

O H R N E T

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SECRET OF WELL-BEING

“Yitzchak’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Yitzchak’s herdsmen saying, ‘The water is ours,’ so he called the name of that well Esek, because they involved themselves with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also; so he called it Sitnah. He relocated from there and dug another well...” (26:19-22)

It’s tough being fabulously wealthy.

It takes so much time and worry and effort to protect and embellish your riches. You have to inspect your factories, lunch with lawyers, account with accountants. The Internal Revenue Service has you in its sights. You hardly have time to put out the cat.

By our standards, the Avos — Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov — were multi-billionaires. A tycoon’s portfolio would pale in comparison. And yet, in spite of all their wealth, they never lost sight for a moment of the purpose of their wealth.

Oil may be called “black gold,” but when you live in the desert your entire wherewithal is dependent on “white gold” — Water. Without water, you have nothing. When there was an argument over water rights, did Yitzchak become litigious? No. He let it go. He walked away and dug another well. Whenever there’s a fight over something, it’s going to eat up my time and peace of mind. What will I gain? Money? Status? Is it really worth it? It’s going to knock me off the spiritual path, so I walk away.

Nothing is equal to the worth of my spirituality. That is my only lasting possession.

Yitzchak dug another well, “Sitnah,” whose name is derived from the word “to oppose.”

If the Philistines are trying to oppose my spirituality, to try to drag me down, I walk away. I build another well.

In the secular world they say that time is money.

We say “Money is time.”

All you ever have in life is time. You can spend your life with your lawyers, or you can spend it talking and listening to your Creator. It’s up to you.

“Nothing is equal to the worth of my spirituality. That is my only lasting possession.”

A TENDER TRAP

“And Yitzchak loved Esav, for trapping was in his mouth, but Rivka loved Yaakov.” (24:28)

In the celestial courtroom drama which will take place at the end of history, Hashem will turn to each of the Avos and say “Your sons have sinned.” Avraham and Yaakov will say to Hashem that if their offspring have sinned, they should be brought to punishment, for Hashem’s name is sanctified when those who sin are punished.

Yitzchak, however, will defend his children claiming that their sins were petty and insignificant. He will do his best to get them “off the hook.”

Why, specifically, should it be Yitzchak

who will go to greater lengths than the other Avos to seek clemency and leniency for his children? Especially as he himself is the embodiment of the fear of Heaven and its awe.

Yitzchak had a winning claim against Hashem. He could say to Hashem: “I also had a son who sinned — Esav. And in spite of my being only flesh and blood, I loved him and forgave and pardoned him.”

“You, Master of the Universe, You who are the essence of forgiveness, how much more so should You exonerate and forgive Your children, even though they have sinned against You!”

It turns out therefore, that through Yitzchak’s love for Esav, he had a substantial and well-founded defense for the Jewish People.

This is what the above verse means when it says that Yitzchak loved Esav “because trapping was in his mouth.” Yitzchak loved Esav so that when Hashem would accuse the Jewish People, Yitzchak would have a ready-made defense to, as it were, “trap” Hashem into forgiving them.

SONS AND FATHERS

“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak the son of Avraham — Avraham begot Yitzchak.” (25:19)

Yitzchak always considered that his only merit was that he was “the son of Avraham,” and Avraham thought that his only merit was that he “begot Yitzchak.”

That is the way of the righteous: They never see themselves as sufficient in their own eyes; rather they see their only merit as being the son or the father of a righteous person.

THE VOICE

“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav” (26:22)

The Voice is given to Yaakov. And the Hands, to Esav. The Voice is the internal power which emanates from the heart. The Hands are the external power of action.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak's prayers to Hashem are answered and Rivka conceives twins, Esav and Yaakov. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born first, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. As they grow, the contrast between the twins becomes apparent: Esav is a hunter, a man of the field, of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of the funeral of their grandfather Avraham, Yaakov is cooking lentil soup, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the first-born. Yitzchak tries to escape to Egypt when a famine strikes Canaan, but Hashem reminds him that because of the *Akeida* (where he was offered as a sacrifice) he has become holy and

must remain in the Holy Land. Instead he relocates to *Gerar* in the land of the *Plishtim*, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say that she is his sister. Yitzchak arouses jealousy when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three *Batei Mikdash* (Temples) which will be built in the future. Avimelech, seeing the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on Yitzchak, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses the end of his days approaching, he summons Esav to give Esav his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate his brother and receive the blessings. When Esav in a rage of frustration complains to his father that his brother has bought his birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov who has valued its responsibilities rather than its privileges, and confirms the blessings he has given. Esav vows to kill his brother, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

HAFTORAH: SHMUEL I 20;18-42

MODEL FRIENDSHIP

This Haftorah has been selected to be read on the *Shabbat* whose morrow is *Rosh Chodesh*. It begins with the words "Tomorrow is the *Chodesh*" which Yonatan, the son of King Saul, said to David at the outset of his plan.

King Saul had demonstrated hostility towards David, whom he viewed as a potential competitor for his throne, and there was serious doubt as to whether it was safe for David to remain a part of the royal entourage. Out of his great affection for David, Yonatan assumed responsibility for alarming David if the tense situation ever reached a danger point.

In order to avoid detection by the

king's agents, Yonatan devised a secret method to inform David of King Saul's reaction to David's absence from the *Rosh Chodesh* feast in the palace. The *Haftorah* ends with David's flight from Saul's anger, and the covenant David and Yonatan reiterate which will forever bind them and their posterity. David and Yonatan's mutual affection is cited by our Sages as the model of selfless love between two people.

OHRNET

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General Editor:
Rabbi Moshe Newman
Editorial & Web Advisor:
Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
Associate Editors:
Rabbi Mordechai Becher,
Rabbi Reuven Subar
Contributing Writers:
Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
Insights, Overview, Haftorah:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Lev Seltzer**
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* If you have a question about Judaism, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi. Just send your question using E-Mail to "ohr@virtual.co.il" and set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi". We can't include all questions submitted in the column, but we do try to respond to everyone personally.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

SAGE ON THE BRIDGE

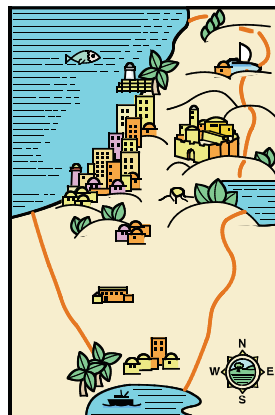
When Rabbi Zeira finally realized his dream of reaching Eretz Yisrael, only a river separated him from his goal. Rather than wait for the next ferry to take him across, he decided to use a primitive bridge consisting of a log spanning the river, which he walked upon while holding on to an overhead rope to ensure that he wouldn't fall.

A heathen observer of this rickety crossing cried out to him: "Impulsive people that you are, who put your mouths before your

ears (when they said "we will do" before they said "we will hear" in accepting the Torah without knowing what it required of them), you are still acting impulsively. Why don't you wait for the ferry in order to make a safer and more comfortable crossing."

To this Rabbi Zeira sighed: "A land which Moshe and Aharon did not merit to enter — who knows if I wait any longer that I will have the privilege of entering it!"

• Kesubos 112a



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was the daughter of Besuel and the sister of Lavan?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Yaakov was born grasping Esav's heel. What does this symbolize?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why did Hashem cause Avraham to die prematurely?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birth right that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt to escape the famine?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. To which animal is Esav compared?
13. What caused Yitzchak to lose his sight?
14. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka rather than keep them at home?
15. What made Yitzchak suspect that it wasn't Esav bringing him food?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on the garments of Yaakov?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be released from his subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. How long did Yaakov study in the Yeshiva of Ever before going to Lavan's house?

BONUS QUESTION?

"Esav said, 'Give me some of this red red, because I'm exhausted.' Therefore, they called him 'Red.'" Esav was born red, but they didn't call him "Red" until this incident. Why not?

answer on page six

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"And Esav was a man who knew how to trap, a man of the field..." There exists a dangerous beast called the "man of the field" — a creature connected to the ground by the navel (see *Mishna Kilaim* 8). The only way to hunt it is to shoot arrows at its connection to the ground until it is severed, and then the beast dies. Esav, on the other hand, knew how to capture it alive. Therefore the verse reads, "Esav was a man who knew how to trap a 'man of the field.'"

• *Kehilas Yitzchak in the name of the Vilna Gaon, courtesy of Rabbi Sholem Fishbane*

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 25:19 - So that everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To proclaim her praise, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:26 - That Yaakov would eventually rise to rule over Esav.
5. 25:26 - Hashem.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in *mitzvah* observance.
7. 25:30 - Avraham died five years prematurely, at 175, so that he should not see his grandson become wicked.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring *korbanos* (sacrifices).
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave *Eretz Canaan*.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 26:34 - The pig. Just as the pig appears to be kosher but lacks the internal sign, so too Esav appeared righteous but internally was evil.
13. 27:1 - The smoke from the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols.
14. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
15. 27:21 - Yaakov mentioned the name of Hashem too readily.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - When he saw that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - Fourteen years.

WEEKLY DAF

BERACHOS 58 - 64

THUNDER AND DREAMS

There are events in life whose purpose is to alarm a person into a fear of Hashem. One of them is the frightening sound of thunder. Science can supply explanations for the cause of this sound, but we have no understanding why the Creator so ordered His universe that this natural phenomenon be one of such volume that it strikes terror in the heart of man.

The reason, says Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, is to straighten out the distorted ideas in the heart of man. Maharsha calls our attention to an earlier *perek* (*Berachos 28b*) where Rabbi Hillel explains that the eighteen blessings of our *Shmone Esrei* prayer correspond to the eighteen times Hashem's Name is mentioned in chapter 29 of *Tehillim*. The nineteenth blessing which was added when the heretics began to make trouble corresponds to the Divine Attribute found in 29:3 — “the G-d of glory thunders.” This thunder is a Divine message to straighten out the heretic's thinking by shocking him into an awareness of Heavenly power.

The source for this approach is the passage in *Koheles* (2:14) about Hashem doing things “so that people should fear Him.” Back in our own *perek* (55a) Rabbi Chisda applies this same passage to the purpose of a bad dream which, he says, is more effective than lashes in arousing a

sinner to mend his ways. The fear aroused by a dream which may foretell an unpleasant future has a longer lasting impact on the dreamer than the pain suffered in corporal punishment. According to our Sages a bad dream is therefore related to thunder which likewise instills a fear which will hopefully inspire us to return to the Creator.

• *Berachos 59a*

THE DANGEROUS FOX

When Rabbi Akiva defied the Roman ban on Torah study by publicly teaching Torah he was challenged by Popus ben Yehuda who exhorted him to exercise caution.

“Let me draw you a parable,” answered Rabbi Akiva. “A fox once passed a river where he observed the fish frantically swimming to and fro. To his query about their rushing from place to place the fish replied that they were fleeing the nets which men were spreading in the water to catch them. When the fox suggested that they could find safety by coming out of the water to live alongside him on dry land the fish scorned his advice.

‘You are supposed to be the cleverest of animals,’ they said, ‘but you speak like a fool. If we have so much to fear in our natural habitat — the water — how much more will we be in danger in a surrounding where we cannot survive!’”

“To us Jews,” concluded Rabbi Akiva, “Torah is our life, just as water is for the fish. If we are in danger while in our natural habitat, how much greater will our danger be if we abandon it!”

Rabbi Akiva's view of the fox as the symbol of all the compromisers in Jewish history who preached abandonment of Torah study and observance as a way of gaining acceptance by non-Jews is echoed in the famous story recorded at the end of *Mesechta Makkos*. When the leading sages of the generation following the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* saw a fox coming out of the place where the Holy of Holies once stood, all of them wept while Rabbi Akiva laughed. His explanation was that the Prophet Yishayahu links the prophecy of destruction about the Temple Mount turning into a jungle with the prophecy of redemption. Seeing the fox was proof that destruction had reached its climax and redemption was beginning.

But why did he alone see this in the appearance of the fox? One approach is that the other sages assumed that the appearance of lions and bears would constitute a jungle, not the tiny fox. Rabbi Akiva, however, saw the fox as a more formidable threat to his people because of his preaching assimilation, and he therefore laughed with joy that destruction would now give way to redemption.

• *Berachos 61b*

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

But these Hands, the hands of Esav, are not satisfied just to dominate the physical world. They strive constantly to subjugate the Voice. The hands of Esav thrust themselves deep into the insides of Yaakov; coarse Hands delving into the depths of the soul; setting up an idol in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish soul; superficiality swelling up and suffusing the innermost chambers of the heart.

The Hands strangling the Voice; the Voice of prayer without the feeling of the heart; a mitzvah done mechanically — the Hands are working. And the Voice grows quieter and

quieter.

But in spite of this, the Voice is *the voice of Yaakov*; destined to rise up, to dominate and elevate the Hands, to purify them and make them holy.

When Yitzchak said that the voice was “*the voice of Yaakov and the hands, the hands of Esav*” he thought that it was Esav who was in front of him and that Esav had acquired the voice of Yaakov — that the Voice had sanctified and elevated Esav. The truth of the matter was that Esav had remained unchanged in his evil, while it was Yaakov who stood before him, garbed in the goatskin hides of

Esav.

For the Voice — the voice of Yaakov — will ultimately permeate to the outermost layer of the skin, even to the very end of the material world.

Sources:

The Secret of Well-being - Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam
A Tender Trap - Shelah HaKadosh in *Mayana Shel Torah*
Sons and Fathers - Rabbi Yechiel m'Alexander in *Iturei Torah*
The Voice - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in *L'Torah u'T'Moadim*

*“There's a voice older than time
a voice softly calling, asking where
creature of mine, where are you now
every chance I give,
is a choice that matters
when you hide then you hide
from yourself...from yourself.”*

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ASK *the* RABBI

SUBWAY PSALMS

Staave, New York NY
<Staave@aol.com> wrote:

Is it OK to say Tehillim [Psalms] on the subway? Do I have to say the words loud enough so I can hear them?

Dear Staave,

It's a great idea to "elevate the subway" by saying *Tehillim*. By doing so, you fulfill the commandment "And you shall speak (words of Torah) as you travel along the way." Also, the merit of Torah study protects you from the many dangers of travel (especially on the NY subway). But you must make sure of two things when saying *Tehillim*:

- The area around you must be clean of any droppings, uncomfortable odors, and the like.
- You aren't facing towards anyone indecently clad.

You don't have to say them out loud, a whisper is adequate.

LULAV LEFTOVERS

Burt Falkenstein
<BNOHOW@aol.com> from the Bronx, NY wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Now that Succot is over what does one do with the etrog and lulav? I noticed in my shul that the lulav is placed on top of the aron kodesh [Holy Ark]? There's also one member of our congregation who collects them to make some sort of pie, (I think). Could you kindly reply with an explanation? Thank you.

Dear Burt Falkenstein,

I've never heard of *lulav* pie! You probably mean *etrog* pie. I know people who make *etrog* jam and *etrog* liqueur. I have a jar of *etrog* jam in my fridge. (It's an acquired taste!)

Since the *lulav* and *etrog* were used for a mitzvah they should be treated with respect. Ideally, they should be used for another mitzvah. Many people save their *lulav* until Passover and then use it to burn the *chametz*. Some people stick cloves into their *etrog* and use it as the fragrance spice at *havdallah*.

AN EXCEPTIONAL RULE

Randy Wohl <rwohl@ndc.co.il> wrote:

Quick question, I hope: Where in the Talmud does it say, "Every rule has an exception" or, equivalently, "There is no rule without an exception?" Thank you.

Dear Randy Wohl,

There's an expression in the Talmud: "*Ain lemadin min haklalot*" — "One may not draw inferences from general rules (stated in the Talmud)." This is because there *might* be exceptions to the stated rule. I don't know if this is exactly what you're looking for, but it's the closest thing I could find.

By the way, if it's a rule that "there's an exception to every rule," then it too must have an exception; i.e., there must be some rules without exceptions!

Sources:

- *Eruvin 27a*, see *Massoret Hashas*

MINYAN MOTIVATION

[Name withheld] from Bogota, Colombia wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Although living in a city with three or so synagogues (located in South America), I find it difficult to drag myself to shul. What would be a suitable argument to put myself to it apart from the ones that are so common (you shouldn't separate from the community, prayer is more appropriate in a minyan, etc.). I would appreciate your feedback to this point that is important to me.

Dear [Name Withheld],

Like anything you want to do but find difficult, you've got to start by 'tricking' yourself into it.

Here's an idea I've found helpful: Find a study partner. Arrange to meet in your synagogue and study Torah together before the morning prayers (for even as little as 10 minutes). The obligation to your study partner, and the embarrassment felt for missing your appointment, will help get you there.

Become more involved in the 'technical' side of shul. Get the key to the shul and be the one responsible for opening up in the morning. Be the *gab-bai* who calls people up to the Torah, or who's responsible for getting someone to lead the services. Lead the services yourself. Becoming involved will make you feel more part of and responsible to the community.

Set aside ten minutes a day to study a book that explains the prayers. Understanding the prayers will make praying a meaningful experience.

When you're in the synagogue, look at yourself as being the tenth person in the *minyan* even if there are hundreds of people present! Why? Let me explain with a story:

A town decides to have a party. In order to supply wine for the party, they place an empty barrel in the town square and ask everyone to bring a glass of wine and pour it into the barrel. One of the inhabitants decides to bring a glass of water: "After all," he thinks "will anyone be able to tell if there is one glass of water in a barrel full of wine?" On the day of the party, everyone comes to the square, dressed in their finest, ready to begin the festivities only to find that the whole barrel is full of water!

If everyone were to rely on the others to make up the *minyan*, chances are that there would be no *minyan* at all.

TOKYO TIPS

Kenny Broodo
<BROKE@gardere.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My sister-in-law and brother-in-law and their new baby girl just made a temporary move to Tokyo to start their business careers. I would very much appreciate knowing of any Jewish resources available to them in Tokyo or elsewhere in Japan. Thank you.

Dear Kenny Broodo,

Japan? I am sending you a list of the communities that I got from Jeff Seidel's "The Jewish Traveler's Resource Guide 1997." I wish them the best of luck.

continued on page six

Tokyo - City Code: (3)
Jewish Community of Japan
Rabbi Jim Lebeau
8-8 Hiroo, 3 Chome, Shibuya-hu, 150
Tokyo, Japan
Phone: 3400-2559 Fax: 3400-1827
e-mail: marcia.greenman-
lebeau@iac-online.com

Kobe - City Code: (78)
The Jewish Community of Kansai
No. 12/12 Kitano-cho, 4-Chome
Chuo-ku, Kobe
Japan
Phone: 221-7236, 241-3440
Fax: 242-7254

Bruce M. Benson,
Secretary of Jewish Community of
Kansai
3-1-17 Kitano Cho
Chuo-Ku, Kobe-Shi F650
Japan
Phone: 222-3950, 221-6188
Mikve on premises

New Feature!

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features.

I thought your piece on Godzilla and Bambi was brilliant.
• Jonathan Clare <jclare@actcom.co.il>

You unnecessarily put down the person who asked about the Shabbat-light covering device. I think you used unnecessary sarcasm (couldn't you find anything better than Bambi vs. Godzilla?). Although I've never heard of the device mentioned, I have heard of Shabbat elevators, etc. I think their

application violates the spirit of the Torah. I know several Rabbis (very Orthodox) that agree with me. The questioner might have used the wrong word ("comic") but your reaction sounded to me much more defensive than objective.

Noe Feldman <swraza@MCI2000.com>



In reference to your article in the Ohrnet about pronouncing Hashem's name whilst singing *Shabbat zemirot*, I would like to suggest why some people are particular to avoid saying Hashem's name. The reason is, often after beginning a tune, a parent might see a child falling off a chair, or spilling a drink, so the parent might call out "careful" or "watch it." You can use your imagination for other examples. In order to be on the safe side, some people never pronounce Hashem's name in a *zemer*. Sing well and Gut *Shabbos!*

• Binyomin Freilich "M & S Schoemann"
<schoeman@netmedia.net.il>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Jack Stroh, East Brunswick, NJ <jackst@erols.com> wrote:

Here is a riddle I am submitting from my father-in-law Stanley Chazan and my daughter Aviva Stroh: "Name 6 couples mentioned in Tanach whose first names start with the same letter in Hebrew."

Answer next week...

BONUS ANSWER!

continued from page three

There was nothing so unusual about Esav being born with a red complexion; many people are born with a red complexion. People only began calling him "Red" in order to deride him for selling his birthright for some red food.

• Ramban and Kli Yakar

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 25:23 Two Nations
- 26:1 Yitzchak in Exile
- 26:5 The Avos and Mitzvah Observance
- 26:20 The Wells and the Future
- 27:4 Rivka's Secret
- 27:33 Why Yitzchak Trembled

SFORNO

- 25:24 Esav's Name
- 25:26 Yaakov's Name
- 27:1 Yitzchak's Blindness
- 27:29 Yaakov's Portion



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