

Yaakov arrives in Charan and meets Rochel by the well.

וַיִּשָּׂק יַעֲקֹב לְרִחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־קוֹלוֹ וַיִּבְדֵּ:

“And Yaakov kissed Rochel, and he lifted up his voice, and he cried.” (Bereishis 29:11).

Why did Yaakov kiss Rochel? If he did not kiss her, what did he do? Why did he lift up his voice? What did he cry about?

Midrash says, *he cried because he foresaw that he would not be buried with her. He also came empty-handed unlike Avraham’s servant who came with gifts.* (Bereishis Rabbah 70:12).

Sforno says, *he was pained that he did not marry her while he was younger, as he would have grown children by now.*

Ibin Ezra says, *he kissed her on the forehead or shoulder. He kissed her only after telling her they were kin, otherwise he would not have kissed her. There was no sensual content.*

Rabbeinu Bachya says, *she was a minor and he could not consummate marriage yet with her. He, therefore, had to work seven years and await her coming of age. He cried as relatives who have not seen each other awhile do.*

Radak says, *she accepted the kiss because Yaakov said they were kin and he fed her animals. Upon seeing her, he wept for joy.*

The explanations of this pasuk leave it lacking. First, there is nothing inherently, biblically, wrong with a cousin kissing a cousin. Especially, not at the time. Certainly, a kiss to a relative that one has not seen ever in life, just met now, and at the zenith of a long journey’s search, undoubtedly was nothing inappropriate. Lavan kissed Yaakov and there is no allegation of homosexuality on Lavan’s part. (Bereishis 29:13). He also kisses his children. (Ibid 32:1). Esau kisses his brother (Ibid 33:4) and Yoseph kisses all his brothers. (Ibid 45:15). After centuries of Rabbinical ordinance, mere touching between the genders has become taboo and it is understandable why one would think a kiss of a cousin inappropriate, especially in light of attributing it to the saintly Yaakov. Even according to Talmudic law, however, a kiss and touch that lacks intimacy and desire is sinless. This is more so among two singles who are permitted to each other in marriage.

Second, the explanation of why he cried is also wanting. He never saw Rochel so there would be no familial emotion after ‘finally’ seeing her. His journey was far from over. Meeting her at the well could not be seen as a finality. He still had to find Lavan and work to marry Rochel. If he did not meet her there then he would have met her at her father’s house. He was headed directly to Lavan per his father’s instruction. (Ibid 28:5).

“And Yaakov kissed Rochel.” Onkelos and every other commentator translate וַיִּשָּׂק “and he kissed her.” The Torah uses the word וַיִּשָּׂק to kiss. (See Ibid 29:13, 32:1, 33:4, and

45:15). קָשַׁף means to give to drink as in “and Yaakov gave to drink the sheep of Lavan his uncle.” (Ibid 29:10). When there is a *cheerik* under the Yud, it means to kiss. (See Ibid 27:27 when Yitzchok kissed Yaakov before the Brocha; 48:10 when Yaakov kisses his grandchildren and blesses them; 50:1 when Yoseph fell on Yaakov’s neck and kissed him). However, when there is a *patach* under the Yud it means to give to drink. (See 29:10 where Yaakov gave Lavan’s sheep to drink; Shmos 2:19 when Moshe watered Yisro’s sheep).

There is a connection between these two words. Why did the Torah not simply use the words קָשַׁף? Why use it without the נ? This is because the kiss is not just a kiss. It’s an act of sustaining the other person. It is giving them to drink, in a way. When one waters sheep, he is giving them a life force, he is sustaining them to live further. Water is also a symbol for Torah and the spiritual. This is because all life is made up of water; humans, fruits, vegetables, and the seas are all made up of water. Water carries oxygen in it. And water keeps flowing and continues to seek a resting place until it fills up its container. Even then, water evaporates and then comes down in the form of rain or snow. In every instance when a person is kissing another via קָשַׁף it is the person giving a spiritual lifeforce to the other. Yitzchok kissed his son before blessing him. Yaakov kissed his grandchildren before blessing them; Yoseph was giving Yaakov life again after reuniting.

When a kiss is just a kiss, it is קָשַׁף. Lavan simply kissed Yaakov out of greeting and his children out of love. The two standouts are when Eisav kissed Yaakov (ibid 33:4) and when Yoseph kissed his brothers (ibid 45:15). When Eisav kisses Yaakov it is when he is greeting Yaakov upon Yaakov’s return to Canaan. Eisav vowed to kill Yaakov after Yitzchok died because Yaakov stole his brocha. However, when they reunite Eisav is instead filled with brotherly affection and there is reconciliation. Eisav kisses Yaakov – קָשַׁף. He is sustaining Yaakov, giving him back his life. Thus, it is written without a *nun*. When Yoseph meets his brothers after 22 years away he kisses his brothers. The pasuk says וַיִּנָּשֶׁק לְכָל-אֶחָיו וַיִּבְרַךְ עֲלֵהֶם וְאָחָרַי כֵּן דִּבְּרוּ אֵחָיו אֵתוֹ: “And he kissed all of his brothers and he cried on them. And afterwards his brothers spoke to him.” (Ibid 45:15). He kissed them simply out of greeting. He had nothing more to give them. They already took everything from him. He has already given them food (they did not necessarily need as the entire purpose of going down to Mitzrayim was a ruse). He did not yet give them Goshen or bring down his father. At this point, he kissed them to show them he was their brother. It was a kiss of brotherly affection.

Yaakov kissing Rochel is synonymous with *And Yaakov gave Rochel to drink*. He watered her animals and also gave her water. This was akin to when the servant of Avraham asked Rivkah to give him to drink and she also gave water to his camels. “I am your father’s kin; I am Rivkah’s son” (ibid 29:12) and I will behave as such. He didn’t *kiss* her out of any love. There was no love there. Nor was there a familial greeting as they never met before. Instead, he then knew she was his soulmate and he would become her husband and he would sustain her.

“And he raised his voice.” Yaakov “raised” a few times. He lifted his feet and went to the eastern country. (Ibid 29:1). He lifted up his voice and cried. (Here). He lifted his children onto camels. (Ibid 31:17). He also lifted up his eyes and saw that Eisav was

approaching him with an army. (Ibid 33:1). וַיִּשָּׂא “lifting” in the Torah is a term of an intentional act. One lifts up his eyes, means he looks yonder and is searching about. When he lifted his eyes, he was scouting for Eisav. He saw him from afar. When he lifted his feet, he did it with intention to head toward the eastern lands, because having heard Hashem’s promise to him, he went to fulfill his journey and find his wife. When he lifted his children and wives onto camels, he was absconding from Lavan. He left with purpose. Here, he lifted his voice.

Eisav, too, lifted his voice and cried. וַיִּשָּׂא עֵשָׂו קוֹלוֹ וַיִּבְרָךְ: “And Eisav raised his voice and cried.” (Ibid 27:38). Eisav called out, intentionally. He just lost his father’s blessing and learned that his brother was blessed to be a master over him. He asked if Yitzchok had another blessing. He raised his voice and cried. It means he called out. He called out to see if Yaakov was nearby. He wanted this reversed and justice done, immediately. He called out for anyone around to search and give him Yaakov’s whereabouts. He cried because he lost his fortune but he also then felt like he lost his brother. He cried and prayed for divine assistance. He did not want to lose out on his father’s bracha.

Here, Yaakov not only raises his voice but he raises תא his voice. The תא makes it a proper noun. He was lifting up the power of his voice. His father had said הַקוֹל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב “the voice is the voice of Yaakov.” (Ibid 27:22). Yaakov had a voice of power and persuasion. When he talked people and Heavens listened. Yaakov raised this voice.

“And he cried.” Using the power of his voice, he cried. He cried and prayed that his journey be over. He cried for years of success and progeny. He cried for sustenance and sustainability. He explains that his journey is over, he has found Rochel and the house of Lavan. He came to the lands of the east and did not have to seek too far to find Lavan. (The eastern lands are massive and finding Lavan could have been a task that would take several more years. The Torah does not say he arrived in Charan, but merely in the eastern lands he found a well. His journey was over even before reaching Charan). He cried for the success of having found Rochel and Lavan’s household, fulfilling his parents’ wish that he travels to his mother’s brother and find a wife. He also cried for himself, a brother lost, and now all hopes lashed to a cousin he just met.