

ECHOES OF RASHI

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THE AKEIDAH SEQUEL

וַיְהִי כִּי זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶיָן עֵינָיו מֵרְאֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּנִי: (כ"ז:א)

It came to pass when Yitzchak was old, and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called Esav his elder son, and he said to him, "My son," and he said to him, "Here I am."

רש"י: "וַתִּכְהֶיָן" - בַּעֲשָׁנָן שֶׁל אֵלּוּ. דָּבָר אַחֵר כְּשֶׁנֶּעֱקַד עַל גַּבֵּי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהָיָה אָבִיו רוֹצֶה לְשָׁחֳטוֹ, בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה נִפְתְּחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְרָאוּ מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת וְהָיוּ בוֹכִים, וְיָרְדוּ דִּמְעוֹתֵיהֶם וְנָפְלוּ עַל עֵינָיו, לְפִיכָךְ כָּהוּ עֵינָיו. דָּבָר אַחֵר כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּטֹּל יַעֲקֹב אֶת הַבְּרָכוֹת:

"Were too dim." – Because of the smoke of these [wives of Esav] (who would burn [incense] to the idols) (Midrash Tanchuma, Toldos 8; Pesiktha Rabbasi 12). Another explanation: When Yitzchak was bound on the altar, and his father was about to slaughter him, the heavens opened, and the ministering angels saw and wept, and their tears fell upon Yitzchak's eyes. As a result, his eyes became dim (Bereshis Rabbah 65:6). A third explanation: to enable Yaakov to take the blessings (Bereshis Rabbah 65:8).

Yitzchak's eyes had grown dim – "vatich'hena einav mei'ros." On a simple level, we assume this to be a symptom of his declining health. His eyesight faded, as happens in old age. But Rashi offers a very different explanation. He traces Yitzchak's blindness back to the Akeidah.

According to Rashi, when Yitzchak was bound on the altar, the heavens opened, angels gathered, and they wept. Their tears fell into Yitzchak's eyes and began the process that would eventually leave him blind. This detail does not appear in Parshas Vayeira. Rashi inserts it here, in Toldos. Why does Rashi introduce this explanation here rather than in Parshas Vayeira?

Rashi is not just explaining a medical condition. He is forcing us to read the berachos through the lens of the Akeidah. Yitzchak's blindness during the blessing scene is not incidental. It is a residue of the Akeidah. The Berachos are a sequel to the Akeidah.

The Akeidah was the moment of selection – of choosing Yitzchak over Yishmael. Toldos is the next act – choosing Yaakov over Esav. In both cases, a father stands at the center of a decision he does not fully control. In both cases, a child is chosen through a process that is morally unsettling. And in both cases, the hand guiding events is divine rather than human.

Once you see Toldos as Akeidah Part II, the parallels begin to surface. Animals are prepared. Knives are mentioned explicitly. Yitzchak commands Esav: "sa na kelecha, taly'cha v'kasht'cha." The Torah does not

need to highlight the tools, but it does. Smell plays a central role – re'ach – just as it does in a korban. And most importantly, the drama unfolds not in public but in an inner chamber, where something decisive happens before Hashem.

There is another striking parallel. Who stands behind the scenes at the Akeidah? Sarah. It is Sarah who insists that Yishmael be removed, who clears the way for Yitzchak to become the sole heir. Without Sarah, Yishmael remains an option. Who stands behind the scenes in Toldos? Rivkah. "Kol asher tomar eilecha Rivkah, shma b'kolah" – "Whatever Rivkah tells you to do you must listen to her." Rashi is telling us: read these stories together.

This connection also helps us confront a difficult question in Toldos: How could Rivkah and Yaakov act against Yitzchak? Even if Esav is disqualified, Yitzchak surely deserves agency. The answer Rashi is pushing us toward is not an easy one: the story of the Berachos, like the Akeidah, unfolds under divine direction. Just as we do not fully resolve the morality of the Akeidah, we should not pretend that the moral questions raised by Toldos are easily resolved. These are moments where Hashem advances history through human agents, even when the human actions feel fraught.

Rivkah herself signals this. When she repeats Yitzchak's instructions to Yaakov about receiving the berachos, she adds a phrase Yitzchak never said: "lifnei Hashem" (27:7). This is no incidental addition. Rivkah understands that what is about to take place unfolds before Hashem. It is more than a private family maneuver. That awareness, rooted in her ruach hakodesh, changes how the entire scene must be read.

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CHANGING ESAV, ONE WORD AT A TIME

וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא כֵלֶיךָ תֶּלְיְךָ וְקַשְׁתֶּךָ וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְצוּדָה לִי צָיִד: (כ"ז:ג)

And now, please take your tools, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game.

רש"י: "שָׂא נָא" - לְשׁוֹן הַשְׁחָזָה, כְּאוֹתָהּ שֶׁשָּׁנִינוּ אֵין מַשְׁחִיזִין אֶת הַסַּכִּין, אֲבָל מַשִּׁיאָהּ עַל גַּבֵּי חֲבֶרְתָּהּ (ביצה כ"ח), חַדֵּד סַכִּינְךָ וּשְׁחֹט יָפֶה, שֶׁלֹּא תַאֲכִילֵנִי נְבֵלָה (בראשית רבה):

"Please take." – The word שא means sharpen, similar to what we learn in the Mishnah (Beitzah 28a): "One may not sharpen the knife in the usual manner but one may sharpen it by passing it (משיאין) over another." (Yitzchak said to Esav:) "Sharpen your knife and slaughter an animal well (according to the regulations) so that you not give me neveilah to eat."

Yitzchak asks Esav to go out and hunt for him. He wants food. He tells him: "v'tzuda li tzayid." I'm hungry – go bring me something to eat. That part is simple and straightforward. But if we listen carefully to how Yitzchak speaks, we notice something unusual. He doesn't describe the hunt in the language you would expect. He

doesn't say "sword." He doesn't say "knife." He doesn't say "kill." Instead, he speaks in a roundabout, softened way. The question is why Yitzchak chooses this particular language.

What is he really saying? Very plainly, he's telling Esav: take out your knife, your sword, your weapon, sharpen them, and go hunt a deer. Go kill an animal and bring me food. That's the reality of hunting in that world. But Yitzchak refuses to speak that way. Instead, he says, "V'ata sa na keilecha" – take your tools. And that word jumps out at us. Your tools? What tools? A screwdriver? A power drill? Tweezers? What exactly does keilecha mean here as opposed to sword and knife?

Then the pasuk adds another word, "telyecha." Taf-lamed-yud-chaf. Rashi explains that this means a sword. Why is a sword called telyecha? Because you hang it up. Every sword had a handle. You come home, take off your coat, and hang up your sword. That's the word Yitzchak chooses.

And then he adds "sa na." Take it. But Rashi explains that doesn't just mean "take." It's lashon hashchaza – meaning to sharpen. Rashi even brings a proof from a Gemara in Beitzah where a similar word is used to describe sharpening a blade. Yitzchak is clearly referring to weapons and hunting, but he deliberately avoids more violent language.



So, let's step back and ask the obvious question. Why all this euphemism? Why not just say what he means? Take your sword, sharpen it, and go hunt. Why does Yitzchak insist on this roundabout language? The answer is that Yitzchak knows his son. Whatever larger calculations he had about the berachos – and there are many ways to understand that – one thing is certain: He knows who Esav is. Esav is rough. He's aggressive. He's violent. He's a hunter. And hunting in those days wasn't setting a trap and waiting patiently. It was hand-to-hand. It was dangerous and bloody. It required strength, aggression, and a certain kind of cunning.

Rav Amital used to point out that this same cunning is why Esav's head ends up in the Me'aras HaMachpelah. There was something sharp there, something audacious, something able to think beyond the box. Those traits can be destructive, but they can also be powerful if they're properly redirected. Yitzchak sees that complexity. He sees Esav's flaws, but he also sees his potential. And instead of rejecting him outright, Yitzchak tries, quietly and gently, to shape him.

That's why Yitzchak's soft language matters. Instead of speaking in gory, violent terms, Yitzchak softens the speech. He doesn't say sword; he says tools. He doesn't say kill; he says bring me food. Yitzchak recognizes Esav for who he is, yet he deliberately softens the language. He is trying to sand down Esav's rough edges, gradually softening his aggressive personality while allowing his strengths to develop. His words and his language plays a role in

that process.

So, the takeaway for us is to pay attention to our language. Language shapes character. It trains us to see ourselves in certain ways. If Yitzchak is careful not to speak in violent terms, it's because he's trying to draw Esav toward something gentler, even as his son remains who he is.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE DINNER TABLE

וַיְשַׁלַּח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פַּדֶּנָה אֲרָם אֶל לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי אֲחִי רִבְקָה אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו: (כ"ח:ה)

And Yitzchak sent Yaakov, and he went to Padan Aram, to Lavan the son of Besuel the Arami, the brother of Rivkah, the mother of Yaakov and Esav.

רש"י: "אֵם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו" - אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה מְּלַמְּדֵנוּ:

"The mother of Yaakov and Esav." – I do not know what this teaches us.

At the very end of Parshas Toldos, there is a small Rashi that I find endlessly striking – one of my favorites precisely because of how unusual it is.

The pasuk describes Yaakov being sent away: "Vayishlach Yitzchak es Yaakov, vayelech Padan Aram, el Lavan ben Besuel haArami, achi Rivkah, eim Yaakov v'Esav." The Torah seems almost excessive in its identifiers. Lavan is the son of Besuel the Arami, the brother of Rivkah – and Rivkah is identified not only as the mother of Yaakov, but also as the mother of Esav. Rashi pauses and says something rare: "Eini yode'a ma melamdeinu" – I do not know what this teaches us.

That sentence alone is remarkable. Rashi is willing to say, "I don't know."



Rav Amital used to say that one of the most important sentences a teacher can utter is exactly this one. A teacher must be intellectually honest and willing to admit when he does not know something.

And yet, even while respecting Rashi's humility and his willingness to say that he doesn't know how to interpret this verbosity, it is hard not to feel that the Torah itself is signaling something. Why emphasize that Rivkah is "eim Yaakov v'Esav" at this precise moment?

By the end of the parshah, Rivkah acted with clarity. She intervened decisively, even daringly, to redirect the berachos. Her decision to redirect the berachos raises difficult moral questions. But once Yaakov leaves, what remains is not a clear cut resolution. This is a family that must find some way to go on. Rivkah, Yitzchak, and Esav are still there together. The tension does



not evaporate. Despite everything that has happened, Rivkah, Yitzchak, and Esav must continue living together.

And that may be the point. Despite everything, Rivkah does not cease to be Esav's mother. The Torah insists on that identity. She is not only eim Yaakov; she remains eim Esav. Even after hard choices are made, even after one child is sent away and another is left behind, parenthood is not revoked. Her decision to favor Yaakov does not mean she has stopped caring about Esav.

This is not meant to be sentimental. Esav is not absolved, and his violence is not erased. But neither is he written out of the family story. Rivkah continues to sit at the table with Esav, even when it is painful, even when nothing feels resolved. That is part of moral responsibility.

In a similar vein Chazal describe Avraham continuing to visit Yishmael after sending him away, traveling to Be'er Lachai Ro'i. Sometimes parents must make difficult decisions about their children, but those decisions do not necessarily end their responsibility toward them.

It is conceivable that this lingering bond matters years later and help avert a bloodbath. When Esav encounters Yaakov again in Parshas Vayishlach, the meeting is tense and dangerous – but it does not end in bloodshed. Perhaps part of that restraint flows from the fact that Esav never fully lost his place within the family, never fully severed ties with his parents while they were still alive.

Perhaps the Torah emphasizes eim Yaakov v'Esav to remind us that Rivkah remained the mother of both children. Rivkah was guided by ruach hakodesh. She acted with conviction. But she remained a mother to both sons. Even when Rivkah acts decisively, she does not abandon her responsibility toward Esav.

Rashi says he does not know what this teaches us. I would not claim to know what Rashi did not. But the Torah may be reminding us that even after making difficult decisions, parents remain responsible for all their children. Perhaps that is why the Torah reminds us that Rivkah was the mother of both Yaakov and Esav. ■



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