

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VII: Vayetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

Essay 17. Esau will fall to the descendants of Rachel

גְּמָרָא דְּבִתְרָא פְּרָק ח' אָמַר ר' שְׁמוּאֵל בְּר נַחֲמָנִי מְסוּרַת אַגְדָּה הִיא בְּיַדְנֵי שְׂאִין עֲשׂוֹ נוֹפֵל אֶלָּא בְּיַד בְּנֵיהּ שֶׁל רַחֵל, הֲדָא הוּא דְקַתִּיב "אִם-לֹא יִסְחָבוּם צְעִירֵי הַצֹּאן", וְלָמָּה הוּא קוֹרָא אוֹתָם "צְעִירֵי הַצֹּאן" שֶׁהֵם צְעִירֵי שֶׁל שְׂבָטִים עַכ"ל.

There is a **Gemara** in tractate **Bava Batra**, the **eighth chapter** (page 123b, and **Tanchuma, Vayechi 14**), **“Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani stated: There is a tradition that Esau will be subjugated by the descendants of Rachel, as it is written, ‘Surely the youngest of the flock will drag them away.’¹ And why does [Scripture] call them ‘the youngest of the flock’? Because they are the youngest of the tribes.”²**

יֵשׁ לְתַת טַעַם עַל דְּרָךְ הַפְּשׁוּט לָמָּה דּוֹקָא עֲשׂוֹ נוֹפֵל בְּיַד בְּנֵיהּ שֶׁל רַחֵל. וְהֵינּוּ דְבִשְׁלֵמָא רַחֵל שְׁהִיְתָה "עֲקָרַת הַבַּיִת" כְּדַקְתִּיב "בְּנֵי רַחֵל אֵשֶׁת יַעֲקֹב", שֶׁפָּכַר הָיְתָה עֲתִידָה לְהִיּוֹת בְּחֻלְקוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב, לְכֹן בְּנֵיהּ יְכוּלִים לְהַלְחֵם עִם עֲשׂוֹ וּלְנַצֵּחַ אוֹתוֹ.

We need to give a reason according to the plain meaning as to why Esau will fall specifically to the sons of Rachel, and not to the sons of Leah, Zilpah, or Bilhah. Granted, Rachel was the “childless woman of the household” whom He sets “as a happy mother of children” (Ps. 113:9), as it is written, “The sons of Rachel, the wife of Jacob, were Joseph and Benjamin” (Gen. 46:19), for she was destined to be in Jacob’s domain. None of the other sons were introduced in this way, by referring to their mother as “the wife of Jacob.” We understood that Jacob saw Rachel first, and whether it was “love at first sight” or not, she was the wife for whom

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¹ Jer. 49:20 and 50:45.

² Bava Batra 123b: “Rabbi Chelbo asked Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani: It is written: ‘And it came to pass, when Rachel gave birth to Joseph [that Jacob said to Laban: Send me away, that I may go to my own place, and to my country]’ (Gen. 30:25). What was different when Joseph was born [that Jacob decided only then to return home]? He said to him: Jacob our patriarch saw [prophetically] that the descendants of Esau will be delivered only to the hand of the descendants of Joseph, as it is stated: ‘And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for straw [and they shall kindle in them, and devour them]’ (Obad. 1:18).” The language cited by the Zera Shimshon comes from a Midrash: see Gen. Rabbah (73:7, 75:5, 99:2), Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 130:4, Midrash Tanchuma (Vayechi 14:3, Ki Teitzei 10).

he bargained, clearly his favorite. **Therefore, her sons were able to wage war with Esau and to conquer him.**

אָבֵל לָאָה שְׁהִיְתָה סְבוּרָה לִיפּוּל בְּחֶלְקוֹ שֶׁל עֵשׂוֹ, וּבְשִׁבִיל שְׁהִיְתָה בּוֹכָה וּמִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֵי הַקֵּב"ה פְּדֻכְתִּיב "וְעֵינַי לָאָה רַפּוֹת", הוֹעִילָה תְּפִלָּתָהּ לְהַצִּיל אֶת עֲצָמָהּ.

But Leah was supposed to fall to Esau's share, as is explained by Rashi on Gen. 29:17, based on Gen. Rabbah 70:16, "Everyone said, 'Rebecca has two sons, Laban has two daughters — the elder daughter for the elder son, the younger daughter for the younger son.' " **But because [Leah] would cry and pray before the Holy One, Blessed be He—as it is written, "the eyes of Leah were weak"** (Gen. 29:17), i.e., weak from crying—**her prayer was effective to save herself.**

אִין לְנוּ לֹמֵר שְׁתוּעִיל זְכוּתָהּ שֶׁבְנֵיהָ יִנָּצְחוּ עֵשׂוֹ, שְׁהָרִי אֲמַרִּינוּ בְּבְרָאשִׁית רַבָּה עַל הַפָּסוּק "שָׁכֶם בְּנֵי חַשְׁקָה נִפְשׁוּ" וְכוּ', לֹא בְקִשְׁתָּ לְהַשִּׁיָּאָה לְמָהוּל, הָרִי הִיא גִישָׁאת לְעַרְל. לֹא בְקִשְׁתָּ לְהַשִּׁיָּאָה דְרָךְ הַיָּמָר, הָרִי הִיא גִישָׁאת בְּאִסּוּר עַכ"ל. וְאָף כָּאֵן לֹא יָפָה עֲשִׂתָּה לָאָה לְבִקּוּשׁ רַחֲמִים שְׁלֹא לִיפּוּל בְּחֶלְקוֹ שֶׁל עֵשׂוֹ, שְׁמָא אִם הִיְתָה גִישָׁאת לוֹ הִיְתָה מִחִזְרָתוֹ לְמוֹטָב, וְדָנָה שְׁתַּצִּיל אֶת עֲצָמָהּ. וְעֵינַי עוֹד לְקַמֵּן רִישׁ פְּרִשְׁתַּי וְיִשָּׁב.

This doesn't mean that her saving of herself from Esau will help her merit, that her sons would defeat Esau. For it says in Genesis Rabbah (80:4) on the verse, "My son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage" (Gen. 34:8), that Jacob hid his daughter Dinah in a box so that his brother Esau would not take her as a wife. While he had good intentions, he was punished for withholding kindness from his brother, as it is written, "One who withholds kindness from a friend forsakes the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:14). Thus, Dinah was saved from Esau, but fell into the hands of Shechem. As the midrash states, the punishment was that: **"You didn't seek to marry her to someone who was circumcised, so she will be married to someone uncircumcised. You didn't seek to marry her in a permitted way, [so] she will be married in a forbidden way."**³

Even here, what Leah did was not nice, to ask mercy to not fall to Esau's share. Perhaps if she had married him, she would have turned him around for the better. Thus, she benefited herself, but that didn't necessarily extend to her sons also having power over Esau. Thus, there is a tradition that Esau will fall to the sons of Rachel, i.e., to Joseph and Benjamin. **See further below, at the beginning of parashat Vayeishev, essay 1.**

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³ This appears in Gen. Rabbah (76:9, 80:4); and Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 900:3. It is also presented by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato ("the RaMChal") (1707–46) in Mesilat Yesharim (Amsterdam 1740) 4:24.