

ALIYA BY ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA Israel Region

PARSHAT TOLDOT

This is the one and only parsha of Yitzchak and Rivka's life. Rivka has twins, Esav and Yaakov. Yaakov buys the birthright from Esav. Yitzchak goes to Gerar in a famine, is told not to leave the Land, digs the wells Avraham dug and renews the pact with Avimelech. Yitzchak is elderly, plans to give the blessing to Esav but is deceived by Yaakov. Esav wants to kill Yaakov. Yaakov travels to Padan Aram so as not to marry a woman from Canaan.

1ST ALIYA (25:19-26:6)

Yitzchak is 40 when he marries Rivka. He prays for her as she is barren. She is troubled by her pregnancy and is told she has 2 nations in her womb. She bears them when Yitzchak is 60. Yitzchak loves Esav, Rivka loves Yaakov. Yaakov buys the birthright from Esav for a pot of lentil soup. Yitzchak journeys to Gerar in a famine. G-d tells him not to go to Egypt but to dwell in the Land, as it is promised to him.

This is the parsha of succession. Yitzchak has now taken Avraham's place, Rivka taken Sarah's. And the next generation is born.



This succession is not prosaic. It is the succession of the covenant. Avraham was promised that his children will inherit the Land of Israel. When you get a promise like that from G-d, nothing else really matters in life. All of life will revolve around that promise.

And in particular, who are these children who will inherit the Land? And when will this promise happen?

Yitzchak and Rivka must be preoccupied with these questions. They must be looking for hints as to who and when this fabulous Divine promise will happen.

If they searched for hints as to who, they would compare themselves to Avraham and Sarah. Avraham had two children, Yitzchak and Yishmael. One is in, one is out. Yitzchak in, Yishmael out. So, is that how it's going to be for us? We have two children, Yaakov and Esav. Is one in and one out?

But hold on, Avraham had two children. But Sarah did not. She had Yitzchak. All of her children are part of the covenant. Yitzchak. Perhaps, thinks Yitzchak, all of Rivka's children, both Yaakov and Esav are in. Maybe.

The first story we hear of the children is the sale of the birthright by Esav to Yaakov. Yaakov is cooking lentils. Esav asks for some of that red, red dish. Hence his name is Edom, red. He is not called Edom because he was born with reddish complexion. No,

at birth he is named Esav, from the word "Asu", like ready made. He was a mature baby, hence called Esav. The red name, Edom, comes now because of the lentil soup.

That is not a compliment. He is called Red, Edom, because he was impulsive, impetuous, selling a valued position in the family. For a bowl of red lentils. The name Edom is not at all a compliment.

Yaakov and Esav may be assuming that unlike the first generation where one was in and one was out, we are both going to be in, because we are both from the same mother. Okay. But who will be dominant, who will be the leader? Naturally, the first born has seniority. Selling the birthright is thumbing your nose at the entire Jewish venture.

If Yitzchak figures both of his children are in, then he has a bit of a problem with the impulsive one, the one who thumbs his nose at our heritage, selling his birthright. And for what? A bowl of lentils.

Now, the other question preoccupying Yitzchak and Rivka is when will this grand venture of settling the Land occur? Is it imminent? Or is it only after the 400 years that Avraham was told?

There is a famine. Everyone runs to Egypt in a famine because the Nile is a reliable source of water allowing Egypt to escape famines. But here Yitzchak is told by G-d Himself – do not leave. Dwell in this Land.

This Divine command to not leave the Land follows Avraham's command to his servant to not take Yitzchak out of the Land when searching for a wife.

Yitzchak clearly gets the message from both his father and from G-d; don't leave this Land. Why not? Could it be that settling the Land seems imminent?

Yet, what about the dreadful prediction to Avraham that his children would be strangers in a strange land, afflicted there, and then would leave with great wealth? Yitzchak must assume that the dreadful prediction is a metaphor. You will be strangers in a strange land is how Avraham described himself in the Land of Israel – *ger v'toshav* – I am a stranger in the Land. And Avraham and Sarah suffered with infertility for 100 and 90 years respectively; that was a terrible affliction. Avraham was blessed with wealth. So, sounds like the strangers in a strange land, afflicted, great wealth has all happened.

It could very well be that Yitzchak assumes that the promises are imminent. His children will inherit this Land. Both his sons. This project of nation building will need all hands on deck. It will need the varied talents of both his sons. Oh, how well we know that nation building needs not only spiritual power but good soldiers too. Yaakov the man of spirit. And Esav, the powerful man of the field.

And perhaps Yaakov knows this as well. He buys the birthright. The birthright is a benefit to one brother over the other. Not an exclusion. An added portion. Perhaps Yaakov too wants to prevail; not to the exclusion of Esav but to have the spirit prevail over power.





2ND ALIYA (26:7-12)

Yitzchak and Rivka are in Gerar. He says she is his sister. Avimelech realizes she is his wife and challenges Yitzchak. Avimelech instructs all not to touch her. Yitzchak plants that year and the crop yield is 100-fold (meah shearim).

Yitzchak plants in a famine. And gets a 100-fold yield. That is not normal.

Wow, Yitzchak must think: the promise of the Jewish people settling this Land is coming true in my time. We are being blessed. What would you think if you planted in a famine and got a 100-fold yield? G-d is with me. Settling the Land is being rewarded from above. Time to take more steps to build the state.



3RD ALIYA (26:13-22)

Yitzchak prospers greatly, with many flocks. He digs the wells Avraham dug but were filled in by the Philistines. Avimelech tells him to move away. He digs more wells of Avraham. Finally, when he digs wells that are not contested, he declares that he has been fruitful.

All the wells end well. That's 5 well diggings.

Why did the Philistines fill in the wells? That sounds quite odd.

These wells are for the wellbeing of the impending Jewish state. Yitzchak is intent on these wells; he is digging the wells for agriculture. The shepherd is transitioning to agriculture; state building demands agriculture.

And the people of Gerar are onto him – they smell an adversary, intent on taking their land. Hence, they oppose his wells.



4TH ALIYA (26:23-29)

Yitzchak journeys to Beersheva. G-d tells him not to fear, for He is with him as He was with Avraham. Yitzchak builds an altar and calls in G-d's name. Avimelech comes to renew the pact, though if any harm be done to him, the pact is off.

Why does Avimelech want this pact?

Avimelech is afraid that Yitzchak will harm him. He senses that a confrontation with Yitzchak is looming. He senses Yitzchak is preparing for a state, something Avraham did not do. And this state will be at Avimelech's expense. The pact is not lovey-dovey. It is a security pact. When you gain power, don't harm me.



5TH ALIYA (26:30–27:27)

Esav marries at 40 taking Canaanite wives, to the consternation of Yitzchak and Rivka. Yitzchak is elderly. He instructs Esav to bring freshly caught venison after which he will bless him. Rivka interferes and instructs Yaakov to imitate Esav. Yitzchak is suspicious but Yaakov's disguise is convincing.

The story of Yitzchak wanting to bless Esav can be seen as the next chapter of his state building. Because, while Yitzchak seems to do all the things that Avraham did, this blessing has no precedent. Avraham did not bless his children at the end of his life. Why is Yitzchak doing this?

Yitzchak figures *both* his sons are going to lead the next generation of the Jewish people, the generation of state building. There is no reason to think otherwise; they are twins, both born of the same mother. And they are complementary leaders. Yaakov is the thoughtful leader. But military power is not his thing. It is Esav's. A great pair. Spirit and power.

Yitzchak does not intend to bless just one son, but both. He intends to bless Esav in

worldly matters, Esav's strength. To complement Yaakov, not replace him.

Rivka sees it all differently. Because she got that message when she was pregnant – 2 nations, not one. She does not accept Yitzchak's fanciful dream that state building has arrived. The Jewish future has a circuitous path before it gets to settling this Land. And that message that she received of two nations.

Well, if the Jewish people is going to be one of these two of my children, not both, it isn't going to be Esav. He spurned the birthright, thumbing his nose at the Jewish enterprise. Then married women of this land, the very thing Avraham was adamant to avoid.



6TH ALIYA (27:28-28:4)

Yitzchak gives the blessing to Yaakov. Esav arrives soon after. When the deception is discovered, Esav is incensed, intent on killing Yaakov. Rivka urges Yitzchak to send Yaakov to Padan Aram to find a wife – and save his life.

The blessing, intended for Esav, is for agricultural blessing from the heavens. And power. In Yitzchak's mind, the Jewish people will require economic success as well as military prowess. And that is the blessing to Esav – a perfect partner to Yaakov, the thoughtful leader.

Rivka's intervention, to avoid the blessing going to Esav shapes Jewish history. And in this, Rivka follows in Sarah's footsteps. Sarah banished Yishmael and G-d told Avraham to listen to her. Rivka, in her way, banishes Esav. And Yitzchak knows that in the end she is correct. Only one of their children will inherit the covenant, the other won't.

The Jewish women prevail and chart the future of our people.



7TH ALIYA (28:5-9)

Esav sees that the Canaanite women he took are frowned upon. He marries Yishmael's daughter.

Esav marries at 40, like Yitzchak. He wants to walk in his father's footsteps, claiming his father's legacy. He takes a daughter of Yishmael, in other words, his cousin, as Yitzchak married Rivka, his cousin. Just like his father.

But it is a hollow walk. It is imitation not replication. Checking off a box, not assumption of a legacy.

The parsha began with Esav selling the birthright and despising it. The parsha ends with a farcical attempt to recover that despised legacy by marrying someone at the same age and stage as his father. A hollow imitation. ■

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