

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Toldos 5785

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Language is very important and slight mistakes can have grave consequences.

וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶתְחִי הִוא כִּי יֵרָא לְאִמֶּר אִשְׁתִּי כְּיִהְיֶה לְגִנִּי אַנְשֵׁי
הַמָּקוֹם עַל־רִבְקָה כִּי־טוֹבַת מְרָאָה הִוא:

“And the men of the place inquired about a wife for him, and he said, ‘She is my sister,’ because he was afraid, saying, ‘my wife, lest the men of the place will cause my death, over Rivkah, because she is beautiful in appearance.’” (Bereishis 26:7).

Why did Yitzchok feel it correct to lie? Was it really pekuach nefesh? Also, the tense in the pasuk is quirky. Where are the quotations and who was Yitzchok talking to? Also, could this pasuk explain how Yitzchok was later manipulated in regard to the brochos?

Yitzchok was in a similar position as that of his father. He was residing out of need with the Philistines and he was saying his wife was his sister. Avraham did similar. Avram had Sarei say she was Avram’s sister. (Ibid 12:13). Avraham then said of Sarah to Avimelech that she was his sister. (Ibid 20:2). Both times he was caught. (Ibid 12:18, and 20:5). With Avraham, though, it was the truth; as she was adopted by Terach. (Ibid 20:12). Further, it was always Sarah saying, “he is my brother,” (ibid 12:13 and 20:5) consenting to give the original status of their relationship. However, what basis did Yitzchok have to say she is my sister? Further, Avimelech and Avraham swore oaths to each other and made peace. (Ibid 20:17). Yitzchok had nothing to fear from Avimelech on behalf of his wife. Even though this is years later and perhaps it was a different King Avimelech, the history and incident between Avraham and the Philistines could not have been forgotten yet. Further, Rivkah was in no way a sister to Yitzchok. Also, Yitzchok took this tactic upon himself, without consulting Rivkah.

The tense of this verse tells the story. The men of the place asked about a wife for him. He answered, of Rivkah, “She is my sister.” Why did he say that? The Torah tells the reason, because he was afraid to say, ‘my wife.’ “Leimor” however is not “to say.” It means “saying.” The Torah uses it a myriad of times in order to continue a narrative. “Hashem blessed them, saying.” (Ibid 1:22). “And Hashem commanded Adam, saying.” (Ibid 2:16). It is not used to mean “to say” in the singular sense. Do not read the pasuk, “He feared to say ‘she is my wife’” but read it, “he feared, saying, ‘She is my wife.’” In other words, he feared so he said “she is my wife.” This makes no sense because he just said she was his sister. When did he say she was his wife? Further, the pasuk continues, “lest the people of the place cause my death, over Rivkah.” The Torah should have reverted back to the third-person narrative and said, “lest they kill him over Rivkah.”

Yitzchok and Rivkah were caught. “Avimelech saw through a window that, behold! Yitzchok was celebrating his wife, Rivkah.” (Ibid 26:8). Behold connotes a

surprise. It appears that Avimelech was surprised, not that Yitzchok was celebrating Rivkah, but celebrating “his wife.”

The word “anshei” means regular people. Anshei were the people of Avraham’s household that he joined in the celebration of milah. (Ibid 17:23). It was every man, not just the special ones. It was the people of Sodom who attacked Lot’s house. (Ibid 19:4). It was all the people, young and old. Lavan called all the “anshei hamakom” – the locals, not just the important people, and made a wedding feast. (Ibid 29:22).

There is one other difference. With Avraham, it was Avimelech that asked after Sarah. (Ibid 20:2). Sarah consented to say she was a sister to help keep Avraham alive. If they wanted Sarah, they would kill Avraham and then take Sarah for themselves. Both Pharaoh and Avimelech wanted Sarah, but both were miraculously prevented. Avraham did not lie to obtain riches. He told the alternative relationship in purposeful misdirection to keep himself alive. Thus, Sarah was the great moser nefesh who risked her own purity and health for the sake of her husband’s life. Yitzchok did not learn from that situation. He sacrificed his wife’s honor to keep himself alive without her consent. It was Yitzchok that said, “she is my sister.” He did not consult his wife when her honor was at stake.

With Yitzchok it was the regular people that started to inquire about Yitzchok. The people then inquired after his wife. They did not inquire about Rivkah. They inquired whether he had a wife. They wanted to marry their daughters to him. He –not Rivkah – said, “She is my sister.” He told them that Rivkah was his sister, that he was unmarried. He put his fear of death over the honor of his wife. The problem was, it was not even King Avimelech who inquired about Rivkah. It was locals.

King Avimelech found out about it and lambasted Yitzchok. “In addition, behold, she is your wife. And how can you have said “she is my sister?” (Ibid 26:9). Yitzchok responded, “It is because I said, ‘lest I die on account of her.’” (Ibid). The pasuk, then, means this: Yitzchok feared, saying [to Avimelech], “She is my wife, lest the local people try to cause my death over Rivkah, because of how beautiful she is.” (Ibid 26:7). Then Avimelech’s immediate concern was that one of his people may have done wrong because of this misinformation. The order of events was: The king called to Yitzchok with a summons accusing Yitzchok of saying “she is my sister” and yet she was his wife. She is not only not your sister that you can agree to marry her off but she is your wife. The accusation was that he was trying to get rich off of possible marriage proposals to himself and to his “sister” who was his wife. The added problem was that it would cause sin to anyone who wanted to marry her. (Ibid 27:10). Yitzchok responded to the summons, saying he did it out of fear. The fear, though, was irrational.

Yitzchok was in a bind but it was with local people not the local king. His life was not really in danger as he could have approached the king who might remember the relationship with his father (or his father’s relationship to Yitzchok’s father) and offered protection. He also did not give Rivkah the choice. It was because of these actions, perhaps, that his son was able to manipulate him to obtain brochos that Yitzchok wanted to give to Esav. Perhaps because of putting Rivkah in this bind, she had the right or felt like she had the right, to manipulate her husband to give brochos to the son she desired to have them.