

All great stories have great endings. And all great story-tellers know that a great ending has to resolve all the main plot issues but still leave some questions unanswered. That way, people will go home to ponder, discuss, and engage with it in their imaginations, and want to hear it again.¹ This is the case with the main story of our parasha Gen. 24: **How Isaac Met Rebekah**. A concise recap: Abraham charges his trusted servant (who, in a prior story is named Eliezer) to go back to his ancestral region to find a suitable wife for Isaac. Bound by an oath to Abraham, the servant embarks to the outskirts of the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, where he deftly and strategically parks his camels by the main well, late in the day, precisely when the daughters of the town will come out to draw water. He prays to God for success, having devised a test of the prospective bride's worthiness: when he asks her for water, if she offers to draw water not only for him but for his camels, she will be deemed worthy. Rebekah appears at the well, engages with the servant and meets the challenge. He gives her a gold nose-ring and two golden bracelets and asks who she is and whether her family can lodge him and his entourage. When she replies that she is the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, and that there is plenty of room for them, he bows down and praises God. She runs home to tell her family, whereupon they invite him to stay. They prepare food for him, but he refuses to eat until he tells his story. Whereupon he spins a great yarn and convinces father Bethuel and brother Lavan to allow Rebekah to return with them to Canaan to marry Isaac. She consents. They travel. When she sees Isaac from afar, she falls from her camel. She turns to the servant and asks, **Who is that man?** He answers, **He is my master**. She covers herself. And our story then ends with the following: (Gen.. 24:66-67)

וַיְסַפֵּר הַעֲבָד לְיִצְחָק אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה. וַיְבֹאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלָהּ שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָה וַיִּנָּחֶם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ.
And the servant recounted to Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of Sara his mother; he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. Thus was Isaac comforted after his mother.

We are left with so many questions. What did the servant tell Isaac? How did he respond? Why is Isaac silent? What does it mean that he brought her into his **mother's tent**? How should we understand, **He took Rebekah**? Where is Abraham? Why does it say that **he loved her**? And so many more questions to discuss and argue about.

The Servant's Story to Isaac and Isaac's Silence: There is a simple reason why it doesn't tell us what the servant told Isaac: it would drag out the story! The story has already reached its climax. It's done! The servant got the wife for Isaac! All good storytellers know that when you're done, you're done. Therefore, the story is not going to relate to us a verbatim of what the servant told Isaac. That's for us to imagine. And here's what we imagine:

- 1. That Abraham kept this plan secret from Isaac.*
- 2. That in bringing Isaac a wife at the behest of his father, the servant was also trying to bring peace between him and his father.*
- 3. That the servant underscored to Isaac, Abraham's adavance that Isaac's future wife be from the ancestral homeland. The servant didn't find just any ordinary Aramean woman. He found him his very own first cousin!*
- 4. That because Abraham had not brought the nation into existence, the torch was now being passed to Isaac who would become the new father of that nation and that his future wife, Rebekah, would become the new mother.*
- 5. That just as Ishmael's mother, Hagar, found a wife for Isaac's half-brother Ishmael from her ancestral land (Egypt, see Gen. 21:21), Sarah was the one who was supposed to find Isaac a wife from her ancestral land (Aram). But now that she was dead, Abraham would have to take over the maternal task.*
- 6. That God made all of these things happen as Abraham emphatically said that he would, validating Abraham's steadfast trust in God and thereby compensating Abraham for all the challenges he put him through, including the terrible Akedah. What better way to compensate him than help his son find a wife!?*
- 7. That Rebekah was truly beautiful and kind in her own right; that she possessed qualities of resolve and strength that made her worthy of being his wife; and that while the two of them were indeed going to function as surrogates for the divine project of creating a nation, they were also two distinct individuals capable of creating their own marriage.*

That's a lot to take in. No wonder Isaac stayed silent.

He Brought Her into His Mother's Tent: We are right to be perplexed by this detail. First a technical problem: Sarah lived in Hebron. Isaac lived in the Negev. Did he take Rebekah to Hebron², or did he take the tent to the Negev³? Or does it mean something entirely different? R. Ezra Bick⁴ points out that we have been so influenced by Freud in our

¹And, in the case of a Torah story, argue over it, discuss it over Shabbat lunch and ask deep questions of theology and identity, and build community with it. This is a story with an **open** or **aporetic** ending. These endings are found in folktales, literature and film. **Casablanca** ends with Rick helping Ilsa and Laszlo escape, and Rick saying to Inspector Louie Renault, **Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship**, while we in the audience wonder, really? What will this friendship look like? At the end of

Shawshank Redemption, Andy and Red reunite, but what happens next?

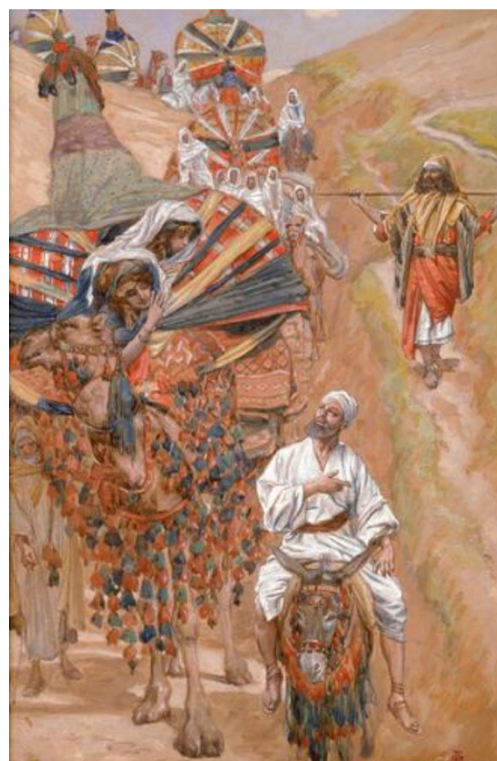
² This is the opinion of Radak, Rabbi David Kimhi, Provence, 1160-1235.

³ A plausible reading, but I cannot locate any sources for this.

⁴ Director of the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion, and lecturer. His article translated from Hebrew can be found at: <https://etzion.org.il/en/>

reading of this story that we always conclude that Isaac married Rebekah to replace his mother. But Bick writes: *I doubt this understanding is correct. Firstly, there is no reason for the Torah to be psychoanalyzing Isaac in this way, since it does not explain anything about the rest of Isaac's life. It is unconnected to the story. Secondly...I find it hard to believe that the Torah explicitly is making a point which no one understood until Freud enlightened us. I have nothing against using psychological insights to illuminate the Torah narrative, but in this case, we are trying to understand the explicit purpose in writing the verse, and I think the Torah's plain sense (p'shat) should have been clear to ancients as well as to us.* In other words,

Jews were interpreting this verse way before Freud and didn't think that Isaac was simply marrying his mother. A more compelling reading (following Bick) would be that Isaac is not a passive mama's boy, incapable of leading his own life and taking on tremendous responsibilities, **but a substantial man in his own right.** We have three clues for this: (1) Isaac understands that as Abraham's son he is destined to be a progenitor of the multitudinous nation that will possess the gates of its enemies, and through which all the nations of the earth will enjoy blessing (Gen. 22:17-18). (2) Isaac is contemplative, he walks at the end of the day (Gen. 24:63), not something ordinary people do. And (3) Look closely at the text: when the servant is in **servant mode**, he is referred to as **הַעֲבָד**-the servant, but when he is in **illustrious-agent-of-Abraham mode** he is referred to as **הָאִישׁ**-the man. The story plays on this duality. When he is before Bethuel with his ten camels loaded with provisions, garments and jewelry, he is



James Tissot,
Rebekah Meets Isaac By the Way.

הָאִישׁ-the man. When he is with Abraham at the beginning of the story, or with Isaac at the end of the story, he is simply **הַעֲבָד**-the servant.

When Rebekah turns to him at the end of the story (Gen. 24:65), the text cleverly and slyly transitions him from **הָאִישׁ**-the man that he was up until this point, to **הַעֲבָד**-the servant that he is now.

וְתֹאמַר אֶל הָעֶבֶד מִי הָאִישׁ הַלֹּזֵה הַלֵּךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרֹאתָנוּ?

And she said to **the servant** (formerly **the man**): **Who is the man over there that is walking in the field to meet us?**

Who's **the man** now? Isaac is **הָאִישׁ**-the man! Not only is he **הָאִישׁ**-the man but he is, in the words of the servant: **אֲדֹנִי**-my master. A big man! **And the Tent?** Bick: *I do not think this is a particular tent which had belonged to Sara and had been waiting empty for the last three years.* **Comment:**

The tent here is not a real tent. *The tent is a metaphor for the role of matriarch and Isaac's co-progenitor of the people.* Thus, the complicated phrase **וַיְבִאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ**-he brought her into his mother Sarah's tent should be rendered: **he brought her into her mother's role.**

An analogy would be to a Prince whose father, the King, was old and infirm and whose mother, the Queen, has just died. He **brings his new wife into the Queen's palace**, a palace which is not the Queen's per se, but the palace of the realm.⁵ *It's a way of saying that he brought her into the role of Queen.* Bick's point (like other major commentators before him) *is that Rebekah is not replacing Isaac's mother (à la Freud) as much as she is in-heriting Sarah's role as matriarch.* Having heard the story from the servant, how wonderful she was, and how providential it was that he found her, Isaac now must assess for himself whether she will be able to live up to the role of matriarch. When **he brings her into the tent**, it is not to cohabit with her. Rather, it is to propose to her: **Rebekah, do you want this role in being my partner in creating this people?** Now she is silent. But she already indicated her willingness when she

decided, on her own volition, to travel to Canaan! She *she said yes!* already said: **Yes!** It is only after he brings her into the tent, i.e. proposes to her, that the text says, **וַיִּקַּח אֶת רֵבֶקָה**

וַיִּקַּח אֶת רֵבֶקָה-And he took Rebekah and she became his wife. **Love and Comfort.** Some have argued that the phrase at the end of the story, refers to the sexual consummation of the marriage. That might be plausible but it's beside the point. Rather, what is unique here is that with all the drama and suspense, within this great story of God's promise and covenant, there is this new couple that has been brought into existence by God's providence and is cemented by a very genuine human love. And that is actually a very beautiful ending to this beautiful story. **Shabbat Shalom!**



**Dror Or.
Sudthisak
Rinthalak.
Ran Gvili.
Hostages
whose
bodies
remain held
in Gaza.**

**This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by
Linda Tondow and family in memory of Al Tondow, z'l,
on the anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah Shabbat.**

⁵ Another analogy: Mother and Father own a business. Father has retired and Mother has died. Son brings his new wife **into his mother's office** to become co-CEO with him.