



Rebecca, by [Giuseppe Molteni](#) (1800–1867)

Falling or Sliding off the Camel?

63 וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַ בְּשָׂדֶה, לִפְנוֹת
עֶרֶב; וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא, וְהִנֵּה גַמְלִים
בָּאִים.

63 And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, there were camels coming.

64 וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת-עֵינֶיהָ, וַתֵּרָא
אֶת-יִצְחָק; וַתִּפֹּל, מֵעַל הַגָּמֶל.

64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she alighted from the camel.

Gen 24:63-64

Why did Rivkah fall off the Camel?

As they approached Avraham's land, Rivkah looked up and saw a man standing in the field praying. She did not know it was Yitzchak. Seeing him praying with such intensity, Rivkah realized that this was a great man. When she saw an angel standing beside him, Rivkah bowed deeply toward him and fell off the camel in her great awe and respect. Hirsch describes the emotion that prevented Rivka from riding towards Yitzchak, which is very characteristic of Rivkah. A fancy lady surely would have preferred to ride in honor and glory and with her head held high. She would have afterwards allowed her future husband to help her descend from the camel. However, especially since Yitzchak was not riding, it didn't seem suitable for Rivkah to ride towards Yitzchak who was walking. In addition, riding is a sign of rulership, and Rivkah didn't want to be seen by Yitzchak as the first lady.

All this was not done through calculation (if not so, it would be only a small difference between humility and haughtiness). Rather "*She fell*" as if accidentally by herself, though arousal of the spontaneous correct emotion.

Furthermore, Rivkah saw the tetragrammaton expressed in the personality of Yitzchak. She fell on her face, just as people would fall on their faces when they heard the tetragrammaton being pronounced on Yom Kippur by the Kohen Gadol.

HaRav Moshe Meir Weiss, Rav of the Agudah of Staten Island relates that after the Akeidah, Yitzchak spent three years in the Garden of Eden and came down just as Rivkah was arriving. In Gan Eden it is said that people walk upside down.

Following this thought, Rivkah saw Yitzchak walking upside down and she fell off the camel as a result.



Rav Uri Cohen writes:¹

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eventide; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold,
there were camels coming.

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¹ <https://harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=1503>

The Hebrew word "*nofel*" can mean "to descend" or "to fall." But there's a big difference between the two -- is it intentional or not, and is it slow or fast? "Descend" sounds like choosing to go down gradually (as in an airplane starting its descent), while "fall" sounds like losing one's balance and plummeting (as in Humpty Dumpty's great fall).

Which one is meant by "**vatipol**," which is what Rivkah did when she saw Yitzchak? Here's the context of the pesukim:

Yitzchak went out to the field at evening time to meditate... Rivka looked up and saw Yitzchak, and she fell (alighted?) from the camel. She asked the slave, "Who is this man in the field approaching us?" "It is my master," replied the servant. She took the veil and covered herself (Gen 24:63-65). 1

The answer to the question of what Rivkah did may very well depend on how we understand the mood of this entire incident. To put it in contemporary terms, if you were filming this scene, what kind of music would you use for the soundtrack? Would it be elegant and refined? Tense and suspenseful? Heartfelt and romantic? Let's examine these three possibilities.

Respect

The first option is that Rivkah descended from the camel because of her refined character traits. Rashi paraphrases "**vatipol**" as "*hishmitah atzmah*," she lowered herself. 2

Radak elaborates that when the servant told Rivkah that the man was Yitzchak, she descended from the camel in order to put on her veil, and then she got back on the camel. Why? According to Radak, "This story teaches manners (*derekh eretz*) and modesty (*tzniut*), that it is appropriate for a woman to be shy in front of her fiancé and to avoid showing her [face] to him until she marries him." This would seem to be the precedent for our minhag of *bedeken*, in which a bride and groom reenact Rivkah's veiling right before their *chuppah*.

A variation of the middot approach without tying it into marriage appears in the Hertz Chumash, which was once the Chumash used in most American Orthodox shuls. Rabbi Hertz, who was Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, comments here:

"*Alighted from.*" A mark of respect; cf. Joshua XV:18; 1 Samuel XXV:23. In the East men and women dismount on the approach of a person of importance.

"Took her veil." Rebekah again acted in accordance with Eastern etiquette. It was not necessary for her to have her face veiled in the presence of Eliezer, since he was only a servant.

In other words, Rivkah's actions were respectful, following the minhagim of the time to show kavod. Interestingly, Seforno thinks that "**vatipol**" refers to her head, not her body: Rivkah lowered her head out of respect for Yitzchak. 4

This approach would call for an elegant and refined soundtrack (perhaps Mozart).

Fear

The second option is that Rivkah fell off the camel out of fear. On the words "She saw Yitzchak," Rabbi Chiya in Bereisheet Rabbah comments that "She saw him majestic (hadur), and she was dumbfounded in his presence." 5

Seforno suggests that Rivkah veiled herself because she was afraid to look at Yitzchak's face, the same way that Moshe hid his face from the burning bush because he was afraid to look (Ex 3:6). 6

While these opinions do not directly address "**vatipol**," the **Netziv** does:

"Rivka looked up and saw Yitzchak": while he was in prayer. He looked like an angel of God, fearful in appearance.

"And she fell off the camel": from fright! She did not know who he was.

"She covered her face with a veil": From fear and embarrassment, as if with a realization that she was not worthy to be his wife. From that moment on, there was always a sense of trepidation in her heart. Her relationship with Yitzchak was very different to Sarah's with Avraham or Rachel and Yaakov. With them, if there was a problem, they would not be afraid or apprehensive to talk it through. This was not the case with Rivka.

This story is the prologue to the story in Parshat Toldot where Yitzchak and Rivka have very different opinions. Rivka could never bring herself to talk to Yitzchak about the truth she felt regarding Esav. The same was true about the bestowing of the blessings ...7

In other words, Rivkah's actions were involuntary and out of shock. This approach would call for a tense and suspenseful soundtrack (perhaps Hitchcock).

Romance

The third option agrees that Rivkah fell off the camel out of shock -- but it was romantic shock. After all, there is a parallelism between two consecutive pesukim in this story:

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[Yitzchak] lifted up his eyes and saw -- look, there are camels coming (verse 63).

Rivkah lifted up her eyes and saw Yitzchak, and she fell off the camel (verse 64)

The **Tzror HaMor** suggests that this parallelism is to teach us that Yitzchak and Rivkah were soulmates.⁸ It's the exact equivalent of the romantic cliché that "their eyes met across the crowded room." While this opinion does not directly address "vatipol," the journalist **Avirama Golan** does:

It is possible to view this differently, as a fateful encounter. A powerful connection of two people who were drawn together, each one to the other's pain, with a tremendous power over which the two of them had no control. If he was praying, his prayer stopped the moment he saw her. Assuming that her falling off the camel wasn't a charming feminine trick intended to draw attention, she was -- as he was -- struck with a lightning bolt of bedazzlement. "Who is this man walking in the field toward us?!" she asked Eliezer, after traveling silently the entire time. And when she found out who he was, she right away "took the veil and covered herself." Was she that modest? Perhaps. That is, at least, the version of most commentators, and that's what generations of religious girls have been taught. But perhaps the girl, seated by herself high on the camel's back, became agitated and confused and didn't know herself, out of great fear and joy and a pounding heart, all of which hit her upon seeing the man who was her intended. Suddenly, at the very moment that their eyes met and he impressed her so much, she found out that this was the man with whom she would spend the rest of her life. She lost her balance and fell from her seat.

Afterwards, embarrassed and blushing, she covered her face and head. For generations afterwards, brides have covered their heads with a symbolic veil. Generation after generation, people have recited for grooms the story of Yitzchak's match, the most romantic story in Tanakh.

Rabbenu Bechaye writes that the custom is intended "to remind the people that a man must be careful, in getting married, not to choose a woman for looks or money" (strange -- Rivkah was very beautiful). But grooms can also learn, from the story, something about love.<9>

In other words, Rivkah's actions were involuntary, but in a good way. The story of "When Yitzchak met Rivkah" was one that the two of them could later look back upon fondly. This approach would call for a heartfelt and romantic soundtrack (perhaps Titanic).

The Torah goes on to say that Yitzchak married Rivkah and that he loved her (verse 67). True, it doesn't state explicitly that she loved him.

NOTES

1. Translation from Rav Alex Israel, "Toldot 5760." <http://www.harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=810>
2. Rashi on Bereisheet 24:64, s.v. vatipol. He cites Targum Onkelos, who thinks that Rivkah inclined or tilted herself toward the ground, presumably to slide off the camel.
3. Rabbi Dr. Joseph H. Hertz (1872-1946), The Pentateuch and Haftorahs (London: Soncino, 1936), p. 87 (on Bereisheet 24:64-65).
4. Rav Ovadiah Seforno (1470-1550) on Bereisheet 24:64, s.v.vatipol.
5. Bereisheet Rabbah 60:15. Also cited by Rashi on Bereisheet 24:64,s.v. vatare. Translation from Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, Genesis: The Beginning of Desire (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 142.
6. Rav Ovadiah Seforno on Bereisheet 24:65, s.v. vateetkas.
7. Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin ("Netziv," 1817-1893), Ha'amek Davar on Bereisheet 24:64-65. Translation from Rav Alex Israel, op. cit. For an elaboration on the Netziv's idea, see Dr. Zornberg, pp. 142-143.
8. Rav Avraham Sava (1440-1508), Tzror HaMor on Bereisheet 24:64,s.v. vatisa.
9. Avirama Golan (1950-), "Your Curse Will Be Upon Me, My Son" (Hebrew), in Ruthie Ravitzky, ed., Kor'ot MiBereisheet (Yediot Acharonot, 1999), pp. 197-198. Translation is mine.