

Meshech Chochmah Parshas Toldos

Words Unspoken – Heard Loud and Clear

וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם לְאִשְׁתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אַחֲתֵי הוּא כִּי יָרָא לֵאמֹר אִשְׁתִּי כֹּן יַהֲרֹגְנִי אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם עַל רִבְקָה כִּי טוֹבֵת מְרֻאָה הִיא.

The men of the place inquired about his wife and he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say “My wife,” lest the men of the place kill me because of Rivkah, for she was of fair appearance. (26:7)

As the beginning of our perek informs us, there was a famine in the land, in response to which Yitzchak and Rivkah went to the city of Garar. Like his father, Avraham, he was fearful that the Plishtim there might kill him if they knew he was Rivkah’s husband, and thus he said she was his sister.

When we look at this pasuk carefully, we will notice that there a couple of words which appear to be missing. It begins by taking about Yitzchak, stating that he was afraid to say “[she is] my wife,” and then proceeds to state his reason for doing so: “Lest the men of the place kill me.” However, as the Ibn Ezra points out, since these, too are the words of Yitzchak, the pasuk should have said, “**For he said,** ‘Lest the men of the place etc.’”! This is the standard way the Torah describes what a person was thinking. Why are these “narrating words” missing here?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that in fact, the omission of these words is also part of the Torah’s narration. The halachah states that if people establish themselves as having a certain relationship over the course of thirty days, to the extent that people in their surroundings come to presume this relationship to be true, this creates a state where they are bound by the laws of that relationship. As such, the Rama¹ raises a basic question: Given that it is forbidden for a Ben Noach live with his sister as man and wife, how was Yitzchak permitted to continue living with Rivkah? The pasuk states that they were in Garar for an extended period of time, in which case she should have become forbidden to him based on the above law of presumption!

¹ Teshuvos Rama sec. 2.

The Rama answers: In a situation where it is clearly understood that there were compelling circumstances which led those involved to present themselves as having a certain relationship, the concept of halachic presumption does not take hold. Here, too, given Rivkah's beauty and the evident worry that this might lead to danger for Yitzchak, saying that she was his sister did not create any prohibition.

In a trademark comment, the Meshech Chochmah brings together the worlds of halachah and *parshanut*. The above explanation of the Rama, says Meshech Chochmah, can be seen within the pasuk itself, for this is what lies behind the Torah's omission of the words "for he said" prior to stating his fear that they might kill him. By omitting these words, the Torah is indicating that this fear was something that Yitzchak *didn't need to state!* Since it was eminently clear from the situation, it was as good as stated, with the result that it did not result in a presumption of a relationship which would have rendered Rivkah forbidden, as the Rama explained.

Yitzchak's Mitzvah

וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ... וַיְהִי לוֹ מִקְנֵה צֹאן וּמִקְנֵה בָקָר

The man prospered... He acquired flocks and herds (26:13-14)

As described in these pesukim, Yitzchak began to prosper greatly in Grar. The Meshech Chochmah raises a nuanced question regarding the way the Torah describes his assets.

The Hebrew terms "צאן" and "בקר" refer to two different types of livestock:

- צאן – refers to sheep and goats.
- בקר – refers to cattle.

As we can see from the pasuk, the term “מקנה” applies equally to both of these categories. However, this being the case, the pasuk could have just used the term once, saying, “ויהי לו מקנה צאן ובקר”. Why does it repeat the term “מקנה”?

To answer this question, the Meshech Chochmah directs us to the words of the Rambam in the Mishneh Torah,² where he discusses the various mitzvos which were introduced to the world with or by the Avos. As we know, the mitzvah of *milah* was introduced with Avraham while *gid hanasheh* was introduced with Yaakov. What about Yitzchak? The Rambam states that Yitzchak introduced the mitzvah of maaser. The source for this idea is in pasuk 12 of our perek which states that Yitzchak’s crop for that year exceeded the expected yield one hundred-fold. The Midrash³ explains that the measuring of the crop was for purposes of separating maaser.

The Meshech Chochmah understands that Yitzchak introduced not only the mitzvah of separating maaser from one’s crop, but also from one’s livestock – *maaser beheimah*. One of the halachos of *maaser beheimah* is that each category of animal needs to be tithed separately. Thus, the Gemara⁴ states that one may not separate sheep or goats as maaser for cattle or vice versa. However, the Gemara also states that all types of flock are considered to be of one category, so that one may separate sheep as maaser for goats and vice versa.

With this in mind, says Meshech Chochmah, we can understand why the pasuk described Yitzchak’s livestock exactly in the way that it did. Although “צאן” and “בקר” are both covered by the term “מקנה”, nonetheless, the Torah repeats it, since they are not in the same category of “מקנה”, something which was of particular significance with regards to the mitzvah of *maaser beheimah* – the mitzvah which Yitzchak introduced.

As with the first case where a close reading of the pasuk noted words which seemed to have been left “unwritten”, in this case where a word appears to be repeated without need, the worlds of halachah and *parshanut* illuminate each other through the masterful vision and insight of the Meshech Chochmah.

² Hilchos Melachim 9:1.

³ Bereishis Rabbah 64:6.

⁴ Bechoros 54b.