

Bereishit 29:10-12

He (Yaakov) was still speaking with the shepherds when Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

When Yaakov saw Rachel, the daughter of Lavan, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Lavan, his mother's brother, he approaches and rolls the stone off the mouth of the well. He watered (*vayashk*) the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother.

Yaakov kissed (*vayishak*) Rachel, raised his voice and wept.

Nechama Liebowitz zt"l used to bemoan that Yeshiva students knew many excuses for Yaakov having kissed Rachel, but not that the Torah explicitly forbids lying. I share her concern about the second half, but I would stress that the reason Yaakov's offense seems relatively minor is at least in part because not everyone believes that the forefathers kept all rabbinic, or even biblical law. This is of course a longer discussion, but I think that students are legitimately upset when their role models exhibit apparently deviant behavior.

Nevertheless, I should note that Ibn Caspi seems to share Nechama's view (somewhat), and his phrasing is delightful enough to deserve full citation:

"I have seen the people complaining against Yaakov for performing this licentious act, especially the pious among our people and the elders. But I, by G-d! I am not bothered by this verse, but rather I say that it was not the custom of that land to kiss on the mouth or the cheek. G-d forbid, for him or for us, that this kiss was on the mouth, the Merciful preserve us. But if – *chas v'shalom!* Yaakov did this, what can we do? Worse than this was done by the anointed of the G-d of Yaakov (King David), but there is much redemption in Him the Blessed and Exalted."

(In passing, it seems that Ibn Caspi would have permitted handkissing as well as handshaking in cultures where such behavior was considered normal greeting protocol.)

Other Questions:

- 1) Why the constant repetition of "his mother's brother" in verse 11?
- 2) Why the focus on the sheep? Why do we care that Yaakov sees the sheep, and why does he water the sheep before kissing Rachel?
- 3) Did Yaakov do anything extraordinary in removing the stone?

Commentaries

Rashi – Yaakov rolled the stone off the well easily, like someone popping the stopper off a bottle.

Radak – Yaakov rolled the stone off the well together with the three shepherds

Bekhor Shor – The shepherds were children, but Yaakov was an adult and thus capable of removing the stone

Seforno – Yaakov had previously waited for fear that if he removed the stone these shepherds would leave and the later shepherds would be unable to remove the stone without their help, but changed his mind when he saw Rachel.

Netziv – Yaakov watered the sheep first so that everyone would know that he was Rachel's cousin and not find the kiss suspicious.

Kli Yakar – As Yaakov removed the stone, he told everyone: "I'm doing this for my mother's brother's daughter", "I'm doing this for my mother's brother's sheep" so that they would not find the kiss suspicious.

My Comments

Netziv and Kli Yakar's point is seriously undercut by the fact that the Torah neglects to describe Rachel as "his mother's brother" during the kiss. Also, it seems that the whole episode with the stone is trivial if it does not involve Yaakov being inspired to superhuman effort by his love for Rachel. It may well be, however, that the relationship gave the kiss necessary social cover.

On the assumption that Yaakov in fact fell in love with Rachel at first sight, it is worth thinking about whether, in the destiny-constrained scheme of his life, this was a good thing.

Shabbat shalom!

RK