

Parshat Toldot

Bereishit Perek 27:38-40

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל-אָבִיו הַבְּרָכָה אַחַת הוּא-לְךָ אָבִי בִּרְכֵנִי גַם-אֲנִי אָבִי וַיֵּשָׂא עֵשָׂו קִלּוֹ וַיִּבֶרֶךְ: וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק אֲבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מְוֹשְׁבֶךָ וּמִטֵּל הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל: וְעַל-חֶרְבֶּךָ תַחְיֶה וְאֶת-אֲחִיךָ תַעֲבֹד וְהָיָה כְּאִשֶּׁר תִּרְיֹד וּפְרִקְתָּ עָלָיו מֵעַל צִוְּאָרְךָ:

And Esau said to his father, "Have you [but] one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father." And Esau raised his voice and wept. And his father Isaac answered and said to him, "Behold, your dwelling place shall be the fat places of the earth and of the dew of the heaven from above. And you shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother, and it will be, when you grieve, that you will break his yoke off your neck."

Orly Lashak- Class of 2021: A Modern Approach

Background:

Esav comes back and finds out that the blessing has already been given to Yaakov. He says asks Yitzchak if there is any other blessing that he could receive as well. Yitzchak gives him a bracha of prosperity and that he will live by his sword and serve his brother. Yaakov flees to his mother's brother, Lavan's house.

Modern commentary: Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

The reason that Yitzchak was unable to give Esav the brachah that he already given Yaakov was because that specific blessing was one of spirituality. When Esav begs his father to bless him, Yitzchak grants Esav a blessing of prosperity. Prosperity, unlike spirituality, can be shared by both brothers. Because Yaakov received the original blessing, which contained political leadership, Yitzchak blessed Esav that if Yaakov's leadership should falter, then he would take his place.

Jeremy Morgan: Class of 2021: Some Original Thoughts

Parshat Toldot is a loaded parsha, with many interesting dynamics displayed in a variety of relationships between siblings, parents, spouses, etc. One incredibly perplexing relationship, though, is that of Eisav and Yitzchak. It is stated in the Torah that Yitzchak loved Eisav, the wicked son, while Rivka loved Yakov, the simple son. (Not to be confused with the 4 sons of Pesach). Many people have a hard time understanding how Yitzchak could possibly have more affection towards Eisav than Yakov, as Yakov was clearly the more righteous of the two. True, Eisav upheld Kaved et Avicha more than anyone recorded in Tanach, but his perseverance in that one mitzvah could not possibly trump the constant learning and mitzvah-doing of Yakov. Many people credit Yitzchak's love of Eisav to his being fooled by his eldest son, claiming that Eisav, through his prepared meals and peculiar questions, fooled his father into thinking he was something other than a short-tempered man of the field. However,

when Yitschak blessed what he thought was Eisav (Yakov in disguise) and later the real Eisav, I think it is revealed that Yitzchak was never really fooled in the first place.

Yitzchak never thought that Eisav was a righteous, learned, nobleman, nor did he think that Eisav was fit to be the next leader of the Jewish people, and this is evident from his bracha. His blessing to fake, and later, real Eisav is one of wealth, prosperity, and power, saying the first time: "may God give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the Earth... peoples will serve you... be a lord to your kinsmen... cursed be they who curse you" and adding the second time, "by your sword you shall live, but your brother you shall serve." Everyone makes it out to be a big deal that Yitzchak was deceived into blessing Eisav, but I believe that it is evident from this bracha that Yitzchak knew what he was doing the entire time. This is further proven when Yitzchak gives his bracha to Yakov, knowing this time that it is truly Yakov and that he is fleeing to Lavan, giving him a blessing about children and continuation of the covenant as opposed to the blessing of power given to Eisav. He says, "may [Hashem] make you fruitful and make you numerous... may He grant you the blessing of Avraham to you and your offspring with you... possess the land... which God gave to Avraham." What we see here is no secondary bracha, rather a bracha that Yitzchak specifically intended for Yakov, because he knew that Yakov was truly fit to lead the Jews and be the next forefather to future generations of Am Yisrael. I believe this is viable proof that Yitzchak was not fooled by Eisav's charades, contrary to the deluge of opinions that he planned to bless Eisav and secure his spot as the next leader, which would have been detrimental to the nation.

In general, the Torah makes it a point to not place our forefathers and leaders on pedestals and intentionally goes into detail about their key character flaws in order to convey the important message that these were actual humans that made human mistakes, and we don't admire them for their perfection, rather other incredible actions and traits. One key character flaw of Yitzchak is commonly believed to be his favoritism of Eisav and his ability to have been deceived by him, so I do not wish to discredit the flaw of Yitzchak and portray him as an angel. I do, however, believe it is important to point out that while people are quick to assume he was duped, there is reasonable evidence to suggest that Yitzchak was fully aware of the dynamic between the twin brothers throughout the fiasco. This is why when Yakov came to him disguised as Eisav, Yitzchak was very careful to make sure it was Eisav receiving the bracha, lest he place the future of the Jewish people in Eisav's hands when it really belonged in Yakov's. Eisav's obedience to his father and meal preparation may have pleased Yitzchak, but as is evident from the blessings he gives out, Yitzchak was fully conscious of who his children truly were and who would be receiving the kavod to lead on the Jewish nation.

Ezra Miller- Class of 2023- Ramban

When Yitzchak blessed Esav, he gave him a very odd bracha. The bracha was that Esav shall live by his sword. The Ramban (1194-1270, Spain) offers an explanation. He says that it did not mean that he would earn his livelihood by committing acts of violence, because he had already been blessed with the fatness of the earth. What it really was was a blessing for him

to win all of his battles. However, this excluded battles against Yaakov because he was blessed to be his servant.

Parashat Vayeitzei Bereishit Perek 31:14-17

וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וַתֹּאמְרָנָה לּוֹ הָעוֹד לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ: הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נִחְשְׁבָנוּ לּוֹ כִּי מִכְרָנוּ וְאִם אָכַל גַּם-אֶכּוֹל אֶת-כֶּסֶּפֶנוּ: כִּי כָל-הָעֹשֶׁר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֱלֹהִים מֵאֲבִינוּ לָנוּ הוּא וּלְבָנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ עֲשֵׂה: וַיִּקֶּם יַעֲקֹב וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת-בָּנָיו וְאֶת-נָשָׁיו עַל-הַגְּמָלִים:

And Rachel and Leah replied and said to him, "Do we still have a share or an inheritance in our father's house? Are we not considered by him as strangers, for he sold us and also consumed our money? But all the wealth that God separated from our father is ours and our children's. So now, all that God said to you, do." So Jacob rose, and he lifted up his sons and his wives upon the camels.

Natanya Ruben- Class of 2021

While reading these pesukim I was focused on one section of pasuk 14 when it says וַתַּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וַתֹּאמְרָנָה לּוֹ הָעוֹד לָנוּ חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אָבִינוּ: *Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house?"* So my question is: Why would Rachel and Leah be worried about their inheritance from Lavan? Yaakov was already wealthy coming from his family, so why were they worried about their other inheritance? I have two reasonings as to why this may be. 1. Rachel is very selfless From when we are first introduced to Rachel, everything she does is for kindness and it wouldn't be a question for her to find a way to help her husband. So if they were to still have a share in the inheritance she could want to show her husband some sort of gratitude and share her inheritance. 2. Leah is in a loveless marriage. Leah on the other hand wasn't even supposed to marry Yaakov so her whole life is living with someone who doesn't even love her. So maybe this could be a way to get some sort of affection or love from her husband. (not the best way but whatever works I guess.)

Yael Passy- Class of 2021 - Rashi's voice

רשי בראשית טו: לא

והלא נכריות נחשבנו לו. אפלו בשעה שדרך בני אדם לתת נדוניה לבנותיו – בשעת נשואין – נהג עמנו כנכריות, כי מכרנו לך בשכר הפעלה:
ARE WE NOT THOUGHT ALIENS BY HIM? — *Even at a time when it is customary for people to give a dowry to their daughters — at*

the time of their marriage — he treated us as strangers for he sold us to you in return for your labour during fourteen years

The pesukim where this commentary comes from takes place after Yaakov being tricked and cheated by Lavan, decides it is time to return home as God tells Yaakov to go back to his father's land. You might think that Hashem's request would be met with reluctance from Rachel and Leah because they don't want to lose out on the inheritance from Lavan but they seem to suggest that they never really had a claimed inheritance in the first place. According to Rashi, Lavan doesn't respect them; he never even accepted them. Rashi comes in to help us fill in the gaps when Rachel and Leah say that Lavan saw them as outsiders or as aliens. Generally a wife gets a dowry when she gets married; in this case Yaakov had to work for the right to marry both of the wives he married.

I really like this Rashi because it wasn't a classic Rashi question and answer- it was more of a helpful guide in being able to read between the lines a little better and gave us insight into Lavan's relationship with his daughters

Bio on Rashi

(Rashi lived in France from 1040-1105, he is a commentary on the majority of tanach as well as the talmud. He is categorized as a *rishon*).

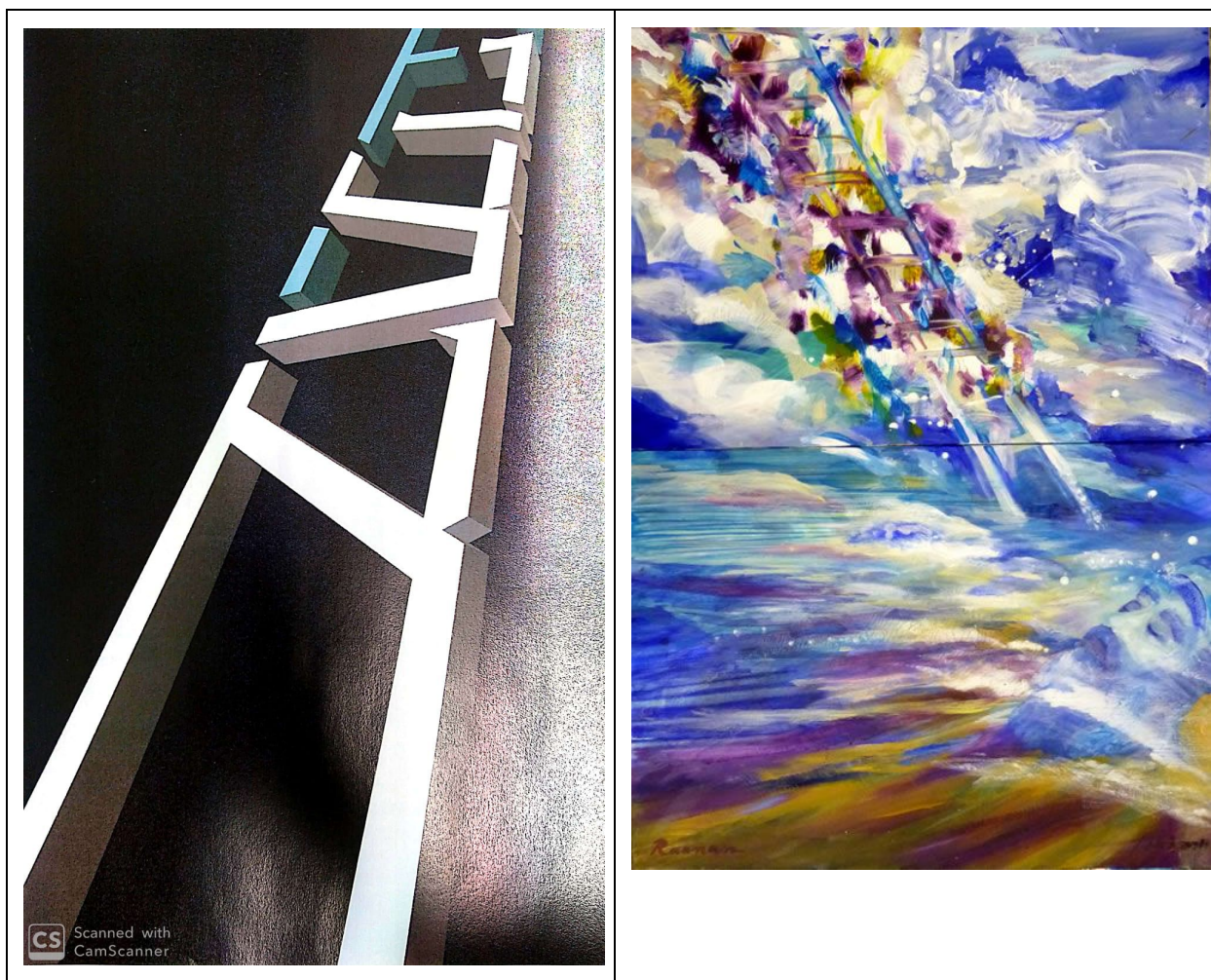
Aaron Ayach- Class of 2020 - A Modern Approach- Ohr Hachayim

The pesukim themselves talk about questions that Rachel and Leah asked regarding the wealth of their father and whether they still had a claim to it. However, in the greater context it refers to a conversation the two (Rachel and Leah) had with Jacob. After the conversation the pasukim go to tell us that "Jacob put his children and wives on camels... with all their livestock and wealth..." and they went off to where Isaac resided in Eretz Canaan. And this was all done without Laban knowing as later in the pasukim Laban is told on the third day that Jacob escaped.

While looking through these pesukim I happened upon the Ohr Hachayim. The Ohr Hachayim was a Talmudist and kabbalist; born at Meknes, Morocco, in 1696; died in Jerusalem, Ottoman Empire on 7 July 1743. He was one of the most prominent rabbis in Morocco. He commented on the phrase "העוד לנו חלק ונחלה" or "Do we still have a share or an inheritance in our father's house?" explaining that when Rachel and Leah mentioned both חלק and נחלה they referred to the inheritance from their mom (because their mother had already died) and

they also referred to a potential inheritance from their father. The sisters concluded that they had no prospect of either. They cited as proof the fact that their father had considered them as strangers as opposed to his children. This proof can be seen from the pasuk “הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נִחְשְׁבָנוּ לוֹ כִּי מָכְרָנוּ וְנִאֲכַל גַּם-אֶכֹּל” or “Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price.” Additionally in the pasuk mentioned above the Ohr Havhayim also comments on the use of the phrase “used up our purchase price” saying that this price included refers to both the money of the marriage settlement of their mother and the value of the labour Jacob performed for fourteen years in order to marry them.

I quite enjoy reading commentaries which address specific meanings and connotations behind words as opposed to bigger thematic commentaries. Which is why these Ohr Hachayim commentaries appealed to me.



Art in the Parsha:
(left): Hillem Smith
(right) Yoram Ranaan

Modern Structure

Gerry Judah, Jacob's Ladder (2018), Steel sculpture, 34 metres, Gibbs Farm Sculpture Park, New Zealand



