

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Essay 14: Isaac blessed his son despite foreseeing some bad descendants

**מדרש** "ונברח את־רים בגדיו", אל תקרי "בגדיו" אלא "בוגדיו" וכו'. קשה שהרי פרש רש"י על פסוק "ונברח אלהים את־יצחק בנו" שאברקם לא רצה לברך את יצחק הואיל שצפה שעתיד לצאת ממנו עשו, וכאן אפילו שראה בוגדיו ברכהו.

Isaac wanted to give a blessing to Esau, but Jacob and his mother, Rebecca, tricked him into giving the blessing to Jacob instead. Jacob dressed in Esau's clothing and went to meet him.

There is a midrash, “ ‘And he smelled the smell of his garments [*begadav*] [בגדיו] and blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the L-rd has blessed’ (Gen. 27:27). **Don’t read ‘his garments,’ but rather ‘its traitors’** [*bogdav*] [בוגדיו] (Yalkut Shimoni remez 115).”<sup>1</sup>

**A difficulty is that Rashi explained on the verse, “After the death of Abraham, G-d blessed his son Isaac” (Gen. 25:11), that the blessing came from G-d because Abraham hadn’t wanted to bless Isaac, because he saw that in the future, Esau would come from him. But here, even though [Isaac] perceived<sup>2</sup> “its traitors,” he blessed [his son]. Why was Isaac willing to give a blessing to Esau?**

וגיש לומר שמעשו נשתרבה אומת אדום, ושאני בין פושעי אומות העולם לפושעי ישראל דכתיב "כפלח הרמון רקתך" אפילו ריקנין שבה, מלאים מצות כרמון. ועוד פושעי ישראל אין אור של גיהנם שולטת בהם קל וחמר מסלמנדרא וכו'. ועוד דמייתי התם המדרש, כגון יוסי בן משימא שחזר בתשובה, ומשום הכי "ונברכהו ויאמר ראה" וכו'.

**It can be said that from Esau spread out the nations of Edom, but there is a difference between those who would hurt the peoples of the world, i.e., the descendants of Esau, and those who would hurt Israel, which is a euphemism for Jews who sin. As it is written, “ ‘your brow is like a slice of pomegranate’ (Song of Songs 4:3)—What is [the meaning of] ‘your brow’ [*rakatech*] [רקתך]? Even the most ignorant [*reikanin*] [ריקנין] among you, Israel, are as full of mitzvot like a pomegranate.”<sup>3</sup> Also, [as far as] those who would hurt Israel, it says:**

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to the midrash, this appears in Sanhedrin 37a.

<sup>2</sup> Literally “saw,” but of course Isaac was blind at that point.

<sup>3</sup> Sanhedrin 37a; Berachot 57a.

Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Elazar said: **The fire of Gehenna has no power over [Torah scholars]**, [this can be derived by] **an a fortiori** [inference] **from the salamander**, [a creature created out of fire and immune to its effects, and whose blood is fireproof]: If a salamander, which is a product of fire, [and nevertheless when] one anoints [his body] with its blood, fire has no power over him, all the more so [should fire not have any power over] Torah scholars, whose entire bodies are fire, as it is written: “Surely My words are as fire, says the L-rd” (Jer. 23:29) [and the words of Torah become part of the Torah scholars’ very bodies].

- Chagigah 28a

**Also see what is derived there in the midrash**, Gen. Rabbah 65:22. **For example**, that “he smelled the smell of his garments” refers to **Yossi ben Mishita who returned in repentance**. The midrash explains that when the Romans desired to enter the Temple, they wanted a Jew to enter first, and they told Yossi Mishita to enter and to take something, and that he could keep it. He entered and took the menorah. As an important symbol, they told him that was too much for him to keep, and told him to go again. He refused. They offered him three years’ worth of tax collections, but he still refused. “Is it not enough that I have angered G-d once, that I should anger Him again?” The Romans then tortured him to death.

Thus, Isaac may have been fooled into thinking that Esau was standing before him asking for a blessing, and he foresaw that from the son he was about to bless, there would descend traitors. But at the same time, he saw that their power to harm Torah scholars was limited, and he also saw that even the worst of these traitors had some redeeming qualities and could repent before their deaths. **Because of this, “and he blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the L-rd has blessed.”**

ואיתא שם במדרש, "רֵאָה רִיחַ בְּנִי" מִלְּמַד שֶׁהָרָאָה לוֹ הַקֵּב"ה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּנֹוֹי וְתָרַב וּבְנֹוֹי. "רֵאָה רִיחַ בְּנִי", הָרִי בְּנֹוֹי וְכֹוֹי "כְּרִיחַ שָׂדֵה", הָרִי תָרַב, וְכֹוֹי. וְקִשְׁשָׁה דְמָה עֲנִינֵן רֵאָהּ זֶה בְּשִׁעָה זֶה, וְעוֹד מֵלֵת "רֵאָה" מִיּוֹסְתֵרֵת הִיא.

**It is also brought there in the midrash**, Gen. Rabbah 65:23, “**see, the smell of my son**” teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, showed [Isaac] the Temple: built, destroyed, and built [again]. “**See, the smell of my son,**” this [alludes to the Temple] built, as in the verse, “a pleasing aroma unto Me, you shall observe to offer unto Me in its appointing times” (Num. 28:2), which could only be offered in the Temple. “**Like the smell of the fields,**” this [alludes to the Temple] destroyed, as in the verse, “Zion shall be plowed as a field” (Micah 3:12).

**A difficulty is what is the relevance of this proof** of the midrash **at this time** when Isaac was about to give his blessing? **Also, the word “see”** [*re'eh*] [רֵאָה] in Gen. 27:27 **is superfluous**.

