



Rivkah's Blessing

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Rivkah receives a blessing from her family members before she sets out on her journey to marry Yitzhak: “O sister! May you grow into thousands of myriads; may your descendants inherit the gates of their foes” (Genesis 24:60).

This, as Rashi points out, is almost identical to the blessing Abraham received from the angel of God after the end of the Akeidah: “I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous... and your descendants shall inherit the gates of their foes” (Genesis 22:17). Indeed, Rivkah effectively receives from her family the very blessing once given to Avraham. Avraham is blessed by an angel of the God immediately after the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzhak), and Rivkah hears the same words as she sets out on her journey to marry Yitzhak.

What is the meaning of the blessing's shifts from Avraham to Rivkah?

Parashat VaYera ends with the Akeidah and with Avraham's blessing. Its content focuses on the promise of numerous descendants, inheritance, and blessing for future generations—that through Avraham's offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed:



בראשית כב:יז-יח

¹⁷כִּי בֵרַךְ אֲבִרְכֶךָ וְהִרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה אֶת זַרְעֲךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָחוּל אֲשֶׁר עַל-שָׁפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֶת שְׁעַר
אֲיָבֻיו: ¹⁸וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְּזַרְעֲךָ כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ עֲקֵב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעַתָּ בְּקוֹלִי:

Genesis 22:17-18

¹⁷I will surely bless you, and I will greatly multiply your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand on the seashore. Your offspring shall inherit the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring, because you have obeyed My voice.

Strikingly, right after receiving this blessing—centered entirely on his offspring—Avraham returns **alone** to the young men who had accompanied him: “And Avraham returned to his servants” (22:19)—with no mention of Yitzhak.

The unusual phrase “*harbeh arbeh*” (I will greatly multiply) which appears in the blessing signals a challenge of continuity embedded within it. This phrase occurs only twice more in the Torah, both in Bereishit, and each time it is tied to human struggle around fertility and parenthood.

It first appears in the Garden of Eden, in God’s words to Hava: “**I will greatly multiply** your pain and your pregnancies; in pain you shall bear children” (Genesis 3:16). It appears again in the angel’s blessing to Hagar, who is pregnant and told to return to Avraham’s household despite her suffering: “The angel of the Lord said to her: **I will greatly multiply** your offspring, and they shall be too many to count” (16:10). Thus, the blessing given to Avraham is rooted in contexts of tension and complexity relating to intergenerational relationships. And indeed, although the Akeidah does not end with the death of the youth, the cost seems to be

estrangement: from that point onward, Avraham and Yitzhak are never again depicted interacting with each other.¹

In our *parashah*, Yitzhak receives two things that are usually passed from father to son — one material and one spiritual: inheritance and blessing. The material inheritance he receives directly from Avraham, although without biblical reference to a meeting or conversation between them: “Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzhak” (Genesis 25:5). As for the blessing, it comes only after Avraham’s death — and, heartbreakingly, not from the father but from God: “And it came to pass after the death of Avraham that God blessed his son Yitzhak” (25:11).

This distance is hardly surprising. The Akeidah represents a moment when Avraham, the father, chooses obedience to the divine command to offer his son as an *olah* sacrifice. As the angel says, “you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me” (Genesis 22:12). One possible outcome of such an event is the need for other forces to ensure continuity — for the story to go on. In this case, two figures step in: God, Who blesses the son in place of the father; and the companion, the partner—Rivkah, Yitzhak’s wife—who comes to him already bearing, in a sense, the blessing of the father, of Avraham, which is the blessing for Yitzhak himself.

When Rivkah appears like a breath of fresh air, she offers an alternative.

Unlike Avraham, she stands at the beginning of her relationship with Yitzhak—and at that very moment, she receives the same blessing.

¹ More on the fraught relationship between Yitzhak and his father and its implication can be found in an essay on Parashat Hayyei Sarah by my colleague R. Shai Held, “Isaac’s Search,” available in *The Heart of Torah* and at <https://hadar.org/torah-tefillah/resources/isaacs-search>.



Rivkah, in this *parashah*, is a connecting figure, unafraid to form new relationships. From the moment she is introduced, she is defined in relation to others—as Avraham's grandniece. When she sees someone in need—Avraham's servant—she responds not only to his immediate request but goes beyond it. She does not fear deepening the connection; she identifies herself and offers hospitality and continuity in relationship:

בראשית כד:כד-כה

וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶּיָּהּ בֵּת בְּתוּאֵל אֹנְכִי בֶן מִלְכָּה אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְנָחוֹר: ²⁵וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גַּם תֵּבֶן גַּם מִסְפּוֹא רַב עִמָּנִי גַם מְקוֹם לָלוֹן:

Genesis 24:24-25

²⁵She replied, "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor."

²⁵And she went on, "There is plenty of straw and feed at home, and also room to spend the night."

And when she is asked, "Will you go with this man?" she answers simply: "I will go" (Genesis 24:58).

Through these connections and contexts, she receives a blessing that looks toward the future:

בראשית כד:ס

אֲחֻתִּי אַתְּ הִיא לְאֵלֶּיךָ רַבָּבָה וַיִּרְשׁ זֶרְעֶךָ אֶת שַׁעַר שָׁנְאֵיו:

Genesis 24:60

"O sister! May you grow, Into thousands of myriads; May your descendants inherit, The gates of their foes."

Unlike Avraham—who never blesses his son Yitzhak and, after the Akeidah, is never again depicted meeting him—Rivkah responds fully and immediately to Yitzhak: “וַתֵּרָא אֶת יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל” (Genesis 24:64): מַעַל הַגָּמֶל - She saw Yitzhak, and she fell/got off from her camel” (Genesis 24:64).

It seems, then, that while the blessing “May your descendants inherit the gates of their enemies” is identical in wording, its meaning changes fundamentally when passed from Avraham to Rivkah.

Avraham receives the blessing “Because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your favored one” (Genesis 22:16), while Rivkah receives hers as “our sister” (24:60). Avraham’s blessing comes with the weight and pain of intergenerational rupture implied in “I will greatly multiply” (*harbeh arbeh*), whereas Rivkah’s comes through the love and kindness of a heartfelt send-off wishing one well as they embark on a journey.

With the blessing given to Rivkah, she becomes part of the chain of transmission—but through closeness and belonging rather than sacrifice and separation. The blessing now becomes a source of human connection and relationship, replacing the kind of choices that led to distance and disconnect. Perhaps the continuation of the blessing through Rivkah is a divine shift—a turning point: no longer continuity through Akeidah, binding, and sacrifice, no longer blessing earned by “you did not withhold,” but rather continuity born from relationships, compassion, and kindness.

Maybe Rivkah’s blessing represents a moment of repair—a realization, maybe even revelation, that divine blessing can come not only through trial and sacrifice, but through building a home, human commitment, covenant, and love.