

## Insights from the Meshech Chochma

רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל  
פְּרָשַׁת חַיֵּי שָׂרָה תשפ"ו

Shulie Plawes

וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ... (פרק בד' סז)  
*And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother; he married Rivka, she became his wife and he loved her...*

Several Mefarshim take notice of our pasuk's letting us know that וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ/(Yitzchak) *loved* (Rivka). Besides being sentimental, which the Torah is not known to be, is there a deeper message that the Torah is conveying? The most famous answer to this is Rashi's, based on Midrash Rabbah: "After he brought (Rivka) into (Sarah's) tent she became exactly like his mother i.e., for all the while that Sarah was alive, a lamp would be alight continuously from Shabbos eve to Shabbos eve, and a blessing would be found in the dough, and a cloud would be stationed over the tent. After she died, these stopped. When Rivka came, they returned." So that וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ was an emotional response to what occurred *after* אִמּוֹ שָׂרָה.

Rav Meir Simcha's approach to this question is quite different and begins with a riveting narrative presented in Yalkut Shimoni: As Rivka was approaching her future husband, she foresaw that she would bear a wicked son. This shook her to the core and she fell off her camel. Her trauma resulted in her becoming a מְכַת עֵץ, a woman whose physical status is that of a non-בְּתוּלָה due to an accident which caused her to bleed. Yalkut tells us that Hashem told the angel Gavriel to "watch over that דָּם and make sure that it is untouched." According to the sefer Kol Bo's version, when she and Yitzchak cohabited and Yitzchak did not see דָּם בְּתוּלִים, he accused her of having had relations with Eliezer. She defended herself and swore to him that she was a מְכַת עֵץ. She was able to locate and present to Yitzchak the עֵץ with her דָּם still on it and Yitzchak believed her. The דָּם and עֵץ were protected by a חֵיהָ and in this merit Kol Bo tells us, it is after the שְׁחִיטָה of kosher חַיּוֹת, not בְּהֵמוֹת, that there is a mitzva of הַדָּם בְּסוּיָהּ. Rav Meir Simcha adds that according to a novel opinion of Rabbeinu Chananel, brought by Tosafos in כתובות ט, that although a מְכַת עֵץ has no דָּם בְּתוּלִים, nonetheless נְעוּל-פְּתִיחָה-like a בְּתוּלָה. This would explain why the pasuk tells us *after* לֹא לְאִשָּׁה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה, because after Yitzchak lived with her and found נְעוּל, פְּתִיחָה, he knew for certain that she was telling the truth and was not unfaithful. According to Rabbeinu Chananel though, why was it necessary to have any proof that she was מְכַת עֵץ i.e., why the need for the dramatic evidence preserved by Gavriel and the חֵיהָ?

To answer this, Rav Meir Simcha takes us on a multi-step journey through several complicated *sugyos* in הלכות אישות. He begins by proposing that Yitzchak, after the *Akeida*, had the status of a Kohen Gadol. He does not explain this further, but perhaps that is because we know that following the *Akeida* Yitzchak remained a קָרְבָּן עוֹלָה, which is קְדָשֵׁי קְדָשִׁים, and the Kohen Gadol is also referred to as קְדֹשׁ קְדָשִׁים, as we read in דברי הימים א כג' יג וַיִּבְדֵּל אֶהָרֶן לְהַקְדִּישׁוֹ קְדָשׁ, דברי הימים א כג' יג

עולם **קדושים** /...*Aaron was set apart, to be consecrated as most holy, he and his sons, forever.* Yitzchak as a Kohen Gadol lends support to the Midrash Rabba later which tells us that Hashem said to Yitzchak, “עולה תמימה; just as an עולה, if it goes outside the curtains (of the *Mishkan*), it is disqualified, you too, if you go out of Eretz Yisrael, you are disqualified.” And likewise, as Kohen Gadol. For these reasons, Yitzchak could not go to his family’s home in *Aram* to procure a wife for himself but rather Avraham sent Eliezer. As a Kohen Gadol, Yitzchak had more restrictions. He could marry only a בתולה, as the Torah explicitly says in יג ויקרא בא' (A Kohen Gadol) shall marry only a woman who is a בתולה. Rambam says, “It is a מצות עשה for a Kohen Gadol to marry a בתולה. נערה. נערה בתולה. when she reaches the age of maturity, i.e., a בוגרת, she becomes forbidden to him.” Timewise, נערוּת is from twelve to twelve and a half years of age. Rav Meir Simcha follows the Midrashic opinion that Rivka, at the time of her betrothal was twelve years old, as the pasuk describes her as both a נערה and a בתולה. She certainly was eligible to marry a Kohen Gadol. However, her נישואין must also be as a נערה because if the marriage occurred after she became a בוגרת, since her body matured and changed, she is not fit anymore to marry a Kohen Gadol. Rav Meir Simcha’s approach adds a new dimension to Eliezer’s dramatic reply to Rivka’s family, when they wanted her to stay back *for a year or ten months*, certainly not unreasonable as this was the period given to a young bride to prepare for her marriage, “אל תאחרו אתי / *Do not delay me*, for if we wait, Rivka will become a בוגרת and be prohibited from marrying Yitzchak!”

Rav Meir Simcha is almost ready to close the circle. With regards to a Kohen Gadol marrying a מבת עץ, it would be permissible if the accident occurred *after* the קידושין but not if it occurred before. This is like an ordinary Kohen betrothing a widow, which is permissible, and then he is appointed Kohen Gadol. He may marry her, even though a Kohen Gadol may not take a widow, because לא אישתיני גופא, her body did not change, it is his status which did. Similarly, a מבת עץ that occurred *after* the קידושין does not prohibit her since the change occurred from an outside factor, the accident, not from within her body. Rivka’s reply to Yitzchak that she *was* faithful and that the lack of דם בתולים was because she was a מבת עץ still needed to be demonstrated that it occurred *after* the קידושין. For this reason, it was *crucial*, as both the Yalkut and Kol Bo told us, for Yitzchak to be shown the עץ and the דם when Rivka fell off her camel, well after the קידושין. Once he saw them, לאשה ויאקהבה, the marriage could continue! And that is why, for preserving the עץ and the דם, the חיה, well-deservedly, received the reward of הדם! (Of note, the text in the Meshech Chochma reads that it was the עופות, not the חיה, which protected the דם-I believe this is a misprint.)

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל  
 לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדר ע"ה  
 לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל  
 ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל  
 מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה