

Genesis 24:63

“And Yitzchak went out *lasuach* in the field at the onset of evening. He raised his eyes and saw that camels were coming.”

The lexical ambiguity in this verse is the word “*lasuach*”, which has been interpreted as

- One. “to pray”
- Two. “to converse”,
- Three. “to plant trees”, and
- Four. “to walk among the trees”.

With regard to each of these interpretations, the immediately cogent question is “Who cares?” In other words, why does it matter what Yitzchak was doing when he saw the camels carrying Rivkah?

This is a question that can be fairly asked about the entire episode, and there have been any number of good answers to the broader question. Most of these focus on Rivkah, specifically either on her greater perceptiveness in recognizing Yitzchak whereas he saw only camels, or on her reactions to seeing him (falling off the camel? Covering herself with a scarf?). I would like to see if Yitzchak’s actions can be significant in and of themselves rather than foils for Rivkah.

A, cited by Rashi, is justly famous, but leaves open the question of what he is praying for. Kli Yakar claims that he is obviously praying for a successful marriage – but this may be too saccharine a reading.

B, offered as an alternate with Chizkuni, leaves open the question “with whom?”

C, offered by Rashbam, may symbolically foreshadow marriage, but seems trite.

D, offered by Ibn Ezra, most starkly fails to answer the question “who cares?”.

A-D each fail to provide a satisfactory account of why the time of day matters, and A-B leave open the less pressing question of why the location matters. (Note: Seforno suggests that he prayed in a field to avoid interruption by passersby).

I don’t have any solutions to offer, but I would like to partially and inadequately cite a wonderful *dvar Torah* I heard some years ago from Rabbi Joshua Berman at the Third Meal at Yeshivat Har Etzion (Note the time and location?). He notes that this episode is framed by Yitzchak’s relationship to B’er Lachai Roi. In 24:62 he arrives from there, and in 25:11 he moves his residence there. B’er Lachai Roi is the place where Hagar is angelically informed of Yishmael’s destiny in 16:14, and Rabbi Berman’s suggestion was that, in the aftermath of the akeidah, Yitzchak spent much time meditating on his relationship with Yishmael. (The move to B’er Lachai Roi follows the reunion of the brothers at Avraham’s funeral in 25:9.)

Perhaps, then, “*lasuach*” here is related to the “*achad hasichim*”, “one of the trees”, under which Yishmael is lying when G-d saves him from death in 21:15, after Sarah has him expelled for Yitzchak’s sake. Further speculation – perhaps the field, and especially a conversation in the field is related to the conversation had by Kayin and Hevel in the field (4:8) prior to the first fraternal murder.

Shabbat Shalom!