

Daniel Langer is a special education science teacher and Hebrew school instructor in Riverdale, New York.

## A TIKKUN: REBEKAH AND EVE

### INTRODUCTION

The Torah is an organic whole. Each section, each word and letter, is interconnected. When we study a particular text in the Torah, we must examine its relationship to the Torah as a whole. A key to finding these relationships lies in listening to the echoes of word and phrase that reverberate from one place to another. The story of Jacob and Esau, and its connection to Eden and Sinai, will serve to illustrate this concept.

The consequences of the events of the Garden of Eden took an historic turn when Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau. Isaac had intended to bless Esau, the very son who had just taken wives who “were a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah” (Gen. 26:35), but Rebekah knew that the progeny of Esau could not bring the world closer to redemption. Only the nation that would issue from Jacob could become a vessel for Isaac’s blessings—both the physical and spiritual heritage of Abraham. Rebekah performed a radical act. She took from the cunning that was the province of the snake of the Garden of Eden, and commanded Jacob to bring savory food to Isaac. In so doing, Rebekah effected a *tikkun* (repair) of the error of her foremother, Eve. Eve had given her husband, Adam, from the fruit of the tree which the Lord God had commanded not to eat, “*and he did eat (’akl)*” (Gen. 3:6). Rebekah ensured that *her* husband, Isaac, would eat from the savory food of Jacob, a source that was in accord with the will of God, “*and he did eat (’akl)*”. One day, Jacob’s progeny would encamp at Sinai and eat from the Tree of Life—the Torah<sup>1</sup>: “*and they beheld God, and they did eat (’akl)*” (Ex. 24:11).

In this article, we shall explore the relationship of the story of Jacob and Esau to the narratives of the Garden of Eden and the revelation at Sinai. Our aim is twofold. First, we will demonstrate the remarkable parallels of word, phrase, and numerical symmetry that connect these accounts. Word parallels and numerical symmetries are methods the Torah employs to draw our attention, as if to say, “Do not forget to look at parallel sections when you try to understand the text before you.”<sup>2</sup> Second, we will suggest a way to understand the connections between these seemingly unrelated

---

This article is dedicated to the memory of my father, Louis Langer.

texts. Eve had given Adam from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, instead of the Tree of Life. Rebekah ensured that her husband would eat from the right “tree,” from the savory food of Jacob, instead of Esau. As a result, a nation that would be worthy to receive the Torah—the children of Israel, and not the progeny of Esau (or any combination thereof)—would come to Sinai and eat from the Tree of Life. The parallels between the accounts of the revelation at Sinai and the Garden of Eden suggest that at Sinai the human being had returned, at least for the moment, to the spiritual state that had once been his in Eden. Rebekah’s *tikkun* had made this possible.

## I

## JACOB AND ESAU, AND THE GARDEN OF EDEN

What basis do we have for connecting Rebekah to Eve, or Isaac’s eating of the savory food to Adam’s eating of the fruit? When we listen carefully to the story of Jacob and Esau and their struggle for their father’s blessing, we can hear the resounding echo of the Garden of Eden. The parallels between the two accounts are quite striking. In the pages that follow, we shall note many of these parallels, as well as explore their implications.

*The Generations of Isaac, and the Generations of Heaven and Earth*

Let us begin our examination by listening to the opening sentence of each section.

*Jacob and Esau*

And these are the generations of Isaac, son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac. (Gen: 25:19)

*The Garden of Eden*

These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created<sup>3</sup>, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven. (Gen. 2:4)

The similar assonance of *ve’eleh toldot ... ben avraham* and *eleh toldot ... behibbare’am* is most striking. The Midrash has already noted that אברהם (Abraham) and בהבראם (when they were created) are anagrams. The world was created for the sake of Abraham. The story of the Garden of Eden is the beginning of the generations of heaven and earth. The history of heaven and earth reaches fulfillment through the generations of Abraham and Isaac. *Parashat Toldot*—the generations of Isaac son of Abraham—deals with the problem of who would inherit the task of bringing the history of heaven and earth to its intended purpose. Would it be Esau,

Jacob, or a combination of both?

In addition, we should note the similar structure of these opening sentences. Both are made of two clauses, the second of which is a repetition of the first, but in reverse order: "... Isaac, son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac", and "... the heaven and the earth when they were created ... the Lord God made earth and heaven."

Also, it is not fortuitous that the phrase "these are the generations" appears for the *first* time in the Torah at the beginning of the account of the Garden of Eden, and for the *seventh* time at the beginning of the story of Jacob and Esau.<sup>4</sup> Seven is a number of completion, and the seventh is connected to the first.

### *Esau and the Snake of the Garden*

According to the *Zohar*, Esau is connected to the Snake of the Garden: "... Esau was drawn after the serpent ..." (137b). "Jacob knew that Esau was destined to ally himself with that tortuous serpent ..." (138a). There are a number of literary parallels that suggest such a relationship.

The word *heel* (*'aqb*) is prominent in the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau. This is the *second* time the Torah employs this word. The *first* time is in relation to the snake and the seed of Eve:

#### *Jacob and Esau*

And after that his brother came forth, and his hand was *grasping* the *heel* (*'aqb*) of Esau; so he called his name *Jacob* (*y'aqb*). (Gen. 25:26)

#### *The Garden of Eden*

And I will put enmity between you and between the woman, and between your seed and between her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise its *heel* (*'aqb*). (Gen. 3:15)

We can better understand the significance of Jacob's grasping the heel of Esau if we look at a third verse. The *first* time we find the root of the word *grasp* (*'ahz*) is in our verse: "... and his hand was *grasping* (*'ahz*) the *heel* of Esau ..." (Gen. 25:26). The *second* time is when God tells Moses to *grasp* the tail of the snake:

The Lord said to Moses: Put forth your hand and *grasp* (*'ahz*) it by its *tail*. (Ex. 4:4)

The heel of a man is analogous to the tail of a snake: both are at the ends of their respective bodies. If we understand Esau to represent the snake, then the Torah may be suggesting that it is the task of Jacob to grasp the snake by its tail (tail = heel) and, like Moses, to turn the snake into a rod of God: "Moses took the rod of God in his hand" (Ex. 4:20).

The Torah describes both Esau and the snake of the Garden in relation to the field:

*Esau*

And Esau was a man who knows<sup>5</sup> trapping, a man of the *field* (*sdh*). (Gen. 25:27)

*The Snake*

And the snake was more cunning than all the beasts of the *field* (*sdh*). (Gen. 3:1)

Before Isaac would give his blessing, he told Esau to go to the field to hunt for venison:

And now, if you please, take your gear, your sword, and your bow, and go to the *field* (*sdh*) and trap for me some game. (Gen. 27:3)

Isaac sent Esau to the *field*, the domain where Esau was an expert trapper. According to Rashi, Esau's skill as a trapper was to "trap and deceive his father with his mouth." Esau, the "man of the field," was like the snake who was "more deceptive than all the beasts of the field." The field was the habitat for both the cunning of the Snake and the guile of Esau.

Isaac had become addicted to the venomous game of Esau: "Now Isaac loved (*'ahb*) Esau because trapped game was in his mouth" (Gen. 25:28). Isaac would eat from this catch, and when his spiritual vision had become sufficiently diminished, he sent Esau to the *field*—to the domain of the Snake. Before Isaac's soul could come to bless Esau, Isaac had to eat, once again, from the trapped game he had come to love: "... go out to the field, and trap for me game; and make me savory food such as I love (*'ahb*), and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die" (Gen. 27: 3-4). At no other time did a patriarch ask to eat before he would give a blessing.

That the venom of the Snake had affected Isaac's decision to bless Esau is indicated by the similar language used in Isaac's charge to Esau, and in the Snake's seduction of Eve:

*Isaac*

And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old and his eyes (*'ayn*) were dimmed from seeing, that he called Esau ... and he said: Behold, now, I am old, I know (*yd'a*) not (*l'o*) the day (*yom*) of my death (*mot*). And now ... make me savory food ... that I may eat (*'akl*), that my soul may bless you before I die (*mot*). (Gen. 27:1-4)

*The Snake*

And the snake said to the woman: You shall surely not (*l'o*) die (*mot*)! For God knows (*yd'a*) that in the day (*yom*) that you eat (*'akl*) thereof that your eyes (*'ayn*) shall be opened, and you shall be like God knowing (*yd'a*) and good and evil. (Gen. 3:4-5)

Both Isaac and the Snake used the words *know*, *not*, *day*, *eat*, and *die*.

The transposed words of the Snake had penetrated the language of Isaac.

The Snake had promised Eve that their eyes would be *opened*, but when they opened their eyes they knew only that they were naked, and they hid from the presence of God (Gen. 3:7-8). Adam and Eve's spiritual vision had, in fact, been dimmed by the cunning of the Snake.<sup>6</sup> Like Adam and Eve, Isaac's spiritual vision had been diminished by the venom of a snake—by the deceptive trappings of Esau—as it is written: "... and his eyes were *dimmed* from seeing, and he called *Esau* ..." (Gen 27:1).

### *The Association of Eating and Death in Both Stories*

*Eating* is associated with *death* three times in relation to Isaac's eating of the savory food, and three times in relation to Adam and Eve's eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

#### *Jacob and Esau*

And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat (*'akl*), that my soul may bless you before I *die* (*mot*). (Gen. 27:4)

Bring me some game, and make me savory food, that I may eat (*'akl*), and I will bless you before the Lord before my *death* (*mot*). (Gen. 27:7)

... and I will make of them savory food for your father, such as he loves; and you shall bring it to your father, that he may eat (*'akl*), so that he may bless you before his *death* (*mot*). (Gen. 27:9-10)

#### *The Garden of Eden*

But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat (*'akl*) of it, for in the day that you eat (*'akl*) thereof you shall surely *die* (*mot*). (Gen. 2:17)

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the center of the garden, God has said: You shall not eat (*'akl*) of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you *die* (*mot*). (Gen. 3:3)

You shall surely not *die* (*mot*), for God knows that the day you eat (*'akl*) thereof your eyes shall be opened. ... (Gen. 3:4-5)

Isaac and Rebekah's threefold association of *eating* with *dying* corresponds to Adam and Eve's threefold association of *eating* with *dying*. Both Adam and Isaac expected imminent death after eating—Adam, if he would eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and Isaac, soon after he would eat from the savory food of Esau. Adam did not die after he had eaten the fruit, but he lived another nine hundred thirty years; and Isaac did not die after he had requested savory food from Esau, but he lived another fifty-seven years. Although Adam did not die physically on the same day that he ate from the fruit, he did suffer a spiritual diminution. If Isaac, whose spiritual vision was already weakened, had eaten, once again, from

the catch of Esau, and had transferred his mission, in whole or in part, to a son who was spiritually connected to the Snake of the Garden, then Isaac's spiritual blindness would have resulted in spiritual death, God forbid.

Rebekah had to intervene. She had to ensure that this time the man would eat from a tree of life, instead of a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from a Jacob, "a wholesome man, dwelling in tents," instead of an Esau, "a man who knows trapping, a man of the field" (Gen. 25:27).

### *Rebekah and Eve*

There are a number of parallels that connect Rebekah to Eve. The motif of the Garden of Eden continued to play in the life of Rebekah.

Both Eve and Rebekah are called "mother" ('am):

#### *Rebekah*

... Rebekah, mother of ('am) Jacob and Esau. (Gen. 28:5)

#### *Eve*

... Eve ... mother of ('am) all living. (Gen. 3:20)

These are the first two times that this precise form of the word mother, 'am, appears in the Torah. Eve, the "mother of all living," is the mother of the macrocosm. Rebekah, as "mother of [both] Jacob and Esau" is mother of the macrocosm, as well. Eve is the mother who conceived her first children in the Garden of Eden, but bore them in exile. Rebekah is the mother whose chosen progeny, the children of Israel, would show the children of Adam the way back to the Garden, and to the Tree of Life that stands in its midst.

In order to get Isaac to eat from the savory food of Jacob, Rebekah borrowed from the cunning of the Snake of the Garden, and she disguised Jacob as Esau.

#### *Rebekah and Jacob*

Your brother came with *cunning* (mrmh)<sup>7</sup>, and he has taken your blessing. (Gen. 27:35)

#### *The Snake*

Now the snake was more *cunning* ('arum) than all the beasts of the field. (Gen. 3:1)

The *Zohar* has already noted this connection between the cunning of Jacob and Rebekah and the cunning of the snake: "... a woman (pattern of Eve) and a man (pattern of Adam) will circumvent and out-manuever the evil serpent and him who rides on him" (145b).

Rebekah dressed Jacob in garments of skin. The *first* time in the Torah that we find the roots of the words *skin* and *clothed* is when God *clothed* Adam and Eve in garments of *skin*. The *second* time is when Rebekah *clothed* Jacob in the *skins* of the goat:

*Rebekah and Jacob*

And Rebekah took the treasured garments of Esau . . . which were with her in the house, and she *clothed* (*lbsh*) Jacob. . . . And with the *skins* ('or) of the kids of the goats she *clothed* (*lbsh*) his arms and the smooth of his neck. (Gen. 27:15-16)

*Adam and Eve*

And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of *skin* ('or), and He *clothed* them (*lbsh*). (Gen. 3:21)

According to the Midrash, Esau's treasured garments, which were kept with Rebekah, were the same garments that God had made for Adam.<sup>8</sup> This Midrash is supported by the fact that the first two times that we find the words *skin* and *clothed* in the Torah are in the stories of Adam and Eve, and Rebekah and her sons, respectively. Rebekah dressed Jacob in these vestments from Eden, as if to say, "In the very same skins that Adam wore, when he was expelled from the Garden, shall you wear, when you bring your father the savory food that I have prepared. The garments that marked man's expulsion from the Garden, shall mark the beginning of his return."

The exact same verb forms are used to describe both Eve and Rebekah *giving*, and Adam and Isaac *eating*:

*Rebekah and Isaac*

And she gave (*vttn*) the savory food and the bread which she had made into the hand of Jacob. . . . And he brought it near to him [Isaac, Rebekah's husband], and he *did eat* (*vy'akl*). . . . (Gen. 27:17-25)

*Eve and Adam*

. . . and she gave (*vttn*) also to her husband with her, and he *did eat* (*vy'akl*)<sup>9</sup>. (Gen. 3:6)

Eve and Rebekah gave; and Adam and Isaac *did eat*.

However, the ramifications of each eating were not the same. After Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden fruit, they suffered a spiritual decline. "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:8). The spiritual vision that Adam and Eve had once enjoyed was replaced by the physical perception of their own nakedness, and they "hid from the presence of the Lord God." The outcome was very different when Isaac ate the savory food that Rebekah had prepared. Instead of the spiritual fall that Adam and Eve had suffered, Isaac experienced a spiritual rejuvenation. His prophetic vision was restored, and he could smell the Garden of Eden: "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed" (Gen. 27:27). Rashi comments, "... there is no smell worse than the smell of washed goat-skins! However, this teaches that there entered with him the smell of the Garden of Eden."<sup>10</sup> Isaac's spiritual vision had returned, and he could see the true fragrance of the son who stood before him.

### *A Tikkun for the Curse of the Ground*

The word “give” appears three<sup>11</sup> times in both stories. “Give” appears three times in Chapter 3, beginning with Eve giving Adam the fruit: “... and she gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). Eve’s giving resulted in the cursing of the ground, making difficult the acquisition of grain with which to eat bread: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat...” (Gen. 3:12). “Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife ... cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life ... and you shall eat the grain of the field. In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread...” (Gen. 3:17-19). Give also appears *three* times in Chapter 27, beginning with Rebekah giving Jacob savory food to bring to this father: “And she gave the savory food and the bread which she had made into the hand of Jacob, her son” (Gen. 27:17). Rebekah’s giving resulted in a blessing of the land, facilitating the acquisition of grain with which to eat bread: “... and he blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. And may God give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fat of the earth, and abundant grain and wine. Let peoples serve you [work the land] ...” (Gen. 27:27-29). “Behold, a lord I have made him over you, and all his brethren I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him...” (Gen. 27:37).

Eve had given Adam forbidden fruit, and a curse was brought into the world. Rebekah gave Jacob savory food and bread, so that blessing would be brought into the world. In so doing, Rebekah began to repair the damage inflicted by the sin of her foremother, Eve. As the *Zohar* states:

Jacob thus equipped himself with wisdom and cunning, so that the blessings reverted to himself, who was in the image of Adam, and were snatched from the serpent of “the lying lips” [Esau], who acted and spoke deceitfully in order to lead astray the world and bring curses on it. Hence Jacob came with craft and misled his father with the object of bringing blessing upon the world and recovering from the serpent what hitherto he had withheld from the world. It was measure for measure. ... From the very days of Adam, Jacob was destined to snatch from the serpent all those blessings, leaving him immersed in curses. ... Jacob turned each curse into a blessing, and he took what was his own. (143a-143b)

### *The Voice of Rebekah and the Voice that Walks in the Garden*

*Hear* and *voice* appear together *three* times in that story of the Garden of Eden,<sup>12</sup> and *three* times in the narrative of Rebekah and Jacob.<sup>13</sup> Both texts are connected to the concept of *mitzva* (commandment):



*Rebekah and Jacob*

And now, my son, *hearken (shm'a)* to my voice (*kol*), to that which I command you. Go to the flock and fetch two good kids. . . . (Gen. 27:8-9)

Upon me be your curse, my son; only *hearken (shm'a)* to my voice (*kol*), and go fetch me [them]. (Gen. 27:13)

And now, my son, *hearken (shm'a)* to my voice (*kol*)<sup>14</sup>; arise and flee to Laban, my brother. . . . (Gen. 27:43)

*The Garden of Eden*

And they *heard (shm'a)* the voice (*kol*) of the Lord God walking in the garden. . . . (Gen. 3:8)

. . . I *heard (shm'a)* Your voice (*kol*) in the garden, and I was afraid. . . . (Gen. 3:10)

Because you have *hearkened (shm'a)* to the voice (*kol*) of your wife and have eaten from the tree which I commanded you, saying: You shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground. . . . (Gen. 3:17)

Rebekah's voice is connected to the Voice that walks in the Garden, and her command, "hearken to my voice", is connected to the command of God. When Jacob hearkened to his mother's command to bring Isaac savory food, he effected a *tikkun* of the sin of Adam and Eve.

*The Exile of Adam, and the Exile of Jacob*

Jacob's exile from the land of Canaan closely parallels Adam's exile from Eden. The same verb (*shlh*) is used to record both exiles:

*Jacob's Exile from Canaan*

And Isaac sent forth (*shlh*) Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram. . . . (Gen. 28:5)

Both exiles are in the east:

*Jacob's Exile from Canaan*

Then Jacob lifted his feet, and he went to the land of the children of the east (*qdm*)<sup>15</sup>. (Gen. 29:1)

*Adam's Exile from Eden*

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth (*shlh*) from the Garden of Eden. . . . (Gen. 3:23)

*Adam's Exile from Eden*

So He drove out the man, and He placed at the east (*qdm*) of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim. . . . (Gen. 3:24)

In both texts, we find expressions of *keeping the way, eating bread, return, and returning to the ground*:

*Jacob's Exile from Canaan*

And, behold, I am with you, and I will keep you (*shmr*) wherever you walk, and I will return you to this ground (*shuv el ha-adamah*), until I have done that which I have spoken to you of. (Gen. 28:15)

If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way (*shmr brdrkh*) in which I am walking, and will give me bread to eat (*lhm 'akl*), and raiment to be clothed in, so that I return (*shuv*) in peace to my father's house [an allusion to the world to come]<sup>16</sup>, then shall the Lord be my God. And this stone . . . shall be a house of God. . . . (Gen. 28:20-21)

*Adam's Exile from Eden*

So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned each way to keep the way (*shmr et-drk*) to the tree of life. (Gen. 3:24)

By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread (*'akl lhm*), until you return to the ground (*shuv el ha'adamah*) from which you were taken; for dust you are, [in your life], and to dust [as you are in your life] shall you return (*shuv*) [an allusion to the resurrection of the dead (Malbim)<sup>17</sup>]. (Gen. 3:19)

Jacob's prayer, on his way into exile, was an echo from the Garden of Eden. Both narratives share many of the same key words: keep, way, walking, give, bread, eat, clothe, and return. Jacob asked that God clothe him in protective garments, as God had done for Adam and Eve. He asked for bread to eat, even if he had to labor in the heat by day and the frost by night (Gen. 31:39). This was in accord with God's declaration to Adam: "By the sweat of your face shall you eat bread." Jacob asked God to keep him in the way in which he was walking, to remain in the path of He Who walks in the Garden; and he petitioned God to return him in peace to his Father's house, to the place which "shall be a house of God." Before Jacob called, God had already answered:<sup>18</sup> "And, behold, I am with you, and I will keep you wherever you walk, and I will return you to this ground, until I have done that which I have spoken to you of" (Gen. 28:15). God had promised the same to Adam: "... until you return to the ground from which you were taken" (Gen. 3:24). Adam was taken away from the ground of the Garden of Eden, and exiled from the Tree of Life. Jacob asked God to keep him in this way, and God promised Jacob that he would return to this ground, to the place of the Tree of Life, whose way through the eastern gate of Eden is kept by the Cherubim. One day, the progeny of Jacob, the children of Israel, would eat from the Tree of Life—the Torah—which is kept by the Cherubim that rest upon the Ark Cover. These Cherubim, along with the Torah they guard, are found within the midst of the Tabernacle, the house of God. Like the Garden of Eden, the Tabernacle's entrance is in the East (Ex. 27:13-16). Jacob's prayer—to keep him in this way, to return to his Father's house, and to make this place

a house of God—was a yearning to return to the spiritual Garden of Eden and to the Tree of Life.

## II

### THE GARDEN OF EDEN, REBEKAH, AND SINAI

#### *Hearken to My Voice*

A key to understanding the significance of Rebekah's intervention to ensure Isaac's blessing for Jacob is the word *voice (kol)*. When we listen carefully to Rebekah's thrice stated command, *hearken to my voice*, we can hear the whisper of the Garden of Eden and the echo of Mount Sinai.

*Voice (kol)* appears *three* times in the narrative of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8,10,17), *seven* times in *Parashat Toldot*, the section that deals with Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Esau (Gen. 26:5 27:8, 13, 22, 22, 38, 43), *seven* times in the account of the revelation at Sinai in the book of Exodus, (Ex. 19: 5, 16, 16, 19, 19; 20:15, 15), and *seven* times in the same account in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 5:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 25). *Three* is a number of emphasis, and *seven* is a number of completion and perfection. When the Torah emphasizes the same word in more than one section by *threefold*, and, especially, *sevenfold* repetitions, the Torah is calling on us to understand the word's meaning in one place by the light of its context in another.

The context of the *first* use of a word in the Torah gives us the word's essential meaning.<sup>2</sup> Let us compare how the word *voice (kol)* is used for the *first* time in each of the sections mentioned above:

The Garden of Eden: "And they heard the *voice (kol)* of the Lord God walking in the garden. . . ." [This verse marks the *first* time that *voice* and *hear* are used in the Torah.] (Gen. 3:8)

*Toldot*: "... and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your seed; because<sup>19</sup> Abraham hearkened to My *voice (kol)*, and kept My charge, My commandments, and My laws." (Gen. 26:4-5)

Revelation at Sinai (Exodus): "And now, if you will indeed hearken to My *voice (kol)*, and you will keep My covenant, then you shall be a precious treasure to Me from among all the peoples. . . ." (Ex. 19:5)

Revelation at Sinai (Deuteronomy): "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, a great *voice (kol)*, and He added no more. And He wrote them upon the two tablets of stone, and gave them to me." (Deut. 5:19)

In each of these verses, the *first* of a *threefold* or *sevenfold* unit of the word voice, the voice is the Voice of God.

As Adam and Eve had hidden from the voice of the Lord after they had eaten from the forbidden fruit, “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden . . . and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God . . .” (Gen. 3:8), so did the Lord’s voice become hidden from Isaac when he decided to bless Esau. God’s name was not mentioned when Isaac told Esau, “And make me savory food . . . that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die” (Gen. 27:4). Rebekah, however, never lost her sense of God’s presence. When she overheard Isaac speaking to Esau, she knew that this was not an accident. She knew that God had wanted her to hear this conversation for some purpose. Therefore, she took action, adding the Lord’s name when she told Jacob: “I heard your father speaking<sup>20</sup> to your brother Esau, saying: Bring me venison, and make me savory food, that I may eat and bless you *before the Lord* before my death. And now, my son, *hearken to my voice* according to that which I command you. Go now to the flock . . .”<sup>21</sup> (Gen. 27:6-9). Rebekah’s awareness of the Divine presence in the world was rooted in her being.

Three times did Rebekah tell Jacob, *hearken to my voice* (Gen. 27:8, 13, 43); three times did the Torah record *hear* and *voice* together in the account of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8, 10, 17); and three times do we find *hear* and *voice* together in *Parashat Yitro*, the *parasha* of the revelation at Sinai (Ex. 18:19, 24; 19:5)<sup>22</sup>. When Rebekah said to Jacob *hearken to my voice*, at once her soul adhered to the Voice that walks in the garden (Gen. 3:8), as well as to the Voice that emanates from Sinai (Ex. 19:5). Rebekah ensured that Jacob, her son who was so connected to the aspect of voice, as in “the voice is the voice of Jacob” (Gen. 27:22), would be the sole recipient of the heritage of Abraham and Isaac. As Jacob heeded the voice of his mother, so, too, would Jacob’s progeny hearken to a voice—to the Voice of the Lord at Sinai.<sup>23</sup>

### *Rebekah, Sinai, and the Return to the Tree of Life*

The revelation at Sinai returned the children of Israel to the spiritual state that had once existed in the Garden of Eden. Many of the words that describe this experience—voice, hear, saw, sent forth His hand, eat, dwelt, give, eyes, six days, seven days, and in the midst of (Ex. 24:3-18)<sup>24</sup>—resonate with the echo of Eden.

The events in the Garden of Eden took place on the *sixth* day of Creation, and Adam and Eve were sent out before the onset of the *seventh* day; the cloud covered mount Sinai *six* days, and the Lord called out to Moses to enter on the *seventh* day (Ex. 24:16). God had “caused to dwell (*vyshkn*) at the east of the Garden of Eden the Cherubim . . . to guard the way

to the Tree of Life" (Gen. 3:24); but "the glory of the Lord dwelt (*vyshkn*) upon mount Sinai . . . and He called to Moses" [to receive the Torah, which is called a tree of life] (Ex. 24:16). "The Tree of Life [was] *in the midst of the Garden (btkh hgn)*" (Gen. 2:9); and Moses entered "*into the midst of the cloud (btkh h'ann)*" (Ex. 24:18). At the gates of Eden, God had placed the "*flaming sword that turned each way*" (Gen. 3:24); but, at Sinai, it was the glory of the Lord that appeared "*as a devouring fire*" (Ex. 24:17). In the Garden, Eve saw that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a "*delight to the eyes ('ayn)*" (Gen. 3:6); but, at Sinai, it was the glory of the Lord that was seen "*by the eyes ('ayn) of the children of Israel*" (Ex. 24:17). In the Garden, Adam had *hearkened (shm'a)* to the voice of his wife (Gen. 3:17); but at Sinai, the children of Israel pledged to *hearken (shm'a)* to the word of God (Ex. 24:7). In Eden, the Lord had said, "*lest he send forth his hand (shlh ydo)*, and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat (*'akl*), and live forever" (Gen. 3:22); but, at Sinai, "*He sent forth not His hand (shlh ydo)*"<sup>25</sup> and allowed the nobles of Israel to "*behold God, and they did eat ('akl)*" (Ex. 24:11). Adam and Eve had eaten from forbidden fruit, as it is written, "*Have you eaten ('akl) from the Tree which I commanded you not to eat?*" (Gen. 3:11); but the children of Israel ate from the peace-offerings of the covenant at Sinai,<sup>26</sup> as it is written, "*and they sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen to the Lord . . . . And Moses took the blood, and he sprinkled it upon the people, and he said: Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you . . . and they beheld God, and they did eat ('akl) and drink*" (Ex. 24:5-11). The descendants of Jacob had been given a taste of the Tree of Life, as the Zohar states:

When Israel stood before Mount Sinai, the impurity of the serpent was removed from them . . . and in consequence they were able to attach themselves to the Tree of Life. . . .<sup>27</sup> (1:52b)

The descendants of Jacob "*saw the God of Israel*" (Ex. 24:10). They did not hide from the face of God, like Adam and Eve, nor were they spiritually sightless like Isaac (when he decided to bless Esau). They did not eat from that which was forbidden, but from that which was permitted. They were not *given* from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but were *given* "*tables of stone and the Torah*" (Ex. 24:12). They were not driven from the Garden of Eden, but one man of Israel, Moses, was beckoned to enter the Garden—"Come up to me into the mount"—and take the Torah, the Tree of Life, to the children of Israel, that he might "*teach them*" (Ex. 24:12). And Moses entered "*into the midst of the cloud*" (Ex. 24:18) to receive the source of life that is "*in the midst of the Garden*" (Gen. 2:9).

None of this could have happened had Rebekah not acted, had Jacob not hearkened to his mother's inner voice, her *kol*. Rebekah said, "*hearken to my voice,*" to my inner being that is connected to the Voice that walks

in the Garden, and to the Voice that reveals itself at Sinai.<sup>28</sup> Rebekah employed the same style of language to command Jacob to *hearken* to her voice as Moses used to command the children of Israel to *hearken* to the Voice of the Lord. Rebekah said:

And now, my son, *hearken* (*shm'a*) to my voice (*kol*) to that *which* (*'ashr*) I (*'ani*) *command* (*tsvh*) you. (Gen. 27:8)

Moses said:

... if you will indeed *hearken* (*shm'a*) to the voice (*kol*) of the Lord your God, to keep and to do all His commandments *which* (*'ashr*) I (*'ani*) *command* (*tsvh*) you this day. ... (Deut. 28:1)

Because of Rebekah's courage to act, Isaac *did eat* (*'akl*) and *did drink* (*shth*)<sup>29</sup> from Jacob, the son whose essence was of the aspect of voice. One day, Jacob's progeny, the children of Israel, would eat and would *drink* from the Tree of Life, the Torah, for it is written that at Sinai "they beheld God, and they did eat (*'akl*), and they did *drink* (*shth*)," and in the very next verse it is written, "Come up to me into the mount ... and I will give you the tables of stone, and the Torah, and the commandments which I have written" (Ex. 24:11-12).

The revelation at Sinai is connected to the Garden of Eden, and the voice of Rebekah is connected to both.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have noted numerous parallels between the stories of Jacob and Esau, the Garden of Eden, and the revelation at Sinai. The connections between these texts are too numerous and powerful to be fortuitous. The Torah wants us to understand the story of Rebekah and her sons in relation to Eden and Sinai. We have suggested one way to understand this relationship.

Rebekah's daring intervention was a critical turning point in the movement of the history of heaven and earth, that began in the Garden of Eden, toward the event that would be essential to the fulfillment of that history, the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Eve had given Adam fruit from the wrong tree, from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, instead of the Tree of Life. Isaac intended to eat savory food from the wrong son, from Esau, instead of Jacob. This time the woman would give the man food from the right "tree." Rebekah ensured that *her* husband, Isaac, would eat savory food from their righteous son, and would bless Jacob, instead of Esau. In so doing, Rebekah performed a *tikkun* of the sin of her foremother, Eve.<sup>30</sup> If not for Rebekah, Esau would have shared with Jacob the heritage of Abraham and Isaac,<sup>31</sup> and the nation that would bring Torah into the world would never have existed, God forbid. Only the progeny of Jacob, the nation of Israel, could receive the Torah and "eat and drink" (Ex. 24:11)

from this Tree of Life. Through the keeping of Torah, the children of Israel would ensure that one day the children of Adam would be redeemed from their exile and would “return to the ground from which they were taken” (Gen. 3:19)—to the spiritual soil of the Garden of Eden. Rebekah’s radical act had cosmic consequences. It prepared the way for the ultimate redemption of man and the fulfillment of Creation.

## NOTES

1. “She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her” (Prov. 3:18).
2. See author’s “Numerical Symmetry: A Method for Learning the Biblical Text, Part I,” *Nishma*, August, 1987.
3. This marks the seventh time the root of the word create (*brya*) is used in the Torah. The first is “In the beginning God created...” (Gen. 1:1). The first and seventh form a unit, connecting Genesis Chapter 1 to Chapter 2.
4. The tenth time (corresponding to the ten statements of Creation) that the expression *these are the generations* occurs in the Torah is in Gen. 37:2: “*These are the generations of Jacob*,” as if to say, “The heavens and the earth that were created for the sake of Abraham, reach completion through the generations of Jacob.”
5. The precise grammatical form of the Hebrew word *knows* (יָדַע), with the same spelling and vowelization, appears here for the second time in the Torah. The first time is in the cunning mouth of the Snake: “For God *knows* (יָדַע) that in the day you eat thereof your eyes shall be opened; you shall be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5).
6. See Rashi to Gen. 3:7: “Even the blind knows when he is naked! What then is [the significance of] and they knew that they were naked? One mitzvah was put in their hands, and they stripped themselves of it.”
7. Although מרמה and ערמה have different roots, their similar assonance and related meaning are worth noting. The term for permissible cunning is מרמה; the term for malicious cunning is ערמה (*Midrash HaBiur*). See *ArtScroll Tenach Series, Bereishis/Genesis*, Vol. 3, p. 1150. Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson (the Lubavitcher Rebbe) notes: “The aspects mentioned in the blessings came about through *mirma* [cunning], for these aspects constitute the sparks of holiness which have fallen to the lowly levels because of ‘the serpent [which] was subtle [cunning]’ etc. The restoration of these sparks to the realm of holiness, therefore, had to be likewise by means of *mirma*.” M. Schneerson, *Likkutei Sifot, Vol. I: Bereshit* [English edition], (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication Society, 1980), p. 104.
8. Rashi comments on Gen. 27:15: “... which he coveted from Nimrod.” According to the *Midrash*, Esau’s garments were the garments that God had originally made for Adam. The garments were passed down through the generations to Nimrod, and Esau took the garments and killed Nimrod in a duel. See *ArtScroll Tenach Series, Bereishis/Genesis*, Vol. 1, pp. 136, 318, Vol. 3, p. 1063; *Sefer HaYashar* 7:24; *Tora Shelema* 3:184.
9. This marks the seventh time the root of the word eat (*’akl*) appears in Chapter 3, and the fourteenth (twice seventh) in the Torah: Gen. 1:29, 30; 2:9, 16, 17, 17; 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 6, 6.
10. How was Isaac able to recognize the smell of Eden? We should consider the the *Midrash* which says that after the binding of Isaac, God took Isaac into the Garden of Eden, where he stayed for three years (*Bereshit Rabba* 56:11).
11. Threefold repetition is for emphasis. See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1944 [first English edition 1961]), p. 193.
12. These verses (Gen. 3:8, 10, 17) mark the first three appearances for both *hear* and *voice* in the Torah.
13. In addition to the three verses in Genesis 27, *hear* and *voice* appear together one other time in *Parashat Toldot*: “because Abraham *hearkened to my voice* and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Gen. 26:5). This first appearance of *hear* and *voice* in the *parasha* fixes the essential spirituality of the expression *hearken to my voice*. The word *voice* (*kol*) appears seven times in the *parasha* altogether, forming a complete unit: Gen. 26:5

- 27:8, 13, 22, 22, 38, 43. (The root of the word *hear* (*shm'a*) appears seven times in the parts of Parashat *Toldot* that deal with Jacob and Esau: Gen. 27:5, 6, 8, 13, 34, 43, 28:7.)
14. This marks the seventh appearance in Parashat *Toldot* for the root of the word *hear* and the seventh for the root of the word *voice*. *Hear* and *voice* occur together in both their first (26:5) and seventh (27:43) appearances in the *parasha*.
  15. This marks the fourteenth (twice seventh) time the root of the word *east* occurs in the Torah: Gen. 2:8, 14; 3:24; 4:16; 10:30; 11:2; 12:8, 8; 13:11, 14; 25:6, 6; 28:14; 29:1.
  16. As in Psalm 23:6 "... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."
  17. See Malbim to Gen. 3:19. Also, see Zvi Faier's note (#471) to his English translation, *Malbim, Commentary on the Torah, Book One, Beginning and Upheaval* (Jerusalem: Hillel Press, 1978), pp. 280-281.
  18. *Midrash Ner Hasekhalim—Torah Shelema* (see *Bereshit Rabba* (69:61).
  19. Note that *because*, *heel*, and *Jacob* have the same root, 'aqb.
  20. "I heard your father speaking (*mdbr*)" (Gen. 27:6). The word *speaking*, in the form *mdbr*, appears only four times in the Torah: Gen. 27:6; 29:9; Deut. 4:33; 5:23. Our verse, and the two verses in Deuteronomy, are the only verses in the Torah with both a word from the stem *hear* (*shm'a*) and this exact form of the word *speaking* (*mdbr*). Both verses in Deuteronomy describe the revelation through the aspect of hearing the voice of God speak: "Did ever a people *hear* (*shm'a*) the voice of God *speaking* (*mdbr*) from the midst of the fire, as you have *heard* (*shm'a*), and live?" (Deut. 4:33); and the related verse, "For who of all flesh has *heard* (*shm'a*) the voice of the living God *speaking* (*mdbr*) from the midst of the fire, as we, and lived?" (Deut. 5:23). (We should also note that the paragraph wherein this last verse appears (Deuteronomy 5:19-6:3) contains many words that appear in the account of the Garden of Eden.) The juxtaposition of the words *speaking* (*mdbr*) and *hear* (*shm'a*) in both the story of Rebekah and the account of the revelation at Sinai may not be fortuitous. The Torah may be hinting that God wanted Rebekah to overhear Isaac speaking with Esau so that Rebekah could intervene in some way. Only the progeny of Jacob would merit to stand at Sinai and "hear the voice of God *speaking* from the midst of the fire."
  21. Rebekah's command to hearken to her voice never called for deception, only to go to the flock and bring Isaac savory food. The voice of Rebekah never commanded Jacob to wear a disguise. It was Jacob's own anxiety that first suggested the need for deception: "Perhaps my father will feel me..." (Gen. 27:12). It was only after Jacob had already hearkened to his mother's voice and had brought the goats that Rebekah dressed Jacob as Esau (Gen. 27:14-16). The spiritual voice of Rebekah stated the desired end—that Jacob should bring savory food to his father, and that Isaac should bless Jacob, instead of Esau, but this Divine voice within Rebekah never demanded that deception be used to reach this end.
  22. The first two relate to the oral Torah: "Now *hearken to my voice* ... you be for the people before God, that you may bring the matters to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and you shall make known to them the way in which they must walk ... and you shall place over them rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds [etc.] ... and Moses *hearkened to the voice* of his father-in-law, and did all that he had said" (Ex. 18:19-24). The third coupling of *hear* and *voice* in Parashat *Yitro* occurs at the making of the covenant between God and His people at Sinai: "And now, if you will indeed *hearken to my voice*, and you will keep my covenant, then you shall be a precious treasure to Me from among all the peoples ..." (Ex. 19:3-5). (In the account of the revelation at Sinai in Deuteronomy, the words *hear* and *voice* appear together ten times: Deut. 4:12, 30, 33, 36; 5:20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 25.)
  23. That God reveals Himself through the aspect of voice is self-evident in the account of the revelation at Sinai: "... a voice of words did you hear, but a form you did not see, only a *voice*" (Deut. 4:12). "Behold ... we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire ..." (Deut. 5:21).
  24. These key words from the account of the revelation at Sinai are essential to the narration of days Six and Seven and the Garden of Eden: *voice* (Gen. 3:8, 10, 17), *hear* (3:8, 10, 17), *saw* (1:25, 31; 3:6); *send forth his hand* (3:22), *eat* (1:29, 30; 2:9, 16, 16, 17, 17; 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 6, 6, 11, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 17, 17, 18, 19, 22), *dwell* (3:24), *give* (1:29; 3:6, 12, 12), *sixth day* (1:31), *seventh day* (2:1, 2, 3), *eyes* (3:6), and *in the midst of* (2:9; 3:3, 8).
  25. These mark the first and seventh times, respectively, that the expression "send/sent forth his hand (*shlh ydo*)" appears in the Torah, and the seventh reflects the first: Gen. 3:22; 8:9; 22:10;



- Ex. 4:4; 22:7, 10; 24:11. (Excluded in this count is “send forth your hand” [Ex. 4:4].)
26. See U. Cassuto to Exodus 24:5-11, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1951 [first English edition 1967]), pp. 311-315.
  27. *The Zohar*, translated by Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, (London: The Soncino Press, 1934), p. 165.
  28. What right have we to associate Rebekah’s voice with the voice of God? Could Rebekah’s voice be connected more to the voice of Eve than to the Voice of God? Let us compare texts:  
 And to Adam He said: Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying: You shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil shall you eat of it. . . . (Gen. 3:17)  
 And Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying: . . . And now, my son, hearken to my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock, and take to me two good kids of the goats; and I will make of them savory food for your father, such as he loves. And he will eat, so that he may bless you before his death. (Gen. 27:6-10)  
 The two texts have many contrasting parallels. Eve’s beckoning led to a curse, but Rebekah’s counsel led to a blessing. Adam heeded Eve’s call to disobey a command, while Rebekah urged Jacob to obey a command. Adam and Eve “hid from the presence of the Lord” (Gen. 3:8). In contrast, Isaac’s soul became connected to the Source of blessing (see Malbim to Gen. 27:10 and 27:21). Adam and Eve ate fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but Isaac ate savory food made from “two good kids of the goats” (Gen. 27:9), from the good within the good. This was no ordinary food that Isaac ate, but tasty food (*t’am*), like the manna from heaven whose “taste (*t’am*) was a the taste (*t’am*) of fresh oil” (Num. 11:8). (The root *t’am* appears only in Numbers 11:8, in Exodus 16:31 in relation to the manna, and in Genesis 27:4, 7, 9, 14, 17, 31). The voice of Eve had led man out of the Garden, but the inner voice of Rebekah would return man onto the path that leads to the Tree of Life.
  29. Esau, too, “did eat (*akl*), and did drink (*shth*)”, but “he rose up and went his way, and so Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). Unlike the descendants of Jacob who ate and drank while accepting the Torah (Ex. 24:11), Esau ate and drank while shunning this spiritual heritage of Abraham. At one point, the spiritual voice within Esau cried out: “Have you but one blessing my father? Bless me, even me also my father. And Esau lifted up his voice (*kol*), and wept” (Gen. 27:38). Immediately, Divine blessing flowed down upon Esau in the form of Isaac’s blessing (Gen. 27:5-7). However, Esau’s flirtation which the spiritual was short-lived. The spiritual voice within Esau was muted by his suffocating hatred for Jacob: “But Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him. And Esau said in his heart [instead of raising his voice to God he addressed the evil within his heart]: Let the days of mourning for my father draw near; then I will slay Jacob my brother” (Gen. 27:41).
  30. Rabbi Schneerson notes: “. . . Jacob is compared to Adam [*Bava Batra* 58a], and he corrected the latter’s sin, as explained in the works of the Kabbala [see *Iggeret Hakodesh*, section VII, and notes 22-23 in the English translation]. Adam had been misled by the *mirma* (cunning) of the serpent. Hence, in order to correct this, and to prevent the blessing from being passed to Esau, Jacob had to procure them by means of *mirma*—“Your brother came with *mirma*; he has taken your blessing” [Gen. 27:35].” M. Schneerson, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-105.
  31. See Malbim to Gen. 27:1 and 27:4, where he notes that Rebekah “was fully aware of how Yizhaq wanted to create a bond between Esav and Ya’aqov . . . . Ya’aqov would pursue Torah, while Esav would provide him with sustenance. However, Rivqa knew all too well Esau’s wickedness. . . . Not only would he not protect him as the shell protects the moth—but like decay, he would cause everything to perish. The wealth that his father would bestow upon him through his blessing he would keep to himself, and use it to harm Ya’akov.” Malbim, *Commentary on the Torah, Book Two: The Patriarchs* (Jerusalem: Hillel Press, 1979), p. 363.

---

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: This article reflects the method of Torah study that was taught to me by Rabbi Murray Schaum. Many of these ideas were developed in the classes of Rabbi Schaum and Rabbi Avraham Weiss at the Midrashia of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale. I would like to thank Rabbi Jacob London, whose camp and yeshiva (Hekhal HaTorah) planted a seed in my youth. This seed would never have germinated if not for the warmth and teaching of Dr. Levi Baldinger, who reintroduced me to the light of Torah Judaism.