Insights from the Meshech Chochma
רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל
פָּרָשַׁת חַיֵּי שָׂרָה תשפ"ז

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וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת דִּבְרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ **אַרְצָה** לַה'. (פרק כד' נב)
And it was, when Avraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself ***to the ground*** *unto Hashem.*

Eliezer, Avraham's servant, upon hearing that Rivka's family allowed her to return with him to his master's house-*Rivka is before you, take her and go*-is so overwhelmed with thankfulness-וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה לַה'.

Rav Meir Simcha is bothered by what to him is surely a glaring discrepancy with a similar phrase earlier in this Parsha. After Eliezer realizes that Rivka passed his חֶסֶד test, in a parallel show of overflowing gratitude, וַיִּקֹּד הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַה'/*the man bowed low and prostrated himself to Hashem.* Why did that pasuk not include וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ **אַרְצָה** לַה' as it did in our pasuk?

His answer begins with a statement from חַזַ"ל in יומא כח: and referenced to earlier by Rashi: "Eliezer, servant of Avraham, was an Elder and sat in yeshiva, as it says וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל עַבְדּוֹ זְקַן בֵּיתוֹ הַמֹּשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ/*And Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who ruled over all he had.* R' Elazar said: 'The verse means that (Eliezer) had *control* over the Torah of his master, having gained proficiency in all of the Torah of Avraham. R' Elazar continues: 'The word דַּמֶּשֶׂק is a contraction of he who draws-דּוֹלֶה-and gives drink-מַשְׁקֶה-to others from his master's Torah.'" With this in mind, Rav Meir Simcha proposes that Eliezer would surely have known the following rule, stated in ויקרא כו' א, "וְאֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּאַרְצְכֶם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם"/*...and in your land you shall not emplace a flooring stone upon which to prostate oneself for I am Hashem, your G-d.*" Rashi there explains that "the word for flooring stone is related to כִּסּוּי, covering, for they cover the ground with a floor of stones." And that it is not permitted to prostrate oneself on an אֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית-even for the sake of Heaven-outside of the מִקְדָּשׁ. In Mishna Torah הלכות עבודה זרה ו' ו, Rambam codifies it as follows: "Similarly, a person who bows down on an אֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית/*kneeling stone* mentioned in the Torah receives lashes-even if he prostrates upon it to Hashem... The pagans would customarily place a stone before a false deity so that they could prostrate themselves upon it. Therefore, this practice is not followed in the worship of Hashem. Where does the prohibition apply? Every place outside of the מִקְדָּשׁ. In the מִקְדָּשׁ however, it is permitted to bow down to Hashem on stone." Returning to our pesukim, Rav Meir Simcha explains that וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת דִּבְרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה לַה' took place in Rivka's family's house which could

certainly have had a stone flooring. So as not to let you think that Eliezer would have bowed down on such a floor, the pasuk had to tell us, וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ **אַרְצָה** לַה'. He made sure that he was on the ground. Eliezer's earlier prostration occurred outdoors, near the עֵין הַמָּיִם, where there would be no אֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית, and so the pasuk did not need to tell us וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה לַה'.

Rav Meir Simcha is still bothered with, as he puts it, וְזֶה הַלִּימוּד לֹא נִזְכָּר גַּבֵּי הָאָבוֹת. What he means is unclear. He could be asking why did the Torah hint to us this rule of not bowing down on an אֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית outside of the מִקְדָּשׁ-even לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם-in connection with Eliezer? Why not link it to the *Avos* themselves? Rav Meir Simcha though does not tell us from where this לִימוּד would be. Alternatively, he may be asking that we read earlier in the Parsha, וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לְעַם הָאָרֶץ לִבְנֵי חֵת/*Then Avraham rose up and bowed to the members of the council, to the children of Chet.* Also, וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַבְרָהָם לִפְנֵי עַם הָאָרֶץ/*So Avraham bowed down before the members of the council.* Both of these הִשְׁתַּחֲוָאוֹת were presumably in a house and yet neither pasuk mentions אַרְצָה? Regardless, his answer is based on Midrash Rabba מז' ו, where Reish Lakish tells us that "the *Avos* are themselves the Divine מֶרְכָּבָה i.e., the שְׁכִינָה, Hashem's *presence*, rests directly upon them, as one rides upon a chariot. As it says, 'וַיַּעַל אֱלֹקִים מֵעַל אַבְרָהָם/*G-d ascended from upon Avraham*,' and 'וַיַּעַל מֵעָלָיו אֱלֹקִים /*G-d ascended from upon him*,' and 'וְהִנֵּה ה' נִצָּב עָלָיו/*And behold, Hashem stood upon him"* i.e., Hashem is described as being 'upon' the *Avos*." With Reish Lakish's exegesis Rav Meir Simcha says that *wherever* the *Avos* were located was considered like the Beis HaMikdash. And as mentioned previously, in the Beis HaMikdash there was no prohibition of אֶבֶן מַשְׂכִּית, so that with regards to the *Avos*, there is no reason to mention אַרְצָה!

Once again, an esoteric Midrash and *Halacha* become the foundation for our author's creating a novel understanding to "a not so subtle" שִׁנּוּי in our שֶׁבִּכְתָב תּוֹרָה!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
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