

PARSHAS TOLDOS

by Gedalia Litke

Out of fear for his life in Grar, Yitzchok said that Rivkah was his sister. After Yitzchok had lived there for some time ('ki archu lo shom hayomim'), King Avimelech looked closely ('vayashkeif') and saw ('vayar') that Yitzchok was 'metzacheik' with Rivkah, demonstrating that Rivkah was, in fact, his wife. (26:7,8)

Rashi, explaining 'ki archu lo shom hayomim', says that after having lived there and there being nothing, seemingly, to be concerned about, Yitzchok let down his guard and 'lo nizhar lihiyos nishmar' - he wasn't careful to take precautions. Rashi says, further (under the heading 'vayashkeif'), that Avimelech witnessed Yitzchak being engaged in marital relations.

1. Why does the pasuk say Avimelech both (i) looked closely/vayashkeif and (ii) saw/vayar, a somewhat redundant formulation.
2. Why does Rashi say 'lo nizhar lihiyos nishmar/he wasn't careful to take precautions', also a somewhat redundant formulation.
3. Rashi's headings (dibur hamatchil) are very precise. Why does Rashi use the heading 'vayashkeif' for the explanation of what Avimelech witnessed; this explanation belongs under a 'metzacheik' heading.

Beyond these questions we can also ask a threshold question: How is it possible that Yitzchok would have been 'metzacheik' in a way that could be seen by outsiders, whether or not he thought the locals were suspicious? The Zohar's answer to this threshold question is that Avimelech did not physically witness anything; rather he peered into the astrological signs to see if he could determine the relationship between Yitzchok and Rivkah. Vayashkeif means he consulted with the messages contained in the stars and perceived this detail about Yitzchok.

Based on this Zohar the Maskil L'Dovid answers the three questions above.

Avimelech first undertook to consult with the astrological signs (vayashkeif) and, upon investigating, 'saw' ('vayar') or perceived through this medium that Yitzchok was 'metzacheik'. This explains the use of both vayashkeif and vayar. Rashi explains what Avimelech saw under the heading 'Vayashkeif' because it was only through this medium that he perceived this detail about Yitzchok. But any physical perception of this detail is unthinkable.

According to the Zohar, why didn't Avimelech see this in the stars until now? At the time when

Yitzchok's guard was still up we can imagine that he knew of Avimelech's ability to gaze into the stars to glean information about people. Accordingly, Yitzchok had to counter-act, perhaps by uttering certain names of HaShem or using other methods to block or jam Avimelech's 'reception'. Now that Yitzchok's guard was down, however, he no longer took those precautions. Therefore Rashi says both 'lo nizhar' and 'lihiyos nishmar': Lo nizhar, he wasn't careful any more; 'lihiyos nishmar', to take the precautions he had been taking - taking action to interfere with Avimelech's ability to 'see' in the stars.

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