

V

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אלו התלמידים...

ושנתם לבניך

AND RIVKAH FAVORED YA'AKOV...

by Yitzchak Etshalom

JSI Faculty

This shiur is dedicated in honor of Anne and Lee Samson on the marriage of their daughter, Tali, to Natan Slifkin. May the young couple continue to bring much Nachat Ruach to their parents, our community, K'lal Yisra'el and HaKadosh Baruch Hu as they build a trustworthy house in Israel.

פרשת תולדות

ה בכסלו

December 2, 2000

דף יומי: נזיר מו

Daf Yomi: Nazir 46

TIMES FOR THE LOS ANGELES AREA

סוף זמן קריאת שמע: 9:12

Final Time for K'riat Sh'ma:

9:12 a.m.

CANDLELIGHTING

הדלקת נרות

4:26 pm

HAVDALAH

מוצאי שבת

5:24 pm

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I

INTRODUCTION

*And the boys grew;
and Esav was a skilful hunter,
a man of the field;*

*and Ya'akov was a quiet man, living in tents.
And Yitzhak loved Esav,
because he ate of his venison;
but Rivkah loved Ya'akov. (B'resheet 25:27-28)*

Several years ago, I raised the question posed by the information presented in v. 28 - why did Yitzhak favor Esav (i.e. what is meant by Ki tzayyid b'fiv) and why did Rivkah love Ya'akov. Noting that the text does not directly provide any reason for her favoring the younger twin, I suggested several approaches, including attraction of opposites, attraction of the similar, kinship in worship and the information about the destiny of the twins to which only Rivkah was privy. Last year, in analyzing the unique character of Yitzhak (following the presentation of R. Yoel Bin-Nun), additional information regarding the close relationship between Yitzhak and Esav came to light.

This year, I would like to refocus on the question but, instead of adducing an answer from isolation (i.e. information presented about each of the characters in isolation from the child or parent in question), to look at what the text tells us about their interactions. A sensitive reading of the text will shed much light on the direct relationship between Yitzhak and Esav on the one hand, and Rivkah and Ya'akov on the other, which will help us understand the "favoritism" shown each of the sons by his "allied" parent.

II

THE DESIRED BLESSING

The one narrative in which we see direct interaction between Yitzhak and Rivkah and their children (and, indeed, the only place where we find any dialogue between the two parents - more on that later) is in the story of Yitzhak's "deathbed" blessing (or so he thought), intended for Esav but taken by Ya'akov at his mother's behest.

A brief outline of the section is in order:

- I. 26:33-34: Esav marries Hittite women
- II. 27:1-4: Yitzhak speaks with Esav
 - a) The information (1-2)
 - b) The implication (3-4)
- III. 27: 5: Rivkah overhears Yitzhak's request of Esav
- IV. 27:6-13: Rivkah speaks with Ya'akov
 - a) The information (6-7)
 - b) The solution (8-10)
 - c) Ya'akov's concern (11-12)
 - d) Rivkah's response (13)
- V. 27:14-17: Ya'akov's preparations
 - a) The food (14)
 - b) The clothing (15)
 - c) The "masquerade" (16)
 - d) Final preparations (17)
- VI. 27:18-29: Ya'akov and Yitzhak
 - a) Approach and confusion (18-26)
 - b) Blessing (27-29)
- VII. 27:30-40: Esav and Yitzhak
 - a) Approach and confusion (30-38)
 - b) Blessing (39-40)
- VIII. 27:41-Esav's reaction to Ya'akov's "theft"
- IX. 27:42: Rivkah overhears Esav's plans
- X. 27:42b-45: Rivkah and Ya'akov
 - a) The information (42b)
 - b) The implication (43-45)
- XI. 27:46: Rivkah speaks with Yitzhak about Ya'akov marrying Hittite women.

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It should already be clear that there are a number of parallels operating in this narrative. How significant and enlightening they may be is another question - but we will use that as a starting point for our discussion.

First, a tangential issue must be addressed, the resolution of which will affect our access to this narrative (and its parallels) to broaden our understanding of Rivkah's favoring of her younger son.

III

THE CHASM OF GERAR

If we are to utilize the interactions recorded in Chapter 27 - the "blessing" narrative - to explain the parent-child alliances as presented at the beginning of the Yitzhak-Rivkah narrative, we will have to reckon with the apparent chronological gap which divides them.

Subsequent to mentioning the marriage of Yitzhak to Rivkah, the Torah immediately tells us about her long-awaited pregnancy, the attendant confusion and consternation, the prophecy which (evidently) assuaged those concerns, the birth and naming of the twins and a quick snapshot of their maturation:

And the boys grew; and Esav was a skilful hunter, a man of the field; and Ya'akov was a quiet man, living in tents.

This is followed by the story of Esav's sale of his birthright, sealed with the meal of lentil porridge (see, inter alia, Radak [citing his father] at 25:33).

Subsequent to that, the text focuses on Yitzhak's attempt to descend to Egypt to escape the famine in K'na'an, his sojourn in G'rar (including another wife/sister incident - see below) and his successful return to B'er Sheva where he signs a pact with Avimelekh.

It is only after all of this that the "blessing narrative" unfolds, as outlined above. How, then, can we use information gleaned from the much later story of Rivkah's interaction with Ya'akov to shed light on the earlier report of her love for him?

IV

PERUSING THE GERAR NARRATIVE

A quick scan of the story of Yitzhak and Rivkah in Gerar (Chapter 26 - dealt with in detail in last year's essay) points us to one puzzle - which I have not seen addressed by any of the classical commentators. In order to highlight the puzzle, let's quickly review the chapter:

- i. Yitzhak's descent (1)
- ii. G-d's revelation and blessing (2-5)
- iii. The wife/sister story (6-11)
- iv. Yitzhak's material success in Gerar (12-14)
- v. The wells (15-22)
- vi. G-d's second revelation in B'er Sheva (23-25)
- vii. Avimelekh proposes a pact (26-31)
- viii. The well (33)

(notice the pattern here - G-d appears and blesses Yitzhak, he has troubling interaction with the P'lishtim and then achieves material success, highlighted by

finding water. This forum does not allow for a full analysis of the structure of Chapter 26, but the pattern is, at least, noteworthy).

Following Yitzhak and Rivkah's life to this point, we see them descending towards Egypt - but only getting as far as Gerar (by Divine fiat) with twin boys in tow - boys who are already old enough to have mastered the bow and arrow (Esav) and the subtleties of business acumen (Ya'akov). It does not stand to reason that they would have left their only seed behind - especially as they were both unattached and had not yet taken on the responsibilities of family life.

So - the puzzle of Chapter 26 is:

Where are Ya'akov and Esav?

This question is more serious than it appears at first, once we consider the series of events which unfold in Gerar.

- a) How could Yitzhak "pass" Rivkah off as his sister if they had two grown children living with them there? Remember, the earlier "wife/sister" stories (both involving Avraham and Sarah; one in Egypt and the other right here in Gerar) occurred when Sarah was still childless. Following that model - and the inherent difficulty in pulling such a ruse with children as contradictory evidence - it is hard to read the "wife/sister" story here as taking place with Esav and Ya'akov nearby. Parenthetically, the only classical commentator who addresses the Esav/Ya'akov issue in Gerar is Ramban, who states that Yitzhak would have "passed them off" as another woman's children. (26:7) We will revisit this comment further down.
- b) Once Esav's "hobby" (or "lifestyle") of a hunter is established, how could he not have gotten involved in the confrontations which his father had with the P'lishtim over the wells? Certainly, the Rabbinic representation of Esav as a violent person and murderer (see, e.g. BT Bava Batra 16b) makes his non-involvement in Yitzhak's battles all the harder to understand.
- c) A third question, not directly stemming from the absence of Esav and Ya'akov from Gerar, but impacting upon it, takes us to the very end of our Parashah and the beginning of next week's reading. Yitzhak sent Ya'akov away to Padan-Aram - to find a wife (Yitzhak's perspective) and to save his own life (Rivkah's motivation). The opening line of Parashat vaYetze is *And Ya'akov went from B'er Sheva, going to Haran*. Why does the text have to mention that he left B'er Sheva? Since that is the location where the family is located at the end of Chapter 26, then we presume that that is the place from where Yitzhak sent Ya'akov. The cogent and insightful observations of commentators as to the need to mention B'er Sheva (beginning with Rashi - "the departure of the righteous man from the town leaves an impression" - to the Brisker Rav who aligned the two purposes in Ya'akov's flight with the two phrases) notwithstanding, the verse does communicate seemingly superfluous information.

The most evident and reasonable solution to these questions is for us to reconsider the sequence of events.

We approach all T'nakh text with a number of standard assumptions, including the notion that the sequence of the story is chronologically consistent, save when overriding considerations render that desideratum impossible to achieve. Ramban is the staunchest supporter of the "chronological sequencing", known as Yesh Muq'dam uM'uhar baTorah (see his comments at Sh'mot 18:1; see also the Gemara's discussion at BT Pesachim 6b); yet even he admits to occasions where the text is clearly and blatantly in violation of chronological sequencing

(the clearest example is Bamidbar 9:1 in light of Bamidbar 1:1). Again, when considerations of juxtaposition, completing one biography before moving on to the next generation (see Ramban's comments at B'resheet 35:28) or other similar textual concerns are present, time-sequence may suffer.

The entire description of Yitzhak in Gerar fits the model of a younger man, unencumbered (and as-yet-unblessed) with children, whose wife is similarly unattached and can, therefore, be passed off as his sister. Esav and Ya'akov don't intervene in Yitzhak's difficulties - because they haven't yet been born. Chapter 26 is the first bit of information we are given about Yitzhak's life as a married man, detailing his material success and diplomatic/political ascent. Now we understand the doubled phrase at the beginning of Parashat Vayetze: Ya'akov left **from** B'er Sheva to go to Haran. As Ramban points out (beginning of Parashat Hayye Sarah), Ya'akov went from Hevron (where the family was living) to B'er Sheva to pray before leaving the Land (just as he did before leaving for Egypt - 46:1).

By the way, this also fits the model established by Avraham and maintained by Yitzhak and Ya'akov. While travelling and without children, B'er Sheva was the settlement of choice; but, after having a son, all of the Avot settled in Hevron. Why this is the case is well beyond the scope of the shiur; for our purposes, noting the pattern serves to validate our approach.

In brief: the birth of Esav and Ya'akov and everything that followed from that birth occurred after the events described in Chapter 26. After Yitzhak returned from Gerar and settled in B'er Sheva, he returned to Hevron, where he stayed the rest of his life (see B'resheet 35:27). The birth of the twins was followed by Esav's marriages and the "deathbed blessing" scene. (One may challenge this on the grounds that Yitzhak lived 120 years after becoming a father; he could he have thought that he was near death immediately after their birth? Note that he lives many years after the "deathbed blessing" narrative and that in any case that narrative took place at least forty years after the birth of Esav and Ya'akov; see 26:33, making Yitzhak at least 100 years old).

We also understand why Ramban insists on the boys being present in Gerar (see above, end of question a) - due to his customary allegiance to the principle of Yesh Muq'dam uMuhar baTorah, any method by which the time-line can be maintained will be adopted and utilized.

IV

THE OVERRIDING CONCERN

We have almost overcome the obstacle to using the information in Chapter 27 to explain the cryptic comment in Chapter 25. As mentioned above, in order to justify incorrect sequence (from a chronological perspective) in a narrative, there must be an overriding concern. What might that concern be in our case?

The death of Yishma'el, reported immediately after the death of Avraham, was significant for one reason. G-d had promised Avraham that He would "also" bless Yishma'el, making him into a great people:

And Avraham said to G-d, O that Yishma'el might live in your presence! And G-d said, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son indeed; and you shall call his name Yitzhak; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. And as for Yishma'el, I have heard you; Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he father, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Yitzhak, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time in the next year. (17:18-21)

It was crucial to demonstrate the fulfillment of that promise immediately after Yishma'el died:

Now these are the generations of Yishma'el, Avraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Avraham; And these are the names of the sons of Yishma'el, by their names, according to their generations; the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah; These are the sons of Yishma'el, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their encampments; twelve princes according to their nations. (25:12-16)

Once Yishma'el's תולדות were listed, confirming the fulfillment of the Divine promise, the text listed Yitzhak's תולדות. This is not an uncommon phenomenon - for instance, immediately after listing Esav's generations (B'resheet 36), the text states *These are the תולדות of Ya'akov...* (37:2). The likely reason for this is that once we see that even the rejected member of the family (Yishma'el, Esav) is blessed with a mighty nation as part of the general promise to Avraham that his seed would be as numerous as the sand by the shore and the stars in the sky, it is critical to resume the central thread of the story with the successful generations of the selected member (Yitzhak, Ya'akov) of the clan.

That being the case, why doesn't the text simply state: "These are the generations of Yitzhak - Esav and Ya'akov", move us to Gerar and then fill in the details of their birth, their early years and the fateful sale of Esav's birthright?

A survey of the listings of תולדות in B'resheet suggests an answer. Every time there is a mention of תולדות, there is a process of rejection and selection. When the Torah lists the תולדות of Terach, for instance (11:27), we are immediately informed of the selection of Avraham (and the rejection of his brothers). When we are introduced to the תולדות of Ya'akov, that entire Parashah is about the (aborted) selection of Yoseph as Ya'akov's heir to the patriarchate (see Ramban at 37:3)

Hence, not only was it important to list the תולדות of Yitzhak, but the first steps of the rejection of Esav - and the favoring of Ya'akov - had to be presented as part of the "תולדות schema".

Now we understand why the sequence of Parashat תולדות is not true to the chronology of events - Yishma'el's תולדות could not be left "unanswered"; once Yitzhak's children are mentioned, the process of the selection of Ya'akov and rejection of Esav must be introduced. This is the "overriding concern" which mitigates the text's usual loyalty to chronological sequence.

V

ANALYZING THE "DEATHBED BLESSING" NARRATIVE

I suggest following this section with T'nakh in hand, opened to the beginning of Chapter 27.

Now that we have demonstrated that the events presented in chapter 27 follow closely on the events in chapter 25 (i.e. that from the time that Ya'akov bought the birthright until the deathbed blessing was not necessarily a long time - by the way, this makes the plain sense of 27:36 much more "readable"), we can look to the information presented in Ch. 27 to aid us in understanding the enigma posed by Rivkah's favoring of Ya'akov, as presented in Ch. 25.

As briefly noted above, the section contains a number of parallels. The structure of the selection might best be represented as follows:

- A: Esav marries Hittite women
- B: Yitzhak speaks with Esav
- C: Rivkah overhears Yitzhak's request of Esav
- D: Rivkah speaks with Ya'akov
- E: Ya'akov's preparations for entering his father's tent
- F: Ya'akov and Yitzhak
- E' : Esav and Yitzhak
- D': Esav's reaction to Ya'akov's "theft"
- C': Rivkah overhears Esav's plans
- B': Rivkah and Ya'akov
- A': Rivkah speaks with Yitzhak about Ya'akov marrying Hittite women

The chiasmic structure goes well beyond the general topic of each sub-section:

A: Esav marries two Hittite women (thus strengthening our argument that the family resided in Hebron at the time - and not in B'er Sheva, where the most likely "locals" with whom to interact would be P'lishtim). They are a source of bitterness to Rivkah and Yitzhak - the only time that Rivkah and Yitzhak are presented as having one common reaction to anything. (It is tempting to think that these two verses were placed here merely to balance the entire selection and to strengthen the overall sense of parallelism. We'll leave that temptation...)

A': Rivkah speaks to Yitzhak - the only time in the text that we either of them speaks to each other - complaining about the Hittite women.

B: Yitzhak speaks to Esav about his impending death - and, using the transitional word ועתה ("and now"), commands Esav to go bring venison. Esav obeys without question.

B': Rivkah speaks to Ya'akov about his impending death - and, using the transitional word ועתה, commands him to run away to Lavan. Ya'akov obeys without question.

C: Rivkah hears about Yitzhak's request of Esav; she introduces her report of the information with the word הנה (behold).

C': Rivkah hears about Esav's plot to kill Ya'akov; she introduces her report of the information with the word הנה.

D: Rivkah commands Ya'akov to bring the goats that she will prepare; Ya'akov expresses concern that he will bring a curse upon himself instead of a blessing.

D': Esav reacts to Ya'akov's "theft" of the blessing by plotting to kill him - the ultimate curse.

E: Ya'akov takes on the guise of Esav - bringing the food his father loves, with coarse garments and hairy arms.

E': Esav enters with the food his father loves, with coarse garments and hairy arms.

F - The nexus of the selection - Ya'akov's direct meeting with Yitzhak, when he receives the prized blessing. There is no parallel to this sub-section, nor can there be (if there were, Yitzhak's answer to Esav in v. 38 would have been dramatically different).

VI

"AND RIVKAH FAVORED YA'AKOV"

For our purposes, the significant sections of the chiasmus which may shed light on Rivkah's favoring of Ya'akov are B and D.

In B, Yitzhak speaks to Esav about his death - and we hear no reaction from the loyal son, save to go a-hunting. The eerie similarity to Rivkah's command to Ya'akov in B' highlights the difference - Ya'akov flees without protest because it is his own life he is saving - that is the prudent thing to do and protesting would be of no avail. That is certainly not the case with Esav's obeisance to his father's command - the later development of the story demonstrates that his zealous exit to the hunt was motivated by his desire to attain father's blessing, not to bring pleasure to his father or to fulfill his command.

In D, Ya'akov's protests to Rivkah fall into two categories - ethical and pragmatic. He is concerned that the blessing will "backfire" because his father will discover the ruse; and he is concerned that he will fail in his father's eyes. When Rivkah accepts responsibility for these potential troubles, his concerns are assuaged and he protests no further.

In D', Esav continues to whine and complain about Ya'akov's "theft"; nothing that father can do will calm him down. He is, remember, the stronger one, the brother to be feared; yet he can not be placated.

When we compare the way each of these sons responded to challenges and potential troubles, we can readily understand why Rivkah favored Ya'akov over Esav and why, as Malakhi indicates (1:2), G-d Himself validated her favoritism.

VII

"ALAI HAYU KULANA"

We'll end with a "cute vort", taken from Rivkah's assuaging of Ya'akov's concerns.

Rivkah states to her younger son: עלי קללתך בני (lit. "your curse is on me" - meaning, "I'll take responsibility for it"). The word עלי can be understood as an acrostic, standing for Esav, Lavan and Yoseph. Those three were, indeed, the three sources of trouble for Ya'akov throughout his life. To wit, Rivkah is saying עלי (Esav, Lavan and Yoseph) *will be your curse, my son*.

After all three of those troubles befell Ya'akov, he was discussing the second return of his sons to Egypt to purchase grain. His sons told him that they could not return without Binyamin. In protesting, he stated: Yoseph is no longer, Shim'on is no longer, would you take Binyamin? עלי היו כולנה - literally *they are all on me*. In our approach, we might suggest עלי (Esav, Lavan and Yoseph) were all of them! I've already had my three tragedies - losing Binyamin just isn't in the cards. How can I send him down into the danger of Egypt - losing him would extend beyond the curse that I was given before taking the blessing from father.