

פרשת תולדות

In fact, the transition happened after two full decades but when we view it by turning the pages from the end of Parshas Chaye Sarah to the beginning of this week's Parshas Toldos it seems that it happened overnight.

True, it wasn't overnight but the transition was abrupt.

We met Rivka l'meinu when she was three years old, according to the Midrashim and Rashi. As difficult as it is to imagine, at that age she gave Eliezer and his camels drink and was able to respond to her family's query as we read (B'reishis Perek 24/Posuk 58):

וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרַבֵּקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי עִם הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ:

They called Rivka and they said to her, 'Will you go with this man?'; she said, 'I will go'.

Her spiritual level was also unique as Rashi explains on a later verse. We read (Posuk 67):

וַיְבִיֵאֵהָ יִצְחָק הָאֵהָלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת רַבֵּקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּנְחָמָהּ וַיִּנְחָם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:

Yitzchak brought Rivka to the tent of his mother Sarah and he married her and she became his wife and he loved her and Yitzchak was comforted after [the memory of] his mother.

We read in Rashi:

האהלה שרה אמו - ויביאה האהלה ונעשית דוגמת שרה אמו, כלומר והרי היא שרה אמו, שכל זמן ששרה קיימת היה נר דלוק מערב שבת לערב שבת, וברכה מצויה בעיסה, וענן קשור על האהל, ומשמתה פסקו, וכשבאת רבקה חזרו:

To the tent of Sarah his mother – [You should read the verse as follows:] Yitzchak brought Rivka to the tent and she became just like his Mother Sarah. This means to say, 'she was his Mother Sarah'. As long as Sarah was alive the candle burned from Erev Shabbos to Erev Shabbos and a blessing was in the bread [that even eating a little was satiating] and a Divine cloud was over the tent. When Sarah died all of these phenomena ceased. When Rivka came, the three functions returned.

And now, this child is grown. She was betrothed to Yitzchak Ovinu for 10 years and now married ten years and the self-assurance and confidence that we associated with an extraordinary precocious young person has vanished.

למה זה אנכי

Why am I?

These plaintive words seems existentialist in the sense of loss and hopelessness that they seem to express. If a person is weak, then what hope is there when such a soulful cry is uttered?

But, of course, we have taken this verse out of context. Let us read it fully and the ones that precede it.

The Torah writes (B'reishis Perek 25/P'sukim 20-22):

וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקָחַתוֹ אֶת רִבְקָה בִּת בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדֵן אָרָם אַחֹת לְבֵן הָאֲרָמִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק לֵה' לִנְכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' וַתְּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלָּךְ לְדָרֵשׁ אֶת ה':

Yitzchak was forty-years old when he married Rivka the daughter of Besuel the Aramite from Padan Aram to him for a wife; she was the sister of Lovon the Aramite. Yitzchak prayed to G-d opposite his wife because she was barren and Hashem answered his prayer and Rivka his wife became pregnant. The sons were running vigorously inside her and she said, 'If this is so, why am I?'; she went to seek Hashem.

When we read the action that Rivka undertook after that declaration of 'Why am I?', we know that she does not feel alone and abandoned. She seeks Hashem.

Nonetheless, we cannot ignore her plea and we certainly have to understand it.

First we need to examine the final two verses that were brought above; in each the Name of G-d is mentioned when people turned to him.

In the first of those two verses, there is unanimity among the sources in Chazal and the commentators that prayers were being addressed to HaKodosh Boruch Hu to

cure the barrenness of Rivka l'meinu. Although the exact meaning of the term is discussed, the fact that it refers to prayer is indisputable.¹ ויעתר

On the other hand, in the following verse where we read:

וַתֵּלֶךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת ה':

Rivka went to seek Hashem

There are differing opinions of the meaning of that 'seeking'.

The Targumim themselves differ regarding the 'seeking'. Targum Onkelos renders that phrase as:

ואזלת למתבע אולפן מן קדם ה':

She went to ask teaching from G-d.

In contrast, the way that Targum Yonoson ben Uziel (and the *Targum Yerushalmi*) understand the phrase is:

¹ Rashi writes

ויעתר - הרבה והפציר בתפלה:

He prayed – He increased prayer and urging [G-d to answer].

ויעתר לו - נתפצר ונתפייס ונתפתה לו, ואומר אני כל לשון עתר לשון הפצרה ורבו

Hashem answered his prayer – Hashem accepted the urging and was pacified and was convinced by Yitzchak.

I [Rashi] say that the expression of עתר is always one of urging and multiple [requests]...

Interestingly enough, Chazal in Masseches Sukkah (14 a) explain the word עתר as referring to a spade or pitchfork. We read:

אמר רבי אלעזר למה נמשלה תפלתן של צדיקים כעתר? - לומר לך, מה עתר זה מהפך את התבואה בגורן ממקום למקום, אף תפלתן של צדיקים מהפכת דעתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא ממתד אכזריות למדת רחמנות.

Rabi Elazar said, 'Why are the prayers of the righteous compared to an עתר-spade? This teaches you that just like the spade overturns the grain in the silo from one place to another, so the prayers of the righteous overturns G-d's opinion from the attribute of cruelty to the attribute of mercy.'

וְאֶזְלַת לְבִי מִדְרָשׁ דְּשֵׁם רַבָּא לְמַבְעֵי רַחֲמִין מִן קֳדָם ה':

Rivka went to the Beis Midrash of the great *Shem* [*ben Noach*] to request mercy from before Hashem.

It seems to me to be easier to understand this phrase as seeking explanation for the phenomenon of her unusual pregnancy, as Onkelos writes, rather than referring to prayer, as Targum Yonoson writes. It would seem that if prayer was the subject once again, then the Torah would have used the same term to indicate prayer as it did before. The change of the terminology implies a change of subject as well, or so it would seem.

Of course, we know better than to 'second-guess' our *meforshim*, and certainly not the *Tannaim* –*Onkelos* and Yonoson. And thus, we can imagine that for the prayers that Rivka wished to utter for her unusual pregnancy she went to a great person to turn to G-d on her behalf².

The commentators themselves align with these two Targumim.

Rashi writes:

ותלך לדרוש - לבית מדרשו של שם:

She went to seek – to the Beis Midrash of Shem.

לדרוש את ה' - שיגיד לה מה תהא בסופה:

² The Gaon Rav Yechiel Michel Tuckechinsky ZT”L in his classic *Gesher HaChaim* on the *Hilchos Aveilus* writes in Chapter 26 of that work regarding davening in cemeteries and requesting that the Tzaddikim buried there should intercede on a person’s behalf.

He writes there (Page 212):

The power and the ability of a *living* great Tzaddik...is his ability to change nature and to bring down heavenly influence from above and have his holy influence ascend to heaven...and while he is alive he can influence the events of the entire world.

To such an extent is the Tzaddik powerful that Hashem nullifies His decrees because of the intervention of the Tzaddik (Masseches Shabbos 63 a and Masseches Moed Koton 16 b).

To seek Hashem – that he³ should tell her what will be her end.

Ramban disagrees and writes:

ותלך לדרוש את ה' - לשון רש"י, להגיד מה יהא בסופה. ולא מצאתי דרישה אצל ה' רק להתפלל, כטעם דרשתי את ה' וענני (תהלים לד/ה⁴), דרשוני וחיו (עמוס ה/ד⁵), חי אני אם אדרש לכם (יחזקאל כ/ג⁶):

³ I translated 'he' as referring to *Shem ben Noach*, but not as 'He' referring to HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

Rivka went to the great scholar in order that she should have the information that she sought.

Support for this translation is from the following verse (Posuk 23) that begins with the words:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ

Hashem said to her.

Rashi comments:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ - על ידי שליח, לשם נאמר ברוח הקודש והוא אמר לה:

Hashem said to her – Through an intermediary. The information was told to Shem through *Ruach HaKodesh* and Shem told it to Rivka.

If the 'he' refers to Shem ben Noach, then, in fact, Rivka I'meinu received a far more authoritative answer than she sought.

Rivka wanted *Shem ben Noach* to tell her *his* interpretation. Instead Hashem shared with her the incontrovertible Divine understanding.

⁴ The entire verse reads:

דָּרַשְׁתִּי אֶת ה' וְעֲנֵנִי וּמָכַל מְגִוֹרוֹתַי הִצִּילֵנִי:

I sought G-d and He answered me; He saved me from all of my fears.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

כִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל דַּרְשׁוּנִי וְחִי:

Because so says Hashem to the House of Israel: seek Me and you shall live.

⁶ The entire verse reads:

בֶּן אָדָם דַּבֵּר אֶת זַקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי...ד...נִי ה' הֲלֹדֶרֶשׁ אֶתְּךָ אֶתְּךָ בָּאִים חִי אֲנִי אִם אֲדַרְשׁ לָכֶם נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי...ד...נִי ה':

Son of man, 'speak to the elders of Israel and you shall say to them, 'So says Adoshem Hashem, "Are you coming to seek Me? I swear that if I will be sought, I will answer you." says Adoshem Hashem.'

She went to seek Hashem – Rashi writes, ‘that he should tell her what will be her end’.

I [Ramban] have not found the term *drisha*-seeking in relation to Hashem as meaning anything other than prayer. Such as, ‘I sought G-d and He answered me’ and ‘Seek me and you will live’ and ‘I Hashem swear that I will answer your prayers when I am sought by you’⁷.

The Netziv to this verse tells us why he sides with the explanation of Rashi and not with that offered by Ramban. He writes:

ותלך לדרוש את ה'. העיקר כפירוש רש"י ורשב"ם לשאול את הנביא דעת ה' ורצונו בזה, ולא כרמב"ן ז"ל שפירש תפלה, וכמו שכתבתי בשמות יח/טו במשמעות דרישת אלקים, ומכאן מוכח גם כן הכי, דאלו תפלה לא היה לה לילך למקום אחר, והרי נתקבלה תפלת יצחק כאן, אלא לדרוש מנביא שהוא רואה מה שבנסתר ונעלם, וכלשון הכתוב בספר שמואל א' [ט/ט] כי לנביא היום יקרא לפניו הרואה...

The correct explanation is like Rashi and Rashbam⁸ that Rivka went to ask the prophet Hashem’s wisdom and will in this matter. The correct explanation is not like the Ramban who explained that Rivka went for the purpose of prayer.

⁷ Ramban is not alone in this opinion. Hadar Z’keinim of *Ba’alei Tosfos* writes:

ותלך לדרוש את ה'. כלומר על ידי שהיו מתרוצצים בבטנה זה לתורה וזה לעבודה זרה הבינה שיהיה אחד צדיק ואחד רשע ומשום הכי הלכה לבית המדרש לדרוש ה' לבית מדרשו של שם ועבר דהיינו בית ה' להתפלל שיהיו כולם צדיקים:

She went to seek Hashem – This means to say that because of their running in her womb, this one to Torah and that one to idolatry, Rivka understood that [this indicated that] one son would be righteous and the other one would be wicked. That is the reason that she went to the Beis Midrash to seek Hashem – that is, to ‘The House of G-d’ to daven there that they should both be righteous.

⁸ He writes:

לדרוש את ה' - אל הנביאים שבאותן הימים (מלכים א כב/ח) כדכתיב לדרוש את ה' מאתו, וכתיב כי יבא אלי העם לדרוש את ה':

To seek Hashem – to the prophets who were in those days as it is written, ‘to seek G-d from Him’ and it is written, ‘when the people come to me to seek Hashem.’

And this is like what I wrote in Parshas Yisro regarding the implications of 'seeking G-d'. And here, this verse proves the same thing. For, if it was for the purpose of prayer, there was no need for her to go to another place. After all, Yitzchak's prayer was received in her home!

Rather, Rivka went to seek a prophet who sees that which is hidden and invisible, in accordance with the verse in Sefer Sh'muel that writes, 'The one who is called a prophet nowadays was previously called the *seer*.'

As intimated earlier, and now with the support of the Netziv, we will approach these two consecutive verses that are found early in the Parsha with the following assumption: in the first of the two verses there was prayer. In the second of the two verses we learn of two different types of prophets, with Rivka l'meinu seeking a prophet⁹ who would explain to her the meaning of the events overtaking her.

⁹ Seemingly, the question begs to be asked: Why did Rivka need to seek out *Shem ben Noach* to answer her query. Why did she not approach Avraham Ovinu? He was a prophet.

The Netziv, at the end of the section cited above, introduced us to the verse in Sefer Sh'muel where we are told that there were two terms used for what we call a 'prophet'. One term was רואה, the seer and the second was נביא, the one who expresses himself.

Netziv writes:

...פירוש שהיה שני אופני נביא, אחד מה שמדבר עמו ה' לשעה, והוא מלשון (ישעיה נז/ט) ניב שפתים כי הוא מדבר הרבה וכמו שכתבתי לעיל פרק כ מקרא ז', והשני הרואה דברים נעלמים ברוח הקדש, וזה האופן היה נקרא רואה, ואברהם היה נביא באופן הראשון לבד, משום הכי הלכה לאדם גדול שידעה כי הוא רואה ויודע:

...the explanation is that there are two types of prophets.

One type is one with whom Hashem talks with regarding the necessities of the times. It is derived from the term 'words of the lips' because this type of prophet speaks a great deal, as I wrote earlier in Perek 20/Posuk 7.

The second type is the 'seer', the one who sees that which is hidden with his *Ruach HaKodesh* – that is why he is called the 'seer'.

Avraham was a prophet only as far as the first type.

That is the reason that Rivka went to a great person whom she knew that was capable of 'seeing' and 'knowing'.

Thus, we find that in the two verses to which we are attending, there are two approaches to G-d. One approach turns to Him in prayer; the other approach turns to Him seeking knowledge and understanding.

Let us pursue these two branches of our relationship with Hashem in order to have a better understanding of our relationship with the Ribbono Shel Olom and in consonance with what we can learn from Yitzchak and Rivka.

We view these verses once again and examine them in a more thorough fashion.

וַיַּעֲתָר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָהּ הוּא וַיַּעֲתָר לוֹ ה' וַתְּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: וַיִּתְרַצְּוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי לְדָרֵשׁ אֶת ה':

Yitzchak prayed to G-d opposite his wife because she was barren and Hashem answered his prayer and Rivka his wife became pregnant. The sons were running vigorously inside her and she said, 'If this is so, why am I?'; she went to seek Hashem.

If I read the first verse carefully and try to temporarily forget all of the information that I have accrued over these many decades, I carefully note that the only person mentioned as praying is Yitzchak Ovinu, not Rivka I'meinu.

This does not mean to imply that Rivka I'meinu did not daven. But, there certainly may be an implication that the Torah is emphasizing the prayers of Yitzchak over those of Rivka.

It is true that Rashi teaches us that they both were davening and such is suggested by the words לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ, opposite his wife. He writes:

לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ - זֶה עוֹמֵד בְּזוּיַת זוֹ וּמִתְפַּלֵּל, וְזוֹ עוֹמֵדֵת בְּזוּיַת זוֹ וּמִתְפַּלֵּלֵת:

Opposite his wife – He was standing in one corner and davening and she was standing in the other corner and davening.

Both Yitzchak and Rivka¹⁰ were praying for the children that had not yet been born to them, Rashi explains.

However, this may not be the literal meaning of the verse and there is a reason to support the literal meaning that has Yitzchak praying *לנכח אשתו* - towards his wife, meaning for Rivka, but not for himself.

And, it could be that the justification for such an approach is in the verse itself if we add some emphasis. We read:

כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא

She was barren.

What is the justification of such a statement that implies the issue of being childless was that of Rivka and not of Yitzchak?

Chizkuni explains:

לנכח אשתו לתקנת אשתו, כמו (שופטים יח/11) נכח ה' דרככם שתרגומו אתקן ארחתהון. אבל בשבילו לא היה מתפלל שהרי יודע היה שאינו עקור כדכתיב (בראשית כא/12) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע. כי עקרה היא מפני מה נתעקרה רבקה שלא יאמרו האומות תפלתנו שהתפללנו על (בראשית כד/13) אחותנו את היי לאלפי רבבה עשתה פירות אלא ויעתר יצחק, ויעתר לו.

¹⁰ It would appear that Rashi could agree that the Posuk seems to be indicating the prayers that Yitzchak Ovinu offered over those that Rivka offered. And since Rashi explains (Posuk 21) that Hashem answered the prayers of Yitzchak and not those of Rivka in this case, that emphasis is well-understood.

¹¹ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַכֹּהֵן לֵכוּ לְשָׁלוֹם נִכַּח ה' דְּרָכְכֶם אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכוּ בָּהּ:
The Kohen said to them, 'Go to peace, Hashem should [show] you a straightforward road that you should go in it.

¹² The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים... לְאֵל אַבְרָהָם אֵל יִרְעָה בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנֶּעֱרָר וְעַל אֲמֵתְךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַיךְ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לָךְ זָרַע:
G-d said to Avraham, 'It should not be bad in your eyes regarding the lad and your maidservant; all that Sarah said to you, listen to her voice because within Yitzchak your seed will be called.

¹³ The entire verse reads:

Opposite his wife – for the purpose of ‘repairing’ his wife. And this would be in consonance with the verse [Hashem should show] you a straightforward path’ that the *Targum* renders ‘I will repair your ways’.

But, Yitzchak did not have to daven for himself because he knew that he wasn’t barren as we read in the verse, ‘Because through Yitzchak your seed will be called¹⁴.’

וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אַחֲתֵינוּ אַתְּ הִי לְאֵלֶיפִי רַבָּה וַיִּירֶשׁ זְרַעֲךָ אֶת שַׁעַר שְׂנְאָיו:
They blessed Rivka and they said to her, ‘Our sister, may you be thousands and a myriad and may your seed inherit the gate of those who hate them.

¹⁴ As noted here, many of the commentators hold that Yitzchak Ovinu was not barren because of the Divine promise to Avraham Ovinu.

In his commentary on Rashi to these verses, the Bartenura has a *chiddush*, noting that the ‘she’ in the verse saying that Rivka was barren is written הוא, which would be read as *hu*-he - were it not for the vocalization that teaches us to read it as *he*-she.

Bartenura writes:

כי עקרה היא. נראה לי שבא כתיב הוא בוי"ו שבא להורות שגם יצחק היה עקר כמו שאמרו רז"ל שהאבות טומטומין היו...

Because she was barren – It appears that we can explain why the word ‘she’ is written with the letter *vov* giving it the appearance as meaning *hu*-he.

This spelling of the word *he*-she comes to tell us that Yitzchak, too, was barren as Chazal (Masseches Yevomos 64 a) say, ‘the Patriarchs were born without physical signs of gender.

It seems surprising that Bartenura, in this work which is a commentary on Rashi, does not refer directly to Rashi’s opinion. Although he does not write so in our Parsha, a reading of Rashi in next week’s Parshas Vayetze makes it clear that Yitzchak Ovinu was praying for himself as well. He, too, was barren.

We read (B’reishis Perek 30/P’sukim 1-2):

וַתֵּרָא רָחֵל כִּי לֹא יִלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב וַתִּקְנֶה רָחֵל בְּאֲחֵתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵל יַעֲקֹב הֲבָה לִי בְנִים וְאִם אֵין מִתָּה אֲנֹכִי: וַיַּחַר אָף יַעֲקֹב בְּרָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר הֲתַחַת אֱלֹהִים אֲנֹכִי אֲשֶׁר מִנַּע מִמֶּנּוּ פְרִי בֶטֶן:
Rachel saw that she had not given birth for Yaakov and Rachel was jealous of her sister and she said to Yaakov, ‘Give me sons and if not, I am dead’. Yaakov was angry at Rachel and he said, ‘Am I in place of G-d Who has prevented fruit of the womb from you?’

Rivka was barren in order that the nations of the world would not think that she bore children as a result of the prayer of her family for her, 'Our sister, you shall be thousands and myriad' – that was the reason that she was fruitful.

Rather the reason that she left the state of barrenness was the prayer that Yitzchak prayed for her and *his* prayer was answered.

Rabbenu Bachye offers a different reason to explain the barrenness of Rivka l'meinu. He focusses on a seemingly syntactic anomaly and writes:

ויעתר יצחק לה' לנכח אשתו כי עקרה היא. הכתוב היה ראוי להקדים ולומר, ותהי רבקה עקרה ואחר כך: ויעתר יצחק לה' כי עקרה היא, ומה שהקדים התפלה יתכן לומר שהקדים העיקר, ולמדנו שאין הכונה שתהיה העקרות סבת התפלה שאם כן הסבה עיקר והתפלה טפל לה, אבל הכונה לשון הכתוב כי התפלה סבת העקרות, ולומר לך שלא נתעקרה אלא כדי שיתפללו שניהם על הדבר, לפיכך הקדים התפלה שהיא העיקר והסבה הראשונה שבשבילה בא העקרות לרבקה אמנו. וזהו שדרשו ז"ל: (שיר השירים רבה ב/לד) מפני מה נתעקרו האמהות, מפני שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתאוה לתפלתן של צדיקים.

Yitzchak davened to Hashem opposite his wife because she was barren – It would have been proper for the Torah to begin this verse with 'Rivka was barren' and [only] then to write 'Yitzchak davened to Hashem because she was barren'.

And that which in fact the Torah wrote regarding the 'prayer' before writing about the 'barrenness' is because that the Torah is not telling us that it was

Rashi writes:

הבה לי - וכי כך עשה אביך לאמר, והלא התפלל עליה:

Give me sons – [You are not praying for me]. Is that what your father did for your mother? Didn't he pray for her?

אשר מנע ממך - את אמרת שאעשה כאבא, אני איני כאבא, אבא לא היו לו בנים אני יש לי בנים, ממך מנע ולא ממני:

Who prevent you – You said that I should act like my father acted. I am not like my father. Father had no sons; I have sons. G-d prevented children from you, not from me.

Rashi points out explicitly that Yitzchak prayers were for himself, not just for Rivka. He, too, was barren.

the barrenness that caused the prayer. If that would be so, the most important fact would have been that Rivka was barren and prayer would have been of secondary importance only.

But the intent of the syntax of the verse is that [the need for] prayer was the reason for the barrenness. And this teaches that Rivka was barren only so that both Yitzchak and Rivka should pray for this matter. That is why *Tefilah* is written first because it is the most important and the primary cause and because of the need for Tefilah, Rivka l'meinu was barren.

And this is what Chazal taught in Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabba: Why were the Matriarchs barren? Because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous.

On the other hand, Seforno opines that the prayers of Yitzchak were said with fervor even though he was fertile. Why then were his prayers filled with unique *kavanah*? He writes:

לנכח אשתו. אף על פי שהובטח על הזרע שיירש התפלל לקל יתברך שיתן לו אותו
הזרע מזאת ההגונה הנצבת נכחו:

Opposite his wife – Even though Yitzchak was promised that he would have seed who would inherit him, he prayed to G-d that He would give him that seed from this very appropriate and proper wife that was standing opposite him.

Rav Hirsch, as well, sees Rivka as the focus of the prayers, not Yitzchak. But, the reason that Rav Hirsch opines is somewhat different. We read:

לנכח אשתו. עשרים שנה היה יצחק שופך שיחו לפני ה', ומתפלל שייולדו לו בנים מרבקה. ידוע ידע את הנבואה: "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע" (בראשית כא/יב), ומובטח היה לו, שהוא יפקד בבנים. אך למרות מעלותיה של רבקה, הרי אחרי ציפיה כה ממושכת, יכול היה הספק להתעורר בלבו, שמא ממשיכה של ברית אברהם לא יוכל להיולד מאחות לבן; לפיכך עיקר תפלתו היה "לנכח אשתו". - הנה כי כן, לא רק אבן הפנה, אלא כל המשכו של בית ישראל היה תלוי בחסד ה' ובהשגחתו הישירה. כשרה כן רבקה היתה עקרה.

Opposite his wife – For twenty years¹⁵ Yitzchak poured out his prayer before G-d and davened that that he should have sons that will be borne by Rivka.

Yitzchak was well-aware of the prophecy that ‘with Yitzchak, your seed will be called] [as was told to Avraham]. He was certain that he would be blessed with children.

However, despite the good qualities of Rivka, and following long-awaited child-bearing, perhaps a doubt arose within Yitzchak that perhaps the woman who would continue the line of Avraham would not be the one who was the sister of Lovon [Rivka]. It was for that reason that the main thrust of his prayer was ‘opposite his wife’.

Behold, this is so. It is not only the cornerstone, but the entire continuity of the House of Israel is dependent upon G-d’s kindness and His direct Providence.

Just as Sarah was, so was Rivka barren¹⁶.

¹⁵ According to Rav Hirsch it appears that even before the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka was consummated, when she was a child, Yitzchak was already davening that should be able to bear him children. The cloud of her brother *Lovon* hung over their lives.

¹⁶ Before we proceed, let us look at two other commentators who discuss why Rivka had to be the focus of the prayers offered by Yitzchak Ovinu. These explanations, no less than the ones brought above, indicate the wide-range of vision that our commentators had and the ideas that they chose to share with us.

Let us see Malbim first.

ויעתר. הלידה בבני אדם שיוליד מינו שתולה בטבע כמו ששתול בטבע והחי להשאיר מינו, אולם שיוליד סגולה ושיצא פרי נבחר קדש הלולים, הוא נגד הטבע וצריך לזה עזר א...ל"קי, ועל כן היו אמותינו עקרות כי שיצא מן הקליפה פרי קודש אין הטבע מוכנת מעצמה עד יופיע כח א...ל"קי, שזה יתעורר על ידי התפילה להאציל נשמה קדושה בת א...ל"קים אשר תעש חיל, והגם שיצחק כבר היה מוכן לזה מעת העקדה כמו שכתבתי שם, רבקה לא היתה מוכנת לזה, ועל זה אומר כי עקרה היא, וסיפר איך הוכנה ללידה זו. אן על ידי הרבות בתפלה שעל זה אומר ויעתר שמורה על הרבוי. ב] שהיתה התפילה מיצחק שהוא כבר הובטח על בנים מעת העקדה והתפלל שהבנים יהיו ממנה, ג] לנכח אשתו שעל ידי שהמקבל עומד נוכח המשפיע, יוכן יותר לקבל ההשפעה...

He prayed– Human birth is a natural function. Just like planting and growing is a natural function by which living organisms cause their species to remain living.

But, that which a person will give birth to a unique individual, which will be a chosen and praiseworthy creation – that is unnatural and requires Divine assistance.

It is for that reason that our Matriarchs were barren because for the *klipa* external layer to produce a holy result, ‘nature’ is incapable of doing so on its own and requires Divine assistance.

Divine assistance is aroused through prayer to grant the holy soul to a ‘daughter of G-d’ who does valiantly.

And even though Yitzchak was already prepared [to give birth to a ‘child of G-d’] from the time of the *Akeida*, as I wrote there, Rivka was not prepared. That is what it means that she was ‘barren’. [That is, besides the physical barrenness, she was barren from the spiritual level of bearing a ‘child of G-d’.]

The Torah now tells us how Rivka was readied for this birth of a ‘child of G-d’.

1. Through multiple prayers. That is why it says ויעתר, which implies multiplicity.
2. The source of the prayers was Yitzchak to whom it was promised children from the time of the *Akeida*; he prayed that those children should be from Rivka.
3. Opposite his wife. When the recipient of the prayer is standing opposite the one who will shower the influence, the recipient will be better prepared for that influence.

In reference to the third point that Malbim is making here, see Rashi to Yechezkel Perek 46/Posuk 9 where Rashi writes that the term נכחו used in the Posuk there means:

שיתראו בתוך...יפה יפה:

They should be clearly visible.

[The reader may ask, as did this writer: The promise that Yitzchak would have children was made long before the *Akeida*. The verse cited so many times so far: כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע was said when Yishmael was banished, prior to the *Akeida*. Thus, the premise of *Malbim* seems to be incorrect.

However, at the *Akeida* we read (B’reishis Perek 22/P’sukim 16-17):

We are now ready to investigate the second form of interaction with Hashem – seeking knowledge and information.

However, let us now, in advance, pose a question to which we will need to relate further on:

If part of our relationship with HaKodosh Boruch Hu includes seeking information and knowledge, why didn't Rivka I'meinu, suffering childlessness for so many years, not seek out the seer and query why she was unable to bear children? Why, only when she was in the middle of a complicated pregnancy, did she seek information?

We now return to the second of the two verses that we are investigating:

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת ה':

The sons were running vigorously inside her and she said, 'If this is so, why am I?'; she went to seek Hashem.

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי נְאֻם ה' כִּי יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְלֹא חָשַׁכְתָּ אֶת בְּנִךְ אֶת יְחִידְךָ: כִּי בָרַךְ אֲבָרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבֵּה אֲרַבֶּה אֶת זַרְעֶךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכַחֵל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרֶשׁ זַרְעֶךָ אֶת שְׂעַר אֲיָבִיו:

Hashem [said to Avraham], 'I am taking an oath by My Being, says G-d, because that you did this act and did not withhold your son, your only son. I will certainly bless you and I will certainly increase your seed like the stars of the heavens and the sand that is on the sea shore; your seed will inherit the gate of its enemies.]

Netziv's commentary certainly need to be placed after those of Malbim to focus on their points of agreement and their differences. We read in Ha'amek Davar:

כי עקרה היא. משום שהיתה מארם ואחות לבן הארמי, והיה בדרך הטבע שיהיו בניה אכזרים על כן נתעקרה, והיה לידתה אחר כך בדרך פלא ונס...:

Because she was barren – Because Rivka was from *Aram Naharayim* and the sister of Lovon the Aramite, the way of nature would be for her to produce cruel offspring. Because of that she was made barren and her subsequent birthing was wondrous and miraculous...

Our Meforshim offer a wide variety of interpretations as to what troubled Rivka l'meinu so much.

Some explain that the movement in her womb was objectively unusual, to say the least, and therefore she knew something was wrong. Rashi explains it in this fashion:

רבותינו דרשוהו לשון ריצה, כשהיתה עוברת על פתחי תורה של שם ועבר יעקב רץ ומפרכס לצאת, עוברת על פתחי עבודה זרה עשו מפרכס לצאת.

Our Rabbis interpreted the word ויתרוצצו as meaning 'running'. When Rivka went past the Torah site of *Shem* and *Eiver*, Yaakov ran and jumped to leave the womb. When she passed a site of idolatry, Eisav jumped to leave.

Whether or not Rivka knew that she had twins, the very fact that the fetus[es] that she carried reacted so powerfully to such stimuli was striking and unexpected.

Others understand that the activity that she experienced was not objective alarming per se. However, Rivka sensed it as unusual and she attempted to understand how to view that which was occurring insider her body.

Ibn Ezra writes:

והיא שאלה לנשים שילדו אם ארע להם ככה, ותאמרנה לא. וטעם ותאמר אם כן הדבר והמנהג, למה זה אנכי בהריון משונה:

Rivka asked other women who had given birth whether this same phenomenon occurred to them and they responded, 'no'.

The explanation of כן ותאמר אם – 'she said, 'if so' is the custom [different from my pregnancy] למה זה אנכי – why am I in a pregnancy that is so unusual?

In his second commentary, Rashi writes:

דבר אחר מתרוצצים זה עם זה ומריבים בנחלת שני עולמות:

Another explanation is that they were fighting¹⁷ one with the other regarding the inheritance of both worlds, *Olom haZeh* and *Olom haBo*.

¹⁷ The word ויתרוצצו is related to the word ריצה – running and רציצה – crushing.

That is, in this explanation, there is unusual movement but nothing so pronounced as the pushing to leave in specific places, such as the Beis Midrash and *Ihav'dil*, the cemetery. Although Rashi does not mention it, it is not impossible to say that Rivka consulted with other woman to assess if her pregnancy was unique.

The approach of *Netziv* to this question seems most appropriate to the above. He writes:

למה זה אנכי. כסבורה שבשביל שהיא בטבע עקרה על כן אין העבור כמו כל הולדות,
על כן אמרה אם כן למה זה אנכי, מה זה אני, הלא לא כאשה עקרה ולא כאשה
הראויה לבנים:

Why am I? – Rivka thought that since her natural state was barrenness [and her pregnancy was miraculous], therefore the fetus that she was carrying was not the same as all others. And thus, she questioned, ‘Why am I? What is it that I am? I am neither like a barren woman [because I am pregnant] nor like one who is fertile [because I have an abnormal pregnancy].’

However, others see Rivka’s question as more profound and focused and not open-ended as *Netziv* suggests.

Seforno sees Rivka’s question to G-d as being very personal. He writes:

ותאמר אם כן. אחרי שהדבר כן שמתרוצצין ויש לחוש שימות אחד מהם
ואסתכן אני בלידה כמנהג בלידת עובר מת:

She said, ‘if so’ – now that they are running and fighting, I must be concerned that one of the fetuses will die and I will be in a life-threatening situation delivering a still-born child.

למה זה אנכי. למה זה התאוה קרובי שאהיה אני אם הזרע באמרם את היי לאלפי
רבבה וכן בעלי שהתפלל עלי בזה:

Why am I? – Why is it that my relatives wanted me to be a mother of children when they said, ‘You will be thousands and a myriad’? And my husband prayed for me about this, why?

When Rashi, and others, say that they were fighting, it means that there was fierce fighting inside the womb, with each one trying to crush the other.

But, as *Kli Yokor* points out, Rivka's worry was not for herself only. Rivka was aware of her potential place in Jewish history that was now at its very foundations. She knew that her progeny would continue the legacy of Avraham Ovinu and that of her husband, Yitzchak. Thus, the thought that such progeny would not be faithful to *Toras Avraham* was the reason to seek G-d.

Kli Yokor writes:

ויתרוצצו הבנים בקרבה וגו'. רציצה זו היה שבעוברה על פתח בית המדרש של שם ועבר יעקב מפרכס לצאת ועשו מעכב על ידו, ובעוברה על פתח עבודה זרה עשו מפרכס לצאת ויעקב מעכב על ידו, והיא סברה שאין הדבר כן אלא וולד אחד בבטנה ורוצה לצאת בין לפתחי בתי מדרשות בין לפתח עבודה זרה ואם כן חס ושלוש שמא שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך אמרה למה זה אנכי כי כמוני כשאר נשים עובדי עבודה זרה ומה יתרון יש לי עליהם אם חס ושלוש שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך ותלך לדרוש את ה' רצה לומר לדרוש אחר מציאות ה' ממש מהו:

The sons ran in her insides – this expression of ויתרוצצו refers to the fact that when Rivka passed the Beis Midrash of *Shem* and *Eiver*, Yaakov would jump to go out and Eisav stopped him. When she passed the opening of a house of paganism, Eisav would jump to go out and Yaakov prevented him.

Rivka thought that it wasn't two fetuses that she was carrying – but that there was only one child in her womb and that child wanted to go out at both the openings of the Beis Midrash and the opening of the house of idolatry and that, G-d forbid, there were two almighty powers¹⁸!

Therefore she said, 'Why am I? If I am like all the other woman idolaters – why am I any better or different than them if G-d forbid there are two almighty powers?'

¹⁸ A common idolatrous theme is one of שתי רשויות, often referred to as 'dualism'. In many cases, there is a god of good and a god of evil or a god of light and a god of darkness.

If one could envision such a thing as dualism, then each god would exert its force on an individual, drawing near to the good – the Beis Midrash and the evil – the house of idolatry.

That is why 'she went to seem G-d', meaning to seek knowledge about G-d's existence – what is it?¹⁹

And now, following an exploration of various approaches to two of the verses of this week's Parshas Toldos, we return to the question we raised earlier

If part of our relationship with HaKodosh Boruch Hu includes seeking information and knowledge, why didn't Rivka I'meinu, suffering childlessness for so many years, not seek out the seer and query why she was unable to bear children? Why, only when she was in the middle of a complicated pregnancy did she seek information?

I believe that the dichotomy that we see in our Parsha can be understood by analyzing the distinction between the barrenness of Rivka I'meinu and her distress from the unexplained complications of her pregnancy.

In regard to her barrenness, Rivka I'meinu and Yitzchak Ovinu were presented with an objective fact. Rivka I'meinu was unable to bear children.

Her wish to bear children, and the wish of her husband, was of great importance. But, the ability to bear children is in the Hand of G-d.

We read in Masseches Taanis (2 a):

אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח,
ואלו הן: מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה, ומפתח של תחיית המתים...מפתח של
חיה מנין - דכתיב (בראשית ל/כב) ויזכר א...ל"קים את רחל וישמע אליה א...ל"קים
ויפתח את רחמה.

Rabi Yochanan said, 'Three keys are in the Hand of HaKodosh Boruch Hu that were not handed over to a *shlich*. They are the key to rain, the key to giving birth and the key of bringing the dead back to life.

¹⁹ Certainly this explanation of Kli Yokor raises many questions. Does he mean to say that after two decades in the house of Yitzchak and in the area of influence of Avraham Ovinu, Rivka I'meinu had basic doubts in her *emunah*.

How does such an approach fit it with what was brought earlier that upon Rivka's entry into the home of Yitzchak, the home became transformed and all of the wondrous events associated with the home of Sarah now became part and parcel of the home of Rivka?

What is the source of that the key to giving birth was not delivered to a *shliach*? The verse says, “G-d remembered Leah and G-d listened to her and He opened her womb.

The power of prayer would perhaps change the decree that was placed upon her.

Neither Rivka nor Yitzchak sought out a prophecy to understand why she was barren; they did not question G-d’s judgment or His reasoning. That acceptance of G-d’s judgment did not mean that they could not turn to Him in prayer and ask that His decree change. Her situation was fixed and only prayer had the potential of being efficacious in having her status changed.

Once she was pregnant, however, Rivka was required to make knowledgeable decisions regarding her health or the upbringing of her offspring and she felt that such decisions were beyond her capabilities, she then turned to Hashem for answers that would seek to guide her in her quest to be as good and successful as she could possibly be.

The Torah teaches us a great lesson in the two verses that we have just studied.

There is a time when we turn to G-d in sincere prayer and there is a time when we turn to G-d for direction and guidance, in addition to prayer.

We turn to G-d in prayer, without asking for explanation, justification or rationale when we are faced with a given situation about which we have no say and no decision to make. We pray to G-d that He will allow the situation to turn out well. Our prayers are our intervention and our *hishtadlus*. There is nothing more to do.

On the other hand we may be confronted with situations for which we must take a stand, undertake action and are called upon for active decision-making.

In such circumstances, particularly when we are aware that we do not know which way to turn, then, in addition to prayer, we seek Divine wisdom that will guide us through the maze of life and its labyrinths²⁰.

²⁰ This approach may explain that which seems to many to be a very difficult verse.

When B’nei Yisroel stood at the Red Sea, confronted by the impassable water and pursued by the relentless Egyptians, Moshe Rabbenu turned to G-d in prayer.

If we study Parshas Toldos only to see what our forebears have done in the past, then we are doing a disservice to the Torah and those who uphold it.

Does it matter if 3600 other years ago, Rivka said this prayer or went to this Beis Midrash or another?

If, on the other hand, we understand that the detail with which we are provided based on our Torah learning is for us to analyze, understand, apply and internalize, than our Limmud Torah is not only an intellectual exercise, it is *Toras Chaim*, a guide for the lives that we wish to lead, blessed with Divine inspiration and the righteousness of our thoughts and our actions.

Chodesh Tov

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock

The Divine response seems puzzling, to say the least. We read (Sh'mos Perek 14/Posuk 15):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה מַה תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ:
Hashem said to Moshe, 'Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to B'nei Yisroel and they should travel [into the sea].

Rashi writes:

מה תצעק אלי - למדנו שהיה משה עומד ומתפלל, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא לא עת עתה להארך בתפלה שישראל נתונים בצרה.

Why do you cry out to Me – we learn from this that Moshe was standing and praying. G-d said to him, 'This is not a time to say long prayers – now that Israel is in distress.

Our first thought is, 'what is there to do when one is in stress? Shouldn't we daven? But, such a question indicates that we did not understand the Will of HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

G-d did not say, 'don't pray'. He said, 'don't say long prayers'. And the intent is that in addition to praying, He said, 'You, Moshe should have sought Divine Guidance as to the proper next step that you should undertake. You have a decision to make. You are incapable of making that decision – so you should have turned to Me for an answer. Even though you didn't, I will give you the answer anyway, "Speak to B'nei Yisroel and they should travel – move forward.'

