**PARSHAS VAYETZE**

**כט, יא: וישק יעקב לרחל וישא את קלו ויבך**

**29, 11: And Yaakov kissed Rochel. Then he lifted up his voice and he wept.**

Did Yaakov Avinu actually kiss Rochel Imeinu before they were married? Is that allowed? Even if it was, why would he have done such a thing, which seems to not be done even nowadays!

It seems from the **Radak** that he did actually kiss her, since he says she “accepted” his kiss after seeing everything he had just done for her (taking the rock off the well and feeding her flocks, as well as chasing off any unworthy suitors). **Chizkuni** also says he told her afterward that he was her father’s sister’s son, so she wouldn’t be upset at him for kissing her. **Ibn Ezra** says he told her so beforehand. The **Sforno** says basically the same, that it keeps repeating אחי אמו in the previous pasuk to tell us that he did not sin (in mussar) when he kissed Rochel. But does that mean he kissed her the way a young man would kiss a young girl? Could that be what these rishonim mean?

**Ramban** and **Rabbeinu Bechaye** say she was very young and not ראוי ליבעל yet. In fact, in pasuk טו he says she was only five years old (which is why Yaakov suggested that he should work for seven years until she would be twelve years old and able to be married). Since Yaakov was 77 years old at the time, it didn’t seem like a strange thing when a 77 year old man kissed a little girl. She must have been young, because Lavan would not allow her older daughter Leah be outside with these shepherds since she was already old enough to be married off.

Another answer they give (which seems to be connected to the previous answer) is that Yaakov Avinu kissed her on the head or the shoulder, not on the mouth, since the pasuk does not say בפי רחל, and the **Ibn Ezra** says earlier (כז, כה) that anytime the letter ל appears in front of a word, it means “something on top of,” not something direct.

The Ben Ish Chai in **Od Yosef Chai** says Rochel Imeinu may have been 20 years old at this time and could have been a נדה, so there is no way Yaakov would have kissed her without knowing if she was tamei or tahor! Rather, this ל in the front of the word לרחל tells us something very different happened here. He didn’t kiss Rochel at all – it would have said וישק יעקב את רחל! Rather, Yaakov saw that Rochel had come together with her sheep. If you look in the pasuk, it seems there is a פסיק between the word רחל and the word באה, because Rochel always wore a veil with little holes in it so she would not be seen by others. There was something being מפסיק between her and everyone else! It could even be that she surrounded herself with the sheep so that people would not be able to come near her, so she stood עם הצאן – together with the sheep, and not in front or behind them! When Yaakov saw her tznius – how she put herself in the middle of a flock of sheep and covered her face completely, he kissed *what was on* Rochel Imeinu – her veil! The shepherds could not see that far, since Yaakov had walked in between the sheep to get to her, and they assumed he had kissed her ממש and cried out about that – but that had never happened!

The **Ohr Hachaim** suggests that since he was crying when he kissed her (as **Rashi** says, because he had nothing to give her or because he saw through ruach hakodesh that he would not be buried with her) that showed he was kissing her not out of illicit thoughts, but rather because she was his relative, so nobody suspected him of doing something improper.

**Tiferes Yehonasan** Yaakov Avinu did this on purpose in order to make sure he would have no improper thoughts when kissing a beautiful girl like Rochel Imeinu: while doing so, he thought of death, since that should break down your yeitzer hara, as we say in Brachos. Since he did that and we see that he cried, that indicates that this kiss was not out of תאוה but rather because she was his relative. The **Netziv** and **Malbim** say the same thing as well, that this could not have been just a kiss of תאוה since he cried immediately afterward (or possibly while kissing her).

**Tiferes Yehonasan** gives another answer based on what happened when Rebbe Akiva first met the wife of Turnus Rufus who tried to seduce him (in Nedarim נ): he laughed, spat, and cried – because he saw that her beauty would eventually be gone and rot in the ground. It could be that Yaakov Avinu kissed her thinking that she must be the most amazing person in the world if Hashem allowed her to have such great beauty, and then cried as if to say none of this is worth anything at the end of the day, since even this beauty will rot and become dust.

The **Midrash Rabbah** (ע) says all kisses are considered תיפלות and mean nothing, except for three of them: 1) When a great person does it or when someone has just become very great (like Shmuel Hanavi to Shaul Hamelech – **Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky** actually learns from here that the kiss is what allowed Shaul to become King!), 2) When someone hasn’t seen another person for a very long time (like Aharon and Moshe Rabbeinu), and 3) When someone is leaving someone else (like Orpah and Noami). Rebbe Tanchuma adds on a fourth one: 4) Between relatives, and he learns it from right here. This shows us that kissing a relative would be considered something that would be good, at least according to Rebbe Tanchum.

**Ksav V’Hakabalah** explains this midrash beautifully: typically when someone kisses someone else it comes from a physical desire which is burning within him to be close to that person, to the point where they need to connect physically. These three are examples of where it is not the body that desires this closeness but rather the Soul is pining to connect! When you don’t see your friend for a long time, when someone has just become very great, or when you have to leave – there is more to that than just a physical longing. According to Rebbe anchum, with relatives it is the same way. According to him it is not a physical desire, but rather a feeling of closeness.

The truth is this is already a machlokes in the gemara in Shabbos יג with Ulla who used to kiss his sister when he saw her, and was wrong to do so. Some say he kissed her on her chest, while others say he kissed her on her hand. Those who say he kissed her on the chest would say it is forbidden to touch your relatives in an illicit fashion, but otherwise it would be muttar, while those who say he kissed her on the hand would say it is forbidden to touch her at all!

According to the opinion that it was forbidden for him to touch her at all and utilizing Rebbe Tanchuma’s opinion that this kiss was not based on physical attraction, one would have to say that this wording of וישק does not denote that he actually kissed her, but rather he got “close” to her and asked her to marry him, to which she responded yes, since the word וישק is not being used here to refer to the physical act but the spiritual one.

**Rabbeinu Efraim** says the gematria of וישק יעקב לרחל is the same as כמו אז מסר לרחל ג' סימנים, which is crazy because I never would have thought this conversation would have happened now! I would have assumed it would happen seven years later, when it was more נוגע!

**Maayana Shel Torah** says Yaakov Avinu cried because he knew the world would consider this “kiss” to be like the fools think – he saw a beautiful girl, fell for her, and couldn’t hold himself back from kissing her, chas v’shalom. This was an act of extreme holiness and filled with kedusha and proper thoughts, but he knew people in the future who read this would never consider it that way.

**Meam Loez** says this kiss was done in public, before the eyes of all these shepherds who were waiting for everyone to come in order to remove the huge rock on top of the well. This is something that should not have been done, as we know people are drawn to do these types of things and more, and when one thing is “allowed” people will only go further and further. Sanhedrin would have given people מכות מרדות for doing something like this, until he accepts upon himself never to do something like this again! In fact, chazal say you shouldn’t even kiss your sister or your cousins (maybe even your own grown up daughter), since this is what fools and sinners do! When the shepherds saw this, they became very angry and said “From the time the Mabul happened, we have stayed far away from women and made sure we would not go near them, so we do not sin. Now this man comes to our area and does this in front of all of us?! How dare he!” Yaakov recognized he had done something wrong and cried in order to do teshuva (see **Mishnas Rebbe Elazar** פ"ז and Br**eishis Rabbah**, ע, א).

The truth is, says Rav Wolfson in **Emunas Itecha**, that these shepherds were more guilty of these types of sins than Yaakov Avinu was. They had such tamei thoughts that they could only think terrible things when they saw Yaakov do this, when they always wished they had the audacity to do this type of thing publicly! As they say: it takes one to know one, and you only see in others what is true about yourself. They put the blame on Yaakov, the innocent tzadik who didn’t realize people would assume badly what he was doing, and they used this to start acting out and doing what they wanted publicly, which eventually led to a breakdown of society. On the other hand, we know that Yaakov is the tachlis of kedusha, as the third bracha of Shemoneh Esray (אתה קדוש) is his bracha!

The **Igra D’Kallah** says this actually shows the high level that Yaakov was on that he considered the inyan of a zivug to be something that he should not be embarrassed of, as if he were putting on tefillin or wearing tzitzis. You take off your tefillin, you give it a kiss. You pick up your tzitzis strings and kiss them. Remember that Yaakov Avinu had spent his whole life, all 77 years, and especially the last 14 – sitting in a Bais Medrash and connecting to Hashem. To Yaakov, on the level that he was on, he recognized Rochel Imeinu as a חפצא של מצוה! He was so davuk to Hashem he couldn’t consider this to be something bad, and couldn’t imagine anyone else thinking that it would be bad, and he may never have had to deal with people that were so filled with תאוה they had to add on chumros not to be near women because of the issues that stem from that closeness. This is also the reason he said הבה את אשתי to Lavan – who would say that to their prospective father in law?! Who would say something like that to anyone, except the most uncouth people in the streets and in bars somewhere? The answer is that Yaakov would, because to him this was an inyan of a mitzvah and nothing more than that, which is hard for us to understand with our romantic fantasy worlds that we live in.

The **Kedushas Levi** calls this הפלא ופלא that Yaakov Avinu, the איש תם, the one who spent his whole life in the Bais Medrash learning Torah all day long, the בחיר שבאבות, the one who was able to keep all 613 mitzvos while staying with Lavan, should care about beauty and be attracted to Rochel because she was more beautiful than Leah was! That he should even kiss her for that reason seems very strange. He answers that Yaakov defined the middah of Tiferes, beauty and splendor. Any object that had beauty to it, even if it was covered with filth from this world, he was able to pull out that spark of kedusha and turn it into something special and serve Hashem with it. Yaakov saw the most beautiful spark of greatness within Rochel Imeinu and couldn’t hold himself back from being מעלה such a spark, knowing that bringing this into its ultimate level would be like bringing the world to its final tikkun. This was the inyan of the “kiss” – that he knew they together would be the source of only great things in this world.

Now, regarding the halacha, would someone be allowed to do something like this סתם? The **Ram”a** in Even Haezer סימן כא סעיף ה says that some say that whenever someone gets close to a woman לשם שמים, and not out of love or lust, he is allowed to do so, and therefore people are maikel when it comes to many of the things the **Shulchan Aruch** there says is אסור.

The **Bais Shmuel** (יא) says an example of this would be dancing with the kallah before her chosson, but talmidei chachamim should be machmir. The **Chelkas Mechokek** (ז) brings this as well and says it depends on the minhag of the town and what they do. It seems from thee meforshim that it would be muttar to dance with her directly, but the sefer **Om Ani Chomah** (written by a gadol in Bnei Brak, Rav Mordechai Gross) quotes from the sefer **Yafeh L’Leiv** that this was only allowed with a handkerchief in between, and possibly only without הסתכלות. There are others who say this minhag should be taken away.

The source of this idea of לשם שמים being muttar is from Kiddushin פא where Rav Acha bar Rava took his granddaughter into his lap and was playing with her and Rav Chisda asked him how he could do that, to which he answered that he was doing it לשם שמים (which Rashi says means he was showing her and her mother that he loved her).

**Pischei Teshuvah** says it all depends on the person. Rebbe Yochanan and Rav Gidal felt they could sit outside the mikvah and help women do their tevillah correctly. Rebbe Ami allowed women to sing for him outside Caesar’s palace. Many different Rabbanim (like Rebbe Yehoshua) allowed themselves to talk privately to Roman matron women. Rav Ada bar Ahava danced with the kallah on his shoulders. It just seems strange, so this can only be mattered by gedolei Yisroel.

On the other hand, the **Rambam** (in his sefer Hamitzvos #353) does not bring this היתר at all, since he holds any type of קירבה is forbidden from the Torah, since the pasuk specifically uses the phrase לא תקרבו. He holds that if someone would do anything like this to a woman he would get מלקות. The **Ramban** holds this is an אסמכתא and not the same level of איסור. This machlokes is a very complex one, based on the Sefer Hamitzvos and there is a tremendous **Megillas Esther** on it, but this argument is not the point of this chaburah.

One might be able to understand this by looking at it from two different vantage points: if there is an איסור from the Torah, then everything should be forbidden until you see a real reason to mattir it. If you hold there is no איסור from the Torah then everything would be allowed until you see a reason to forbid it.

On the other hand, the **Ram”a** says at the end there that we should not allow public displays of affection between a husband and his wife, since it will cause others to have illicit thoughts. This may be learned from Bava Basra נח where Rebbe Ban’ah was outside מערת המכפלה and Eliezer told him that Avraham was sitting in the lap of Sarah. When Rebbe Ban’ah balked at walking in, he was told to go in anyway since there is no yeitzer hara there. Must be that normally walking in and seeing such a thing would be אסור, or at the very least not tznius (the **Ram”a** seems to say it is forbidden, but the **Nimukei Yosef** says it is not derech eretz). The one exception to this rule seems to be the ancient minhag of the chosson and kallah walking hand in hand or arm in arm to the yichud room, which may be part of the kinyan process – but the **Bais Shmuel** argues on this point in סד, ו.