבא בתרא קכג ע״א) says that when Lavan's twin daughters Leah and Rachel were born (Leah came out before Rachel), Rivka and her brother Lavan already made a shidduch between their children. A deal was struck that Rivka's eldest son Eisav would marry Lavan's eldest daughter Leah and the younger Yaakov would marry the younger Rachel.

There was a substantial age difference between the bride grooms and the brides. When Yaakov met Rachel for the first time, he was 77-years-old and she was 5-years-old. This is why Yaakov agreed to work for Lavan for *seven* years to marry Rachel, because he wanted to marry her only when she was child bearing age (R' Bachyei, בראשית כט, טו).

The only difference in physical appearance between the identical twin sisters Leah and Rachel was that Leah had no eyelashes. The Gemara (above) says that Leah asked passing travelers to tell her about her future husband Eisav and when she heard what a רָשָׁע he was, she cried perpetually at the prospect of having to marry such a man and this made her eyelashes fall out. The physical resemblance between the sisters explains to a large degree how Lavan managed to switch Leah and Rachel under the chuppah without Yaakov immediately noticing.

There are many questions regarding Yaakov marrying Leah and Rachel.

The first question is why did Yaakov *choose* to marry Rachel and not Leah? After all, Yaakov purchased the בְּכוֹרָה from Eisav and *he* was now, in effect, the בְּכוֹר. As such, he should have married the *eldest* daughter, Leah, and the now "no-longer" בְּכוֹר Eisav should have married Rachel.

The second question is if Yaakov was now in fact the בְּכוֹר, why was Leah crying until her eyelashes fell out? If she knew she was going to marry the de facto בְּכוֹר Yaakov, she should have been overjoyed.

The third question is why did Lavan switch Rachel under the chuppah with Leah. Lavan was a רָשָׁע, wouldn't he have preferred to have Eisav, also a רָשָׁע, as his son in law, rather than the "charedi" Yaakov?

The fourth question is how could Yaakov marry both sisters while they were both alive? The Torah specifically forbids that וְאִשָּׁה אֶל אֲחֹתָהּ לֹא תִקָּח לִצְרֹר לְגַלֹּות עֶרְוָתָהּ עָלֶיהָ בְּחַיֶּיהָ (ויקרא יח, יח).

The fifth question is why did Eisav, when he heard his mother and father voicing their disapproval for his marrying the Canaanites Bosmat and Yehudit, not go straight to *Charan* and marry Leah/Rachel? Why did he instead go and marry Machalat, the daughter of Yishmael?

The sixth question is if one of the sisters (Rachel/Leah) was intended for Eisav, why did Eisav never bear a grudge against Yaakov for marrying them both?

Before we begin to dive in and answer all these questions, I would like to preface the answers with a very interesting phenomenon.

At the end of last week's parsha we read וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו (בראשית כח, ה). Theoretically the passuk could have sufficed by saying לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה. Why do we have the extra addition of אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו? We know that Rivka is the mother of Yaakov and Eisav, the entire parsha of Toldot is about that! These words seem extraneous. Rashi on this passuk says אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו: אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה מְּלַמְּדֵנוּ. "I 'do not know' what this comes to teach us".

Rashi is unique amongst the Mefarshim in this regard. The other Mefarshim, if they do not understand the reason, they simply *skip* over the passuk and omit any perush there. Rashi, on the other hand, does not skip over anything. If he doesn't know something, he admits "I don't know". This is not the only occurrence of such a phenomenon, there are numerous others in Rashi's perush on the Torah and the Gemara.

Many of the Mefarshim on Rashi (המעלות לשלמה, שפתי חכמים, משכיל לדוד, וכו') address this phenomenon and provide different explanations for it. Some say that it is Rashi's humility, that he admits when he does not know the answer, as it says in the Mishna וְעַל מַה שֶּׁלֹּא שָׁמַע אוֹמֵר לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי (אבות ה, ז). Some say that it is not that Rashi doesn't know the answer, but rather that there are many different perushim and Rashi doesn't know which of them are *correct*. Others say that Rashi himself never wrote the words אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ and they were later additions written by his talmidim. Towards the end of shiur, I would like to suggest another reason why Rashi says אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה מְּלַמְּדֵנוּ.

The key to answering all our questions above is another simple question - "Who knew about Eisav's sale of the בְּכוֹרָה to Yaakov?"

We just assume that since the Torah describes it *at length* in the beginning of parshat Toldot – how Eisav came in tired from the field, how Yaakov "poured" the food down his throat like feeding a camel, how Eisav despised the בְּכוֹרָה etc. etc. – that it was *common* knowledge. As we will now see, this was not the case.

In last week's parsha, after Yaakov "stole" Eisav's bracha, Eisav returns from hunting and discovers that Yaakov got the bracha instead of him. Eisav cries out וַיֹּאמֶר הֲכִי קָרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי זֶה פַּעֲמַיִם אֶת בְּכֹרָתִי לָקָח וְהִנֵּה עַתָּה לָקַח בִּרְכָתִי (כז, לו). Rashi there says that Yitzchak was *very afraid* וַיֶּחֱרַד יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְּדֹלָה עַד מְאֹד, that he had given the bracha of the בְּכוֹר to the *wrong* son - until Eisav uttered those words וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי זֶה פַּעֲמַיִם, first he took the בְּכוֹרָה from me and now he has taken my bracha. When Eisav told Yitzchak *that*, Yitzchak calmed down because he *now* knew that the bracha had gone to the *correct* son.

What this means is that Yitzchak, until now, did *not* know about the sale of the בְּכוֹרָה. And he wasn't the only one, Leah *also* didn't know. If she did, she wouldn't have been crying. If she knew that Yaakov was de facto the בְּכוֹר, she would have retained her eyelashes. Leah knew about Yaakov "deceiving Yitzchak" with the *bracha* – this was her answer to Yaakov the morning after they were married. Yaakov asked her "How could you deceive me last night and say you were Rachel?" to which Leah replied "I learnt that technique from my Rav – you!" (תנחומא ויצא, סימן יא). However, Leah did not know about the sale of the בְּכוֹרָה, she thought Eisav was still the בְּכוֹר and this is why she cried continually.

Prior to Yaakov getting Eisav's bracha, there were only *two* people who knew about the sale of the בְּכוֹרָה – Yaakov and Eisav. After Yaakov got Eisav's bracha, however, it became common knowledge.

וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו. Yitzchak sends Yaakov off to Lavan אֲחִי רִבְקָה - אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו. Seemingly those words אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו are superfluous, everyone knows who Rivka's sons were. However, they are not superfluous at all. Embedded in the passuk is a *hidden message*. The passuk should have said אֵם עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב - that was the order of their birth. Instead, the order is now *reversed* אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו, you think the בְּכוֹר is Eisav, but you are mistaken – the de facto בְּכוֹר is Yaakov! All preceding contracts are now null and void, all bets are off!

Now we understand why Lavan switched Rachel with Leah under the chuppah – Lavan explicitly says it וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן לֹא יֵעָשֶׂה כֵן בִּמְקוֹמֵנוּ לָתֵת הַצְּעִירָה לִפְנֵי הַבְּכִירָה (בראשית כט, כו). "Yaakov – you better than anyone should know that my בְּכוֹרָה Leah is contractually betrothed to Rivka's בְּכוֹר and that is now - you! A contract is a contract". How did Lavan know this – Yitzchak broadcast it for all to hear in the passuk - אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו.

We might think that this put a dent on Lavan's plans, that he would have *preferred* having Eisav for a son in law, however this was not the case, quite the contrary. Lavan was a gilgul of the נָחָשׁ from Gan Eden. What did the נָחָשׁ say to Chava? "Do you know why HKB"H doesn't want you to eat from that tree, because if you do, you will have knowledge like HKB"H and - כָּל אֻמָּן שׂוֹנֵא אֶת בְּנֵי אֻמָּנוּתוֹ". One evil person does not love another evil person, he *hates* him, because they are of the same ilk and are *competition* to each other.

Eisav hears that Yitzchak and Rivka are sending Yaakov off to uncle Lavan in Charan, to get married. Why? וַתֹּאמֶר רִבְקָה אֶל יִצְחָק קַצְתִּי בְחַיַּי מִפְּנֵי בְּנוֹת חֵת אִם לֹקֵחַ יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת חֵת כָּאֵלֶּה מִבְּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לָמָּה לִי חַיִּים (בראשית כז, מו). Eisav has been living with his Hittite wives Bosmat and Yehudit in his parents' home. They have been burning incense for avodah zara round the clock (some Mefarshim say this is what caused Yitzchak to go blind), but not until now does he hear directly what his parents think of his wives.

Understanding that his parents seriously disapprove of his marital choice, Eisav decides to go and marry someone more "fitting". Where have his parents just sent Yaakov? To Lavan (actually, Yaakov did not go straight to Lavan, he first went to learn in yeshivat Shem and Ever for 14 years), to marry Lavan's daughter. Eisav knows of the marital contract between Rivka and Lavan. Why does Eisav not try find favor in his parents' eyes and also go to Lavan and marry Lavan's second daughter as per the contract? Instead, he goes to Yishmael and marries his daughter Machalat.

There are two possible reasons why Eisav did this.

Firstly, he was petrified of Lavan. Lavan worshipped idols called תְּרָפִים. What are תְּרָפִים? They are a kind of black magic. The Midrash (תנחומא ויצא, יב) describes how one makes תְּרָפִים. "You take a בְּכוֹר, you kill him and preserve him with salt and embalming herbs. You take a gold plate (צִיץ) and on it you write the name of the טֻמְאָה (the total opposite to the צִיץ of the Kohen Gadol on which appears the Shem HaMeforash) and you place it under the tongue of the dead בְּכוֹר. You then place the תְּרָפִים recessed into the wall and light candles before them and worship them. The תְּרָפִים then speak, they tell you secrets, like a kind of a fortune teller. Another Midrash (תרגום יונתן, בראשית לא, יט) says that you decapitate the head and place it in the wall, not the whole body. Another source (ספר ציוני, פרשת ויצא, בשם מגילת סתרים) adds an additional detail – the dead בְּכוֹר has to be אָדוֹם, i.e have a "ruddy" complexion. Eisav wouldn't go anywhere near Lavan, because he didn't want to end up *recessed in the wall*.

Secondly, regardless which daughter remained for him to marry, Leah or Rachel, he didn't want to marry either. If he would have married Leah, she would have made him חוֹזֵר בִּתְשׁוּבָה (בן יהוידע, בבא בתרא קכג ע״א). Similarly with Rachel. Eisav did not want to be חוֹזֵר בִּתְשׁוּבָה. In last week's shiur we discussed

that Eisav only wanted עוֹלָם הַזֶּה and not עוֹלָם הַבָּא. He therefore *defied* his parents and went to marry Yishmael's daughter, who obviously did not make him חוֹזֵר בִּתְשׁוּבָה. Neither did Eisav banish his Hittite wives, he continued living with them. This is why Eisav never bore a grudge against Yaakov for marrying both sisters, because he never wanted either of them.

Those were the easy questions to answer - the more difficult questions relate to Yaakov.

Yaakov knew about the sale of the בְּכוֹרָה – it was *his initiative*! He knew that he was now de facto the בְּכוֹר, so by rights, he should have first asked Lavan to marry *Leah*, not Rachel.

The Midrash (תנחומא ויצא, סימן יב) says that Yaakov was petrified of Eisav. Yes, Yaakov *initiated* the sale of the בְּכוֹרָה, but that was only because Eisav despised it and was happy to relinquish it. Yaakov, however, was never שָׁלֵם with taking Eisav's bracha – it was done begrudgingly. If Rivka had not commanded him to do it, he would never have done it. The Midrash (ibid.) says לֹא דַיְּךָ שֶׁלָּקַחְתָּ בְּכוֹרָתִי וּבִרְכָתִי, אֶלָּא עוֹד נָטַלְתָּ אֲרוּסָתִי. Yaakov was petrified that Eisav would claim "Is it not enough that took my birthright and my bracha, you are *also now going to take my fiancé*!"

There is another possible explanation (I could not find a source for this, so take it בְּעֵרָבוֹן מֻגְבָּל). Yaakov knew he was now destined to marry Leah, being the de facto בְּכוֹר. As long as he thought Eisav might still have some intention of marrying Rachel, he did not want to marry her. However, when Yaakov saw that Eisav did *not* go to Charan to marry Rachel, but instead went and married Machalat, he understood that Eisav had no intention of *ever* marrying Rachel. If that was the case and Yaakov married Leah, then Rachel would never marry and remain a spinster. If that were to happen, it is very likely that Rachel's eyelashes would also fall out from weeping for the rest of her life. Therefore, Yaakov specifically *asked to marry Rachel first*, knowing full well that Lavan would cheat and switch Rachel with Leah and then he would end up marrying them both. All the time we think that it was Lavan who was trying to pull a fast one, but it is the other way round – Yaakov was pulling a fast one on Lavan.

Wasn't Yaakov afraid of becoming one of Lavan's תְּרָפִים? After all he was now the בְּכוֹר? The answer is – no, because, unlike Eisav, Yaakov was not אָדוֹם.

Finally, in regard to how could Yaakov marry both sisters while they were still alive? There are many perushim on this. The Ramban (בראשית כו, ה) says that the Avot fully kept the Torah only in Eretz Yisrael – this is why Rachel had to die when Yaakov returned there. The Da'at Zekeinim (בראשית לז, לה) says that the Avot were not obligated to keep the Torah before Har Sinai, they did it because they chose to. The Chizkuni (בראשית כט, כח) says that Rachel and

Leah were born to Lavan from two different mothers, so they were not the type of sisters referred to in the isur in Vayikra. The Re'em (ויקרא כ, יז) says that Rachel and Leah converted before they married Yaakov. When someone converts, they lose their prior familial status. And there are more ...

All the above perushim are correct, but despite them all, in the end Yaakov still understood, deep down that marrying both sisters was something borderline and not לְכַתְּחִלָּה. The Gemara (פסחים קיט ע״ב) describes that in the time of the Geulah, HKB"H will hold a special banquet for all the Tzaddikim. At the end of the seudah, HKB"H asks Avraham to do zimun. Avraham says "Sorry I can't, I gave birth to Yishmael". HKB"H asks Yitzchak, who replies "Sorry I can't, I gave birth to Eisav". HKB"H asks Yaakov, who says "Sorry I can't, I married two sisters while they were both alive". HKB"H asks Moshe, who replies "Sorry I can't, I never merited entering Eretz Yisrael". HKB"H asks Yehoshua, who says "Sorry I can't, I never bore a son". HKB"H asks David who replies "I will do zimun, as it says כּוֹס יְשׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא וּבְשֵׁם ה׳ אֶקְרָא (תהילים קטז, יג)".

Despite this, it was something that had to be done. Rivka knew it had to be done, because Rivka was given special powers of prophecy specifically related to the era of Mashiach. In last week's shiur we learned why Yaakov had to receive the bracha and not Eisav – only Rivka knew this. Rivka was supposed to give birth to twelve sons, the twelve tribes. We know this from the passuk וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי (בראשית כה, כב) - the gematria of זֶּה is 12 (Yalkut Shimoni, ibid.). However, when Eisav exited her womb, he deliberately caused damage so that she would not be able to bear more children (בעל הטורים, בראשית כה, כג). Rivka knew that her son Yaakov would give birth to the Twelve Tribes, but it would only happen if he married both Leah and Rachel – and this would only happen if it was known to all that Yaakov was now the בְּכוֹר. Therefore, the passuk וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו has hidden codes relating to the Geulah and Mashiach.

The gematria of רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is כָּל שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. This is why the seemingly "extraneous" words אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו had to be there. They are *not* extraneous at all. The gematria of אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is רֶמֶז מָשִׁיחַ.

Rashi certainly had Ruach HaKodesh, he certainly understood the hidden depth of these words אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו. But they harbor hidden codes to things that hadn't happened yet, things that didn't exist yet in Rashi's time.

For example - אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו in gematria is גַּרְעִין אִירָאנִי. When Rashi lived there was no country called Iran (the name Iran replaced Persia only in 1935). In the time of Rashi, the atom had not yet been split and there were no nuclear weapons. Rashi could certainly see that the gematria of אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is גַּרְעִין אִירָאנִי, but he did not know what it *meant*. The gematria of אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is

חַמַאס מִנִּשְׁקוֹ – in Rashi's time there was no terror group called Hamas. The gematria of אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is כִּי אֲנָשִׁים אַחִים אֲנָחְנוּ, how could Rashi possibly know that the final obstacle to the Geulah would be disunity amongst Am Yisrael?

It is not that Rashi didn't understand the essence of the meaning of these words, he didn't understand the mechanism of how it would transpire. Therefore, he humbly states אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה מְּלַמְּדֵנוּ. We, who are privileged to bear witness to the Geulah unfolding before our very eyes can understand the codes.

But we are not quite there yet, there are other codes that hold the secret of what is to happen that we cannot yet recognize or understand. For example, another code – the gematria of אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו is נֵס פַּךְ הַשֶּׁמֶן. Does this mean that something monumental is going to happen connected to Channukah? We don't know, because it hasn't happened yet.

One thing is certain - the Torah is infinite in depth and has encoded within it everything that has happened and that will happen. We will only *fully* understand it in hindsight. All the "convolutions" that appear in our parshiyot, why Yaakov had to deceive Yitzchak to give him the bracha? Why did Yaakov have to marry two sisters in such a "round about" way? There is a lot of hidden reasoning behind it and in the end, when HKB"H does bring the Geulah we will understand it all clearly, in hindsight.

When we witness things today that seem "convoluted" and are difficult to understand, and there are a *LOT* of them going on in the world right now, we must rest assured that they are "convoluted" for a reason, that it is all part of HKB"H's plan to bring the Geulah and that it has to be this way. This is the foundation of our אֱמוּנָה and our בִּטָּחוֹן in HKB"H, that He will eventually fulfil his promise to the Avot and redeem us.

בביי"א

Shabbat Shalom

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