Was Rivka Really Three?

1. Bereishis 24:1; Rashi, s.v. Berach es Avraham bakol

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים וַה׳ בֵּרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בַּכֹּל.

Avraham was old, advanced in days, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything.

״בַּכֹּל״ עוֹלֶה בְּגִימַטְרִיָּא ״בֵּן״, וּמֵאַחַר שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ בֵּן הָיָה צָרִיךְ לְהַשִּׂיאוֹ אִשָּׁה.

“Bakol” has the numerical value of “ben,” a son. Since he had a son, he needed to find him a wife.

2. Bereishis 24:2, 39; Rashi to 24:39 (excerpt)

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל עַבְדּוֹ זְקַן בֵּיתוֹ הַמֹּשֵׁל בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ.

Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who was in charge of all that he possessed.

בת היתה לו לאליעזר והיה מחזר למצוא עילה שיאמר לו אברהם לפנות אליו להשיאו בתו.

Eliezer had a daughter. He was seeking a reason for Avraham to turn to him and ask to marry his daughter to Yitzchak.

3. Rashi, Bereishis 25:20; 23:2 (excerpts)

ויצחק היה בן ל״ז שנה, שהרי בו בפרק מתה שרה, ומשנולד יצחק עד העקידה שמתה שרה ל״ז שנה, ובת צ׳ היתה כשנולד יצחק ובת קכ״ז כשמתה ... ובו בפרק נולדה רבקה, המתין לה עד שתהא ראויה לביאה ג׳ שנים ונשאה.

Yitzchak was thirty-seven years old, for Sarah died at that time. From Yitzchak’s birth until the Akeidah, when Sarah died, thirty-seven years had passed. She was ninety when Yitzchak was born and one hundred and twenty-seven when she died … Rivka was born at that time. He waited three years, until she was physically fit for marital relations, and married her.

ונסמכה מיתת שרה לעקידת יצחק, לפי שעל ידי בשורת העקידה שנזדמן בנה לשחיטה וכמעט שלא נשחט פרחה נשמתה ממנה ומתה.

Sarah’s death is placed alongside the binding of Yitzchak because, through the news of the Akeidah - that her son had been brought to slaughter and had come so close to being slaughtered - her soul departed from her and she died.

4. Gur Aryeh, Bereishis 25:20 (see also Sechel Tov, Bereishis 24:14)

והא דכתיב בקרא ... ״נערה״ דמשמע נערה היתה, ולא תקרא בת ג׳ ״נערה״, ויש לומר דהיו אבריה וגידול שלה כנערה.

As for the verse calling her a “na’arah,” which implies that she was a maiden, a three-year-old would not be called a “na’arah.” We can explain that her limbs and bodily development were like those of a maiden.

5. Yevamos 61b, s.v. Vekhen hu omer (excerpts)

תימה דהכא משמע דרבקה נערה היתה, ובסדר עולם ... תניא בהדיא שהיתה בת שלש כשנשאה יצחק.

This is puzzling: here it appears that Rivka was a maiden, whereas Seder Olam … explicitly teaches that she was three years old when Yitzchak married her.

וה״ר שמואל חסיד משפיר״א הוכיח שהיתה בת י״ד, מדתניא בספרי ו׳ זוגות שנותיהן שוות, וקחשיב קהת ורבקה, וקהת חיה קל״ג כדכתיב בקרא.

Rabbeinu Shmuel HaChassid of Speyer demonstrated that she was fourteen, from the teaching in Sifrei that six pairs had equal lifespans. Kehos and Rivka are included, and Kehos lived one hundred and thirty-three years, as Scripture states.

וכשנולד יעקב היתה בת ל״ד, ויעקב היה בן צ״ט כשמתה רבקה הרי קל״ג ... וצריך לומר דמדרשות חלוקים זה על זה.

When Yaakov was born she was thirty-four, and Yaakov was ninety-nine when Rivka died, making one hundred and thirty-three … We must therefore say that the Midrashic traditions disagree with one another.

6. Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer, chapter 31

ר׳ יהודה אומר: כיון שהגיע החרב על צוארו, פרחה ויצאה נפשו של יצחק. וכיון שהשמיע קולו מבין הכרובים ואמר לו ״אל תשלח ידך״, נפשו חזרה לגופו, וקם ועמד יצחק על רגליו, וידע יצחק שכך המתים עתידים להחיות, ופתח ואמר: ברוך אתה ה׳ מחיה המתים.

Rabbi Yehudah says: When the blade reached his neck, Yitzchak's soul flew out and departed. When He made His voice heard from between the keruvim and said to him, "Do not stretch out your hand," his soul returned to his body. Yitzchak rose and stood upon his feet. Yitzchak understood that this is how the dead would one day be revived, and he began: "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who revives the dead."

7. Bereishis 18:10; Arizal's teaching as quoted in the supplied pp. 22-23; Ohr HaChaim, Bereishis 21:1 (excerpt)

וְהִנֵּה בֵּן לְשָׂרָה אִשְׁתֶּךָ.

Behold, a son to Sarah your wife.

״בן לשרה אשתך״ שבא מצד הנקובא ולסיבה זו הוצרך לעקידה.

"A son to Sarah your wife": he came from the feminine side, and for this reason he required the Akeidah.

8. She'eris Nasan, Toldos, p. 15; quoted in Otzar Pela'os HaTorah, pp. 381-382 (excerpts)

ובאותה שעה קיבלה רבקה נשמה מסטרא דנוקבא כי הנשמות הן זוגות.

At that same time, Rivka received a soul from the feminine side, because souls come in pairs.

היתה בת ג׳ מהנשמה החדשה.

She was three years old in relation to the new soul.

9. Shem MiShmuel, Chayei Sarah 5671, on MeHashem yatza hadavar (excerpt)

דמשעת לידה הי׳ לו נשמה דנוקבא ולא הי׳ שייך לו אז בן זוג.

From birth he had possessed a soul of the feminine side, and at that time a corresponding mate was not yet applicable to him.

10. Shvilei Pinchas, Chayei Sarah, ma'amar 9, p. 23 (explanatory heading)

יצחק ישב בגן עדן ג׳ שנים כדי לחנכו עם נשמה החדשה.

Yitzchak remained in Gan Eden for three years in order to be educated with the new soul.

11. Yismach Lev, Vayeira, quoted in the supplied pp. 24-25 (excerpts)

דכורא בחינת חסד ונוקבא בחינת דין.

The masculine aspect corresponds to chesed, kindness; the feminine aspect corresponds to din, judgment.

ובהתחלה נולד יצחק במדתו מדת יצחק בחינת גבורה, אחר כך בהעקידה נכלל ונכנס בו מדתו של אברהם חסד.

Initially, Yitzchak was born with his own quality - the quality of Yitzchak, the aspect of gevurah. Later, at the Akeidah, Avraham's quality of chesed became included within him and entered him.

וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו.

The two of them walked together.