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מה בפַרְשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ◆ Yitzhak prays for Rivkah to have children, and she becomes pregnant with twins. The twins struggle inside her. God tells her this is because there are two nations within her.
- ◆ The firstborn is reddish and covered with hair. They call him Esav. The second is born holding onto Esav's heel. He's called Yaakov. Yitzhak loves Esav; Rivkah loves Yaakov.
- ◆ Years later, Yaakov buys the birthright (special privileges or responsibilities of the firstborn) from Esav and feeds him lentil stew.
- ◆ Yitzhak goes blind. He tells Esav that he is going to give him a בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing).
- ◆ Rivkah hears this, but she wants Yaakov to receive the berakhah. She tells Yaakov to wear Esav's clothes and puts goatskins on his arms so that they would feel like Esav's, which are hairy. Yaakov then goes to get the berakhah from Yitzhak.
- ◆ Yitzhak notices that his son sounds like Yaakov but has the hands of Esav, and Yitzhak gives him the berakhah.
- ◆ When Esav finds out what happened, he is very upset and says he will kill Yaakov.
- ◆ Rivkah hears what Esav said, and she and Yitzhak tell Yaakov to go to Rivkah's brother, Lavan.





פִּנְסֵט הַפְּסוּקִים • Understanding the Verses

Some siblings have a lot in common. But not Yaakov and Esav!
Here's how the Torah describes them:

Before or after Shabbat,
scan to listen to a discussion
of these pesukim
on the Toldot episode
of Torah Time!



Bereishit 25:27-28

When the boys grew up,
Esav became a skillful hunter, a man of the
outdoors;
And Yaakov was an uncomplicated man, who
sat in his tent.

Yitzhak loved Esav because there was game
in his mouth;
And Rivkah loved Yaakov.

בראשית כה:כז-כח

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים
וַיְהִי עֶשָׂו אִישׁ יָדָע צֹדֵד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה
וַיֵּעָקֵב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים:
וַיֶּאֱהָב יִצְחָק אֶת עֶשָׂו כִּי צֹדֵד בְּפִיו
וַרְבֵּקָה אֲהָבָת אֶת יַעֲקֹב:

- ♦ What stands out to you about these pesukim? How do you think the two pesukim connect to each other?
- ♦ Do you notice that there is a reason given for why Yitzhak loves Esav, but not for why Rivkah loves Yaakov? What do you think that could be telling us?

- ♦ Later in our parashah, Yitzhak and Rivkah have different ideas about who should get the בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing). **(Look it up! Bereishit 27:1-10.)** How do you think that connects to these pesukim?
- ♦ When you're very different from someone (like siblings, cousins, or friends), could that lead to fighting or not getting along? How can you avoid that?





מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Here's what happens when Yitzhak tells Esav that Yaakov came first and got his בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing).

Bereishit 27:34

When Esav heard his father's words, he cried out in a great and bitter outcry, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!"

בראשית כז:לד

כְּשִׁמְעַ עֵשָׂו אֶת דְּבַרֵּי אָבִיו
וַיִּצְעַק צָעָקָה גְּדוֹלָה וַיִּמְרָה עַד מְאֹד
וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו בְּרַכְנִי גַם אֲנִי אָבִי:

Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are
bugged by something
unusual in the Torah text



The language of Esav's cry
sounds familiar. Where do I
know it from?

Bereishit Rabbah

R. Hanina said: You can't say that the Holy Blessed One is lenient with justice! Sometimes it takes a long time, but God ultimately collects what is due.

Yaakov made Esav cry out one time, as is written: "he cried out..." — and where was the payment for this? In Shushan, where it says that Mordekhai "cried out in a great and bitter outcry (Esther 4:1)."

בראשית רבה ס"ז

אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא כָּל מִי שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר
שֶׁהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְתָרַן הוּא
יְתוֹתְרוֹ בְּנֵי מַעוֹהִי, אֲלָא מֵאֲרִיךְ
אִפִּיה וְגַבִּי דִּילִיָּה.

זְעָקָה אַחַת הִזְעִיק יַעֲקֹב לְעֵשָׂו,
דְּכָתִיב: "כְּשִׁמְעַ עֵשָׂו אֶת דְּבַרֵּי אָבִיו
וַיִּצְעַק זְעָקָה", וְהֵיכֵן נִפְרָע לוֹ?
בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּצְעַק זְעָקָה
גְּדוֹלָה וַיִּמְרָה" (אֶסְתֵּר ד:א).

Throughout the Tanakh and the Talmud, we are given the sense that Esav and his descendants are villains or enemies of the Jewish people (for example, see the first few pesukim of Malakhi, which is also the beginning of this week's haftarah). And there are a lot of reasons why it may have been ok for Yaakov to take this berakhah (see פְּרָשְׁנוֹת / Commentary, p. 4).





But despite all that, R. Hanina believes that these pesukim are teaching us that Yaakov still should not have caused Esav so much pain. As a punishment, Mordekhai (one of Yaakov's descendants) will one day suffer the same pain because of Haman (thought to be one of Esav's descendants).

♦ Why is it important that God isn't too lenient about justice? Why should God always collect what is due?

- ♦ According to this midrash, it was wrong for Yaakov to cause pain to Esav. Why was that wrong in this story? What should have been done differently?
- ♦ It can sometimes be hard to treat people nicely and care about how much pain we are causing them, especially when we think we have good reasons not to like them. Can you think of some examples of this from your experience? How do you think we should treat people in those situations?



פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

Toldot tells the story of how Yaakov gets his father Yitzhak to give him a בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing) that was meant for Esav. The strategy he uses seems to involve deception (pretending to be Esav), which doesn't sound like a very good thing to do!

In this pasuk, Yaakov explicitly calls himself Esav:

Bereishit 27:19

Yaakov said to his father, "I am Esav, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat what I hunted, so that you may bless me from your soul."

בראשית כז:יט

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל אָבִיו אֲנֹכִי עֲשׂוּ
בְכֹרֶךָ עֲשִׂיתִי כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי
קוּם נָא שֹׁבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצִּידִי בְּעִבּוּר
תְּבָרְכֵנִי נַפְשְׁךָ:

Some פְּרָשָׁנִים (parshanim, commentators) wonder: Is it possible that what Yaakov did wasn't so bad? Consider these pieces of evidence.

- 1) **Rivka tells him to do it:** Yaakov doesn't want to deceive anyone (Bereishit 27:12), but he's in a bit of a tough position because he also wants to obey his mother.
- 2) **Yitzhak's reaction:** Yitzhak doesn't seem to be angry with Yaakov, and he doesn't punish him.
- 3) **The berakhah works:** Yaakov gets to keep it.
- 4) **Yaakov and truth:** These two get connected later in Tanakh, such as in Sefer Micah (7:20) where it says תִּתֶּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב (You give truth to Yaakov).

For these reasons, many parshanim defend Yaakov's actions. Here are two of these interpretations. See if you can explain the difference between them!



Rabbeinu Behaye (Spain, 700 years ago)

There is no doubt that Yaakov only spoke the truth...

When Yaakov said "I am Esav, your firstborn," he meant to say, "I am here in place of Esav, as your firstborn for the birthright." Yitzhak had wanted to bless Esav because of the firstborn birthright. But since Yaakov had bought it, the berakhot really belonged to Yaakov (who could stand in as the firstborn).

רבנו בחיי

אין ספק שכל דבריו של יעקב אין בהם כלל אמת...

כשאמר "אנכי עשו בכרד" רצה בו אנכי במקום עשו, ובכרד כלומר לבכורה. ובשביל הבכורה רצה יצחק לברך את עשו, ועל כן היו הברכות ראויות ליעקב.

Ibn Ezra (Spain, 900 years ago)

When it comes to prophets...if they have to say something that isn't entirely true, if the situation calls for it, no harm is done.

רבי אברהם אבן עזרא

כי הנביאים...אם יצטרכו לאמר דבר שאיננו כהגו, לפי צרף השעה, לא יזיק.



- ◆ Did Yaakov lie? What does Rabbeinu Behaye think, and what does Ibn Ezra think?
- ◆ How does each one change the way we read the story?
- ◆ What would you have done if you were in Yaakov's shoes?
- ◆ Can you think of situations when it's ok to lie? What if you're in a tough position, and you don't want to lie? What other options are there?



דְּבָרָה שֶׁל דֵּיּוּ • One-Minute Debate

In our פְּשֻט הַפְּסוּקִים / Understanding the Verses section (p. 2), we took a look at how Yaakov and Esav spent their time.

Debate: Hunting is a problematic profession.

How to play:

- ◆ Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- ◆ For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.



Agree!

- ◆ It's important to be kind to animals. Hunters are not.
- ◆ You should avoid any activities that involve violence and dangerous weapons.
- ◆ In the Torah, only Nimrod, Yishmael, and Esav are hunters. These aren't our best role models.



Disagree!

- ◆ Before there were supermarkets, people had to hunt in order to eat. There's nothing wrong with that!
- ◆ Yitzhak seems to get a lot of enjoyment from the meat that his son Esav hunts and prepares.





שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Bereishit 25:19 to 26:5
- 2) 26:6 to 26:12
- 3) 26:13 to 26:22
- 4) 26:23 to 26:29
- 5) 26:30 to 27:27
- 6) 27:28 to 28:4
- 7) 28:5 to 28:9

Haftarah:

Malakhi 1:1 to 2:7

Good luck!

1 Where does God tell Yitzhak not to go?

2 Who is Avimelekh the king of?

3 What do Yitzhak's shepherds and the shepherds of Gerar argue about?

4 What two consecutive words in this aliyah sound the same, but have different meanings?

5 Which two people say הִנְנִי (hineini, here I am)?

6 According to Yitzhak's blessing, what will Esav live on?

7 What are the two ways that Esav and Yishmael are related?

8 How many times does Rivkah tell Yaakov שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי (shma b'koli, listen to my voice/what I'm saying)?

9 How old was Yitzhak when Esav and Yaakov were born? Was Avraham alive at that time?

10 **From the Haftarah:**
Toldot describes Yitzhak's love for Esav, and Rivkah's love for Yaakov (see p. 2). According to the prophet Malakhi, whom does God love?

*
Look for the answers on page 11!



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

In our פְּרָשְׁנוֹת / Commentary section (p. 4), we saw some פְּרָשְׁנִים (parshanim, commentators) who defended Yaakov's actions in the parashah.

But lots of times, our parshanim and Rabbis emphasize the wrong behavior of the people we look up to! On the subject of Parashat Toldot, the Zohar says that Yaakov gets punished. He caused pain to his father Yitzhak, and Yaakov later gets punished for this when his sons sell Yosef and deceive him about it. The Zohar (Toldot 144b) notices that the word אֵפוֹא (aifo, where) links the story where Yaakov first does something wrong, to the story where he suffers for it. (Look it up! Bereishit 27:33 and 37:32.)

Here are some other examples:

- ♦ Hizkuni says Yosef's brothers were wrong to sell Yosef into slavery, and their families suffered the consequences when they became enslaved in Egypt (comment on Bereishit 37:36).
- ♦ A midrash criticizes Moshe for speaking לָשׁוֹן הָרַע (lashon hara, gossip or slander) about Benei Yisrael when he says that the people will not believe him about being God's messenger. The midrash says Moshe gets punished for this! (Shemot Rabbah 3)

R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Bereishit 12) points out that the Torah doesn't hide the fact that its characters – even the most important ones, the ones who might be our greatest heroes and role models – make mistakes and have flaws. We're supposed to learn from this that we, who also make mistakes and have flaws, can still become great like our heroes in the Torah.





- ♦ Would it be easier or harder to learn from the characters in the Torah if they were perfect? Why do you think the Torah wants us to learn from imperfect people?

R. Yitzhak Hutner (aka the Pahad Yitzhak, 1906–1980) wrote about this very issue in a letter to a student. He explained why he thought it's important to acknowledge the mistakes our heroes make:

פחד יצחק אגרות ומכתבים קכח

רעה חולה היא אצלנו שכאשר מתעסקים אנו בצדדי השלמות של גדולנו, הננו מטפלים בסכום האחרון של מעלתם. מספרים אנו על דרכי השלמות שלהם, בשעה שאנחנו מדלגים על המאבק הפנימי...

התוצאה מזה היא כשנער בעל רוח, בעל שאיפה, בעל תסיסה מוצא בעצמו מכשולים, נפילות, ירידות הרי הוא דומה בעיניו כבלתי שתול בבית ה'... בודאי שהנך נכשל ועומד להיות נכשל!

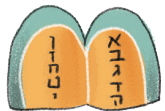
Letters of the Pahad Yitzhak 128

It is a terrible problem that when we discuss our great role models, we sometimes only deal with the end of their stories. We talk about their accomplishments and what they perfected, but we skip over their inner struggles...

The result is that when young people have a lot of spirit and ambition, and sometimes stumble on their way, they might believe they cannot be planted in the house of God (because they know they're not perfect, but they think their role models are)... But of course everybody makes mistakes and fails sometimes!



- ♦ According to R. Hutner, each of us despite our flaws can become a great role model to others. What are the ways you can be a role model?
- ♦ Are there things about you that make you think you're not a role model? How can the story of Yaakov help you get past that idea?



הלכה • Halakhah



Learn one way
the parashah
practically impacts
our lives

This week's parashah gives us the Torah's first story of twins—two babies born to the same mother on the same day. This gives us a great chance to look at a halakhah-based riddle: **How would it be possible for a younger twin to reach the age of mitzvot before her older sister?** (Think about it for a minute before going on to see the answer!)

These twin sisters will become fully obligated in mitzvot at age 12. It would seem that the older one will certainly turn 12 years old before the younger one, right? But there is actually a wrinkle in the Jewish calendar that can complicate things!

First, let's note that twins can be born hours and sometimes even days apart (even though it is rare). Let's say that our twins are born during a Jewish leap year, when there are two months of Adar: **אָדָר רִשּׁוֹן** (Adar Rishon, first Adar) and **אָדָר שֵׁנִי** (Adar Sheni, second Adar). And let's say the first twin is born at the very end of the 29th of Adar Rishon, and the second twin is born about 25 hours later, at the very beginning of the 1st of Adar Sheni.

Twelve years later, if it is not a Jewish leap year, then the first twin's birthday will be marked on the 29th of Adar, but the second twin's birthday will be on the 1st of Adar, 28 days earlier! Isn't that weird? (See Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim 55:10.)

R. Yisrael Yaakov Hagiz in Responsa Halakhot Ketanot (II:174) suggests that maybe this is what happened with Esav and Yaakov! Maybe Esav was born first, but Yaakov thought he had a claim to the firstborn blessing because he reached the age of mitzvot first.

This is the sort of idea that takes details from our later calendar and projects them back onto the stories in the Torah. You have to admit it is an interesting way to think about the conflict between these two brothers!

What is the next time the Torah tells a story of twins?





רְגֵעַ שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bereishit 26:15

בראשית כו:טו

And the Pelishtim stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had **dug** in the days of his father Avraham, filling them with earth.

וְכָל-הַבְּאֵרוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ עֲבָדֵי
אָבִיו בְּיָמֵי אֲבִרְהָם אָבִיו סָתְמוּם
פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּמְלְאוּם עֶפְרָ:

לְחַפֵּר (שָׂרֵשׁ ח.פ.ר.)
◆ To dig (lahpor)



= דְּחָפּוֹר
Bulldozer
(dahpor)

= מַחְפֵּר
Excavator
(mahper)

= חִפְּירוֹת
Archeological digs
or findings (hafiroth)

= חִפְרֶפֶרֶת
Mole (the animal)
(hafarperet)

Find the Word!

When the Nile River turns to blood, the Egyptians dig in the ground around it, to try to find drinkable water. Can you find the words that share this שָׂרֵשׁ (shoresh, root)? (Hint: Look at the fourth aliyah of Parashat Va'era.)

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Mitzrayim (26:2)
2. The Pelishtim (26:8)
3. Who the wells belong to (26:20-21)
4. אַתָּה עַתָּה (atah atah, you now) (26:29). Some people pronounce their ayin in a more guttural way than their alef, so in that case the two words might not sound exactly the same, but still pretty close to identical.
5. Esav (27:1) and Yitzhak (27:18)
6. His sword (27:40)
7. Yishmael is Esav's uncle (his father Yitzhak's brother), and also his father-in-law (the father of his wife Mahalat) (28:9)
8. Three times: twice about the plan to get the blessing from Yitzhak, and once about fleeing to Lavan in Haran (27:8, 27:13, 27:43)
9. 60 (25:26), and yes, Avraham was alive. (Yitzhak was 100 years younger than Avraham, so, when Avraham dies at age 175 [25:7], Yitzhak would have been 75 and the twins would have been 15.)
10. Yaakov (Malakhi 1:2)





תפילה • Prayer in the Parashah

We are taught (Talmud Bavli Berakhot 40b) that every time we say a בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing), it has to include God's most special name. This name is so special that we almost never write it out, and we definitely never say it out loud! Here it is, spelled out with dashes between the letters to create breaks:



What could this name mean? Look at the word – it has the letters yud, heh, and vav. These can be combined into: הָיָה (hayah, was), הוּוֹה (hoveh, is), or יִהְיֶה (yihyeh, will be). Maybe it is a name that means: God always was, is, and will be.

But there is another possible meaning, found in this week's parashah. God says to Yitzhak:

Bereishit 26:3

Dwell in this land, and **ehyeh imkha** (I will be with you), and I will bless you...

בראשית כו:ג

גֵּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֵהְיֶה
עִמָּךְ וְאֶבְרַכְךָ...

See the bolded words? God later says this exact same phrase to Yaakov (Bereishit 31:3), to Moshe (Shemot 3:12), and to Yehoshua (Yehoshua 1:5). In fact, in Tanakh, the word ehyeh (I will be) is only ever said by God, and it is almost always followed by imkha or imakh (with you).

- ♦ Are there times that you find it easy to feel God's presence with you? Are there times it's more difficult?

Next time you say a berakhah or you see God's special name in a siddur, try thinking to yourself the words from our parashah: **ehyeh imkha**. Can these words help you?

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