RIVKA: THE ENIGMA BEHIND THE VEIL

Of the four Matriarchs of Israel, none is more captivating than Rivka, for the breadth and depth of her story in Sefer Bereshit, and for the complexity and mystery of her emergent personality. From the extensive saga of her betrothal to the shrouded circumstances of her demise, we can merely glimpse an enigmatic woman whose thoughts and motivations are hard to decipher, and whose words conceal as much as they reveal.

Even the open-faced tale of unabashed hesed, as the young Rivka proves herself worthy to be the bride of Yitshak, becomes—in retrospect—a complex mystery. The hidden nature of this woman is masterfully drawn at her first meeting with her prospective husband, the one and only scion of Avraham Avinu. As Yitshak approaches, Rivka—in an inexplicable reaction—falls from the camel and veils herself. Had this been but a custom of feminine modesty, one would expect her to be veiled in front of strangers rather than in the presence of her betrothed. Was this, instead, a gesture of withdrawal, or of fear? Perhaps, it signifies shame. In the following pages, a retrospective analysis of several vignettes in the story of Rivka—beginning naturally at the end—allows a partial unmasking of this most mysterious woman.

I. MATRIARCH TO WARRING NATIONS

In the last verse that mentions her name (Bereshit 28:5), the Torah inscribes an epitaph to the Matriarch Rivka, as “the mother of Yaakov and Esav,” and with that seals the long saga of her life. The classic commentaries have struggled with the blatant redundancy inherent in this phrase, on the one hand, and the glaring omission of any details relating to Rivka’s demise, on the other. Thus, the last resonance of this remarkable and complex woman is her conflicted and tragic destiny to be the mother of two irreconcilable sons—and by extension, two cultures/nations doomed to perpetual battle. In his inimitable style, Rashi
humbly inscribes in his commentary here: “I do not know what it teaches us,” leaving his students throughout the ages to struggle along with him for its meaning.

Rashi has taught us repeatedly that in the Scriptures, a descriptive phrase ascribed to a person, place, or thing with which the reader has already become familiar through earlier narrative must have some purpose greater than rhetorical emphasis. Thus, in an earlier stage of Rivka’s story, at the occasion of her marriage, Rashi questions why the Torah reiterates her lineage: “. . . and Yitshak was forty years old when he took Rivka—the daughter of Betuel the Arami, from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami—for his wife” (25:20). Given the length and detail of the preceding chapters describing her betrothal, Rivka and all the details of her lineage are well known to the reader, prompting Rashi to seek additional meaning for an otherwise redundant phrase. There he concurs with Bereshit Rabba (63:4) that the intent of this phrase is to indicate that though Rivka was daughter and sister to evil men, and was raised in an evil culture, she refused to learn from their deeds.

In so doing, Hazal seem to be stressing the theological principle that yirat shamayim is not inherited; rather, virtue is a result of conscious moral choice made by a free individual. The midrash suggests that the narrative function of the repetitive description is to offset Rivka as “a rose among the thorns.” But having already accomplished that, what possible purpose is achieved with the resounding epitaph—“the mother of Yaakov and Esav”?

Among the earliest of Rashi’s commentators, Rabbi Yehuda ben Eliezer (Riva) suggests that this epitaph is not nearly as complimentary. Rather than offset the beauty and virtue of Rivka, its intent is to explain how a tsaddik and innocent such as Yitshak could sire a child as evil as Esav. Redundant reference to Rivka’s lineage implicates the origins of the “evil seed” she bore. Perhaps cognizant that this explanation casts aspersion on the origins of Avraham and Sarah as well, while diminishing the importance of freedom of choice and moral autonomy in the emergence of heroes and villains, Netsiv posits a more persuasive solution. He suggests that the descriptive phrase comes to highlight that Lavan—to whom Yaakov is being sent ostensibly to find a wife—is no less Esav’s uncle than he is Yaakov’s. The Torah apparently intends to stress that Rivka maintained a placid demeanor to hide from both Esav and—especially—from her husband, the pressing reason for sending Yaakov away. She wants neither one of them to know that she is
aware of Esav’s plans to kill his brother after his father’s demise. The phrase “mother of Yaakov and Esav” is then meant to reflect her pose of even-handedness. Nechama Leibowitz proposes that this is no mere pose. She suggests that the solution to Rashi’s “challenge” is to be found in Rivka’s response when she first hears (prophetically) of Esav’s deep hatred for his brother and his scheme to kill him after Yitshak dies (27:45). After revealing to Yaakov his brother’s secret thoughts, Rivka suggests he seek refuge in Haran until Esav’s anger abates, pleading with him to flee lest “I am bereft of you both in one day.” This expression based on the root “sh-k-l” is properly used for the grief attendant upon the loss of a child—and not the loss of a spouse. If Esav kills Yaakov, how would Rivka be bereft of both sons? Both Rashi and Rashbam explain that the ensuing and inevitable violence would ultimately result in the death of both of Rivka’s sons. However, a cycle of blood vengeance would not automatically lead to the death of both “in one day.” Consequently, Leibowitz prefers the solution offered by Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Amuzag, which suggests that Rivka’s expression reflects the thought that whosoever is the killer or the victim, she will have lost both sons, for “the killed is gone, and the killer is despised in my eyes—he is a stranger and an enemy, and it is as if he too were gone.”

Concurring with this view that Rivka had always been maternally affectionate to both Yaakov and Esav, Rabbi Yisaskhar Ber Eilenberg in his commentary to Rashi, Tseda la-Derekh, posits that the purpose of the epitaph—with which we close the saga of her life—is to inform us that in sending Yaakov away, Rivka was acting out of maternal concern for Esav. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch insists that this clause proves that “her soul was bound to both [sons], and Esav is no less her son than Yaakov.” Indeed, R. Hirsch argues, had Rivka intended to disinherit Esav from his just legacy, she would have revealed his devious schemes to Yitshak, alienating him from his father’s esteem and affection.

Thus, she was not merely acting as Yaakov’s mother when she forced him to flee to Lavan’s house. On the contrary, she is acting primarily as Esav’s mother in sending away her “favorite” son, never to see him again, thereby saving her firstborn from the sin of fratricide. In so doing, she is spared the agonizing pain of Hava, who loses both Cain and Hevel in one day. However, no less tragically, Rivka is shorn of any naches she may have enjoyed during her lifetime. She ends her days in tragic loneliness, torn between the irreconcilable destinies of her twin sons.
II. NO TEARS, NO EULOGIES

Though no other Matriarch’s life is chronicled with as much detailed drama, the Torah remains mysteriously mute regarding Rivka’s death. It has been posited by some⁷ that the omission of any narrative regarding her death and burial is in itself meaningful. Once Yaakov leaves home, Rivka disappears from the narrative. Her name is mentioned again but twice, and then only elliptically.

The first mention is at the occasion of the death of Devora, Rivka’s nurse, who dies and is buried by Yaakov at the foothills of Bet El, under a tree renamed Alon Bakhut—liberally translated as “the tree of weepings.” Based on the plurality of the bakhut, Rashi cites the midrash that relates how the mourning of his mother’s nurse⁸ was redoubled when Yaakov was somehow informed at her burial that his mother was also gone. The second mention of her name and her death comes only indirectly at the end of Bereshit (49:31) when Yaakov is on his deathbed commanding his sons to bury him in Ma’arat ha-Makhpela where “they”⁹ buried “Yitshak, and Rivka, his wife.” However, the narrative never explicates who preceded whom in death, at what age and under what circumstances Rivka died, nor does it relate who buried her.

Ramban questions the Torah’s silence regarding Rivka’s demise and ponders whether it reflects the fact that

... she had no honors at her death; for Yaakov is not there, and Esav despises her and would not come to her [funeral], and Yitshak is blind and does not leave his home; and so the Torah avoids mentioning that she had been buried by Benei Het.

The omission is thus not intended as rebuke but serves to gloss over the tragic ignominy that shrouded Rivka’s later years as well as her death. Rashi, on the other hand, implies that the omission is a veiled rebuke to Rivka, “the day of her death was hidden lest she be cursed by the people as ‘the belly from which Esav emerged.’”¹⁰ While Ramban, among others, wonders who would deign to curse Rivка as the progenitor rather than the victim of Esav’s evil, Rashi must have sensed how some readers—particularly the alien—might have understood this most complex of the Matriarchs.

Rashi’s comment was prescient of the attitudes of many gentiles who condemn Rivka. None could be more searing than that adopted by The Interpreter’s Bible, which prefaces the story of Rivka’s marriage to Yitshak with a defense of the Protestants’ decision in the 1920’s to omit
the reference to the “mutual faithfulness of Isaac and Rebekah” from the American Book of Common Prayer. Noting that these “were the one notable pair among the patriarchs who were monogamous,” the Protestant commentator W. R. Bowie nevertheless condemns them for the “dysfunction of their marriage,” for which he places most of the blame on Rivka.

The divergence between Isaac and Rebekah came out of their different regard for their two sons. For that divided favoritism perhaps both Isaac and Rebekah were to blame, but Rebekah more aggressively so than Isaac. Her love for Jacob was so fiercely jealous that it broke loose from any larger loyalty. As between her twin sons she wanted Jacob to have the best of everything no matter how he got it; and to that end she would not scruple at tricking and unfairness both towards her husband and her son Esau.

While many Jewish commentaries share some of this revulsion from trickery, and struggle with Rivka’s means, if not her ends, they do not endorse Bowie’s blatant bias when he concludes, “There was something of the tigress in Rebekah, instinctively protecting the cub that by physical comparison was inferior.” If classic Jewish commentaries are less inclined to critique Rivka it is not a mere function of favorable predisposition to the champion of Rosh Shivtei Yisrael. The midrashic sages, as well as the medieval commentaries, repeatedly demonstrate bold intellectual honesty and do not spare even the Avot and Ima’ot from moral judgment—however, their assessments remain within the bounds set by the text itself. It is their faithfulness to the peshat that is super-ordinate to any “national” loyalties, and it is on the basis of the Writ itself that one must evaluate the charge of moral ambiguity regarding Rivka and her actions.

III. MORAL AMBIGUITY IN RIVKA

It has been argued that the lack of explicit censure in Scripture is in itself suggestive that the Torah does not find “something morally reprehensible about the actions of Rivka and Yaakov.” Whether or not silence represents moral assent is arguable; however, in this case the text itself presents the rationale that justifies Rivka’s behavior. The paragraph preceding the parshiyah of the blessings (26:34-35) and the concluding verses of this chapter, function as explanatory “brackets” which provide the moral context for Rivka’s actions. The opening bracket records Esav’s
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marriage to two Hittite women who are the source of “embittered spirit to Yitshak and Rivka”\textsuperscript{15} and thus provides the background explaining Rivka’s revulsion from her husband’s purported intent to bless Esav. By marrying idolatrous women from the immediate locale, Esav broke with Avraham’s pledge, and in so doing forfeited his spiritual legacy. \textit{Malbim, Sefat Emet}, and others note that these verses indicate not only Rivka’s disappointment, but first and foremost Yitshak’s. When he loses hope that Esav can be worthy of the \textit{berakhot} of Avraham, Yitshak then decides to bequeath him \textit{only} the worldly blessings.\textsuperscript{16}

According to this position, Rivka’s “error” lies not in her evaluation of her two sons, but rather in underestimating the acuity of Yitshak’s perception of Esav and his immoral behavior.\textsuperscript{17} If fault is to be found, it is in the failure of Yitshak and Rivka to discuss their respective assessments of their sons’ behavior and their intended responses. Such was the understanding of Netsiv, who notes that from the beginning of their marriage Rivka—as symbolized so vividly by hiding behind the veil—was less than candid with her husband. She “was not with Yitshak as Sarah was with Avraham or Rachel with Yaakov,” who “did not hesitate to speak forcefully in front of their husbands” and express their disagreement or pain.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Sefat Emet} does not presume that husband and wife did not communicate, but rather that they differed philosophically.\textsuperscript{19} Yitshak, it would appear, felt that the spiritual legacy of Avraham is sufficient blessing for an \textit{ish tam yoshev ohalim}, immersed in the contemplative life; whereas, Rivka opined that Yaakov was not beyond the temporal blessings which he wrests from his father, including the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth as well as \textit{rov dagan ve-tirosh} (27:28)—an abundance of grain and wine. Howsoever they may have differed initially, it seems that once Yaakov receives the temporal blessings—deceivingly or otherwise—Yitshak affirms that he should have them, by averring to Esav “... and I ate from all [the delicacies] ere you came and I blessed him, and he is indeed blessed” (27:33). In the final analysis, Yitshak changed his assessment of Esav’s potential, as well as any utopian plans for a Yisaskhar-Zevulun symbiosis between the two brothers.\textsuperscript{20}

What caused the change of heart in Yitshak? Surely, it was not Rivka’s persuasive powers, which would then have made the ensuing charade unnecessary. According to R Hirsch and others, it was Yitshak who staged a deceptive ruse, hoping to lure Esav into a path of repentance by proffering a “blessing” of unknown nature, having already decided to secure the spiritual legacy of Avraham for Yaakov. The
request for venison was an educational ploy to capitalize on Esav’s desire to hold on to his father’s approval and affection, despite his violating the “Avrahamic” norm by marrying idolatrous women. Rivka, who was not aware of her husband’s secret plan, countered with a deception of her own, presuming that Yitshak had been too blind to see his first-born son’s immorality. The resulting drama is reduced to a tragicomedy of errors, which unmasks for the first time the true secret of the birthright.

When Esav returns from the hunt and learns that Yaakov had maneuvered to take “his” blessing, he reveals unwittingly the hidden fact that he had already relinquished the duty and privilege of the bekhora:

First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing! (27:36)

These words undo Yitshak’s earlier judgment about Yaakov’s underhanded manner of obtaining the blessing (27:35):

Your brother came with guile and took away your blessing.

Having revealed his own contempt for the spiritual legacy inherent in the bekhora, Esav stands unmasked before his father who hitherto had been “blinded.” Rivka, in contrast, had known all along the nature of the divergent paths of her twin sons. She was privy to worldly knowledge—or to divine prophecy—that she would not, or could not share with her husband.

IV. DIMMED VISION VS. MORAL PERCEPTION

Yitshak’s inability to see what was apparent to Rivka is explicated in Scripture as a preface to this entire episode “and his eyes were too dim to see” (27:1). Rashi avoids the literal interpretation to this phrase, i.e., that Yitshak’s blindness was a function of old age, and instead posits a series of figurative explanations culled from midrash. His preference for the midrashic interpretation may be based on the ostensible wordiness of the clause and its ambiguity (easily replaced with one straightforward word, “va-yitav”). He cites the Tanhuma which interprets the “dimming” of Yitshak’s vision as the loss of prophetic perception due to the emotional anguish engendered by Esav’s idolatrous wives.

The Tanhuma posits an additional interpretation based on the injunction (Shemot 23:8) “for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise,” that
Yitshak’s inability to see his son’s true nature was a result of bias engendered by flattery (“ki tsayid be-fiv”) and/or dependence. The dimming of his vision was, according to this view, a metaphor for a lack of moral discrimination. The same midrash contrasts Yitshak’s lack of discernment with Rivka’s acuity, and explains that since Rivka had grown up among idolators, and had witnessed deception and immorality as a matter of course, she was more inured to evil and less traumatized by it. Consequently, her prophetic insight remained unaffected.

Others suggest that Yitshak’s spiritual innocence and the effect of the Akeda were such that he could not “conceive” of evil, and thus did not recognize it when it stared him in the face. Rivka, on the other hand, was on a more earthly plane and knew the frailties and foibles of human nature; and as one who knew how to deceive, she intuitively recognized deception. Accordingly, her extra measure of perception is also a mark of innocence lost.

The Midrash Rabba (65a) suggests that the blindness to evil was a divine “gift” to spare Yitshak even more agony than he had already tasted at Esav’s marriage to the Hittite women. If so, Rivka’s reluctance to disabuse her husband of his hopeful optimism perpetuates her tendency to shield him from bad news. This is consistent with Netsiv’s analysis that since she first saw him, Rivka’s attitude towards her husband was maternally protective. As symbolized by her veil, Rivka was wont to erect barriers between her saintly husband and the evils of this world. It is only when the destiny of the Avrahamic nation is at risk that she uncovers—however surreptitiously—the moral ineptness of Esav.

When all else fails, she ultimately discusses her outrage at Esav’s inappropriate marriages and the pressing need to ensure that Yaakov does not repeat that error, thereby securing her husband’s consent and complicity in sending Yaakov to Padan Aram. At the same time, she spares Yitshak the ugly details of Esav’s secretive plot to murder his brother, for that would have only caused her husband pain, while producing no positive effect. For these reasons, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz concludes that Rivka stands as a counterpoint (”ezer kenegdo”) to Yitshak, as a “complement to his personality.”

R. Steinsaltz notes that Rivka’s initiative and daring schemes are undertaken with little hesitation, and that this bold activism was probably a result of growing up among people who were unreliable both in their moral choices and in their concern for her welfare. In contrast, Yitshak was born into a circle of undivided and unsullied concern for his welfare, surrounded by individuals upon whom he could completely
rely: "he can hesitate, he can even err, in the secure knowledge that there are always others who lovingly and devotedly are committed to his well-being."  

Rivka, on the other hand, had only self-reliance as a tool of survival in the house of Betuel. She, unlike any other woman in Bereshit seems to have drawn her sense of morality and her incisive perceptiveness from a mysterious source alien to her parental home and native culture.

V. FROM THE BEGINNING

Of the four matriarchs, it is only Rivka who is assessed and evaluated as a human being prior to and independently of her future spouse, and separately and distinctly from the family that reared her. It is only Rivka who is "tested" as Avram was, prior to being chosen, and who—like Avraham—goes through a series of tests of increasing severity and sacrifice to "prove" that she was worthy to be chosen. And like Avram, whose birth is noted and future role is foreshadowed before he enters the arena, so too is Rivka's birth and her lineage noted well before her importance to the ensuing narrative can be discerned.

At the conclusion of the drama of the Akeda, the ultimate test of Avraham Avinu—and before the death of Sarah is revealed—the narrative shifts with a denouement that relates the ancestry of Rivka, and in so doing prepares the reader for the forthcoming drama of Eliezer's search for a bride for Yitshak. In so doing the Torah is following a pattern already established in the preceding sagas. Parashat Bereshit comes to its end with the sorrowful tone of a decadent world at the brink of destruction, but with a final hopeful note that introduces the one ray of righteousness, "And Noah found favor in the eyes of Hashem" (6:5).

Similarly, Parashat Noah closes with a parshiya that introduces the next protagonist, Avram, who holds center-stage for the next two parashot. Extraordinarily, Rivka is the first (and only) woman for whom the narrative stage is comparably set, and whose arrival is so anticipated.

Curiously, when her birth is first mentioned, Rivka's lineage is traced to Milka. That name then resounds emphatically whenever Rivka speaks of her family and her heritage. When she first encounters Eliezer, after the terms of the "test" of the appropriate bride have been spelled out, the biblical narrator introduces her in 24:15, spelling out in great detail her ancestry and relation to Avraham and stressing her grandmother Milka:
He has scarcely finished speaking, when Rivka, who was born to Betuel, the son of Milka the wife of Avraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder.

Moreover, when Rivka makes herself known to the servant charged with finding a bride for Yitshak, she identifies herself as “the daughter of Betuel . . . the son of Milka whom she bore unto Nahor” (24:24). Finally, when Eliezer relates his “ordained” meeting of Rivka to her family, he reiterates how she had introduced herself as the daughter of Betuel, the son of Nahor, adding emphatically “who was born unto him by Milka” (24:47). This is particularly noteworthy given the anonymity of Rivka's mother, and the Torah's omission of the names of the mothers of Avraham and Sarah. In contrast, Milka—who according to midrashic sources is the sister of Sarah—merits special mention along with Terah, Nahor and Avraham, as they flee Ur Kasdim. It is possible that she is the source of inspiration, the mentor at whose knees the young Rivka had been educated and from whom she learned the qualities of hesed, and the faith that fortified her on the road to the unknown.

Both Avraham and Rivka come from a common source and both are called to wander to a place unknown, leaving their paternal homes—and idolatrous cultures—and abandon all that is familiar to pursue a future veiled in mystery. While Sarai joins Avram in his wanderings to the unknown, she does so, perhaps, out of her prior commitment to the man she married. Rivka, however, does not yet know Yitshak, although she has bound herself to him in betrothal. What compelled her to accept the proposal of marriage by proxy? And by what madness or genius is she driven to declare, when asked by her family if she consents to go with Eliezer, simply and majestically: “elekh”—I will go (24:58)! Is she swept up without fully comprehending to what and to whom she has bound herself? Or is she, Rivka, “the daughter of Betuel the Aramite, from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Aramite,” not only the virtuous “daughter of an evil man, and the sister of an evil man, who was reared in a city of evil men,” but also the heiress of the elusive Milka? And, as such, is she heeding a divine call—not unlike the one that compelled Avraham and Sarah to leave their homeland?

If this proposition is valid, then Rivka brings to Yitshak not only the shrewdness we associate with Aram, not only the intimate knowledge of the ways of the world and the wiles needed to survive in a hostile environment, but also a legacy of hesed premised on a monotheistic belief that her grandmother had shared with Avraham and Sarah, and which she maintained in a reprobative household and hostile environment.
That faithfulness would merit divine revelation\textsuperscript{35} and blessing comparable to Avraham's alone.

VI. \textit{HESED: THE HALLMARK OF AVRAHAM AND RIVKA}

As noted, Rivka—like the first patriarch—is put to the test, albeit one initiated by a human being. And like Avraham, Rivka meets the challenges and exceeds expectations. This very young woman,\textsuperscript{36} compelled by no outside force or social norm not only passes the test by offering drink to Eliezer and then offering water to his camels; she surpasses even the high standards that he had set by the manner in which she does so. The text stresses the speed and eagerness to serve repeatedly, through the repetition of two words: "\textit{va-temaher}" (and she hastened) and "\textit{va-tarats}" (and she ran):

- 24:18 — "And she \textbf{hastened} and let down her pitcher. . . ."
- 24:20 — "And she \textbf{hastened} and emptied her pitcher . . . and she \textbf{ran} again unto the well. . . ."
- 24:28 — "And the damsel \textbf{ran}, and told. . . ."

The behavior and the language used to describe it brings to mind the hospitality of Avraham as he greets the "three men" on the hot, still day which opens \textit{Parashat Vayera}:

- 18:2 — "and he \textbf{ran} to meet them. . . ."
- 18:6 — "And he \textbf{hastened} into the tent unto Sarah, and he said 'make \textbf{haste}. . . .'"
- 18:7 — "And to the cattle Avraham \textbf{ran} . . . and he gave it to the lad, and he \textbf{hastened} to prepare it."

And like Avraham's hospitality, Rivka's generosity is spirited and swift, spreading among all the members of the household.

The comparison to Avraham holds in another respect. It is Rivka who is blessed, and she alone of the other matriarchs merits a blessing all her own:

Our sister, you will become a multitude and your seed will inherit the gates of those that hate them.\textsuperscript{37}

While it is true that the blessing comes from all-too-human mouths, Rashi had already noted that the blessing resounds with the words and tone of the divine one given to Avraham by the angel imme-
diately after the Akeda (see 22:17-18). And it is surely no accident, that after he received that blessing from the angel, Avraham is informed of the birth of Rivka!

The context in which Rivka first appears also foreshadows the ultimate sacrifice she—like Avraham—was compelled to offer. She is the only one among the matriarchs who is compelled to choose between two sons—and in so doing strives to circumvent the sacrifice of either. Struggling to avoid the tragedy of a banished Yishmael, she opts to cede the presence of her beloved Yaakov, in order to save the soul of Esav. Trying to hold on to both, she remains silently torn, yearning for the elusive redemption that will allow her sons to live together peacefully.

NOTES

2. See also Rabbi Hayim Ben Attar, in his commentary *Or ha-Hayim*.
4. This is consistent with Netsiv's position that Rivka and Yitshak were less than candid with each other, and that Rivka was reluctant to share the ugly truths she perceived [either out of awe of Yitshak's exalted ethereality or out of protectiveness of his "singed" psyche].
6. Rabbi David Kimhi (Radak) insists that even when she displays motherly concern for both, the name of Yaakov always comes first to indicate his primacy in her affection and esteem.
7. More recently by Leah Frankel, who ponders whether this silence is not a silent rebuke. See *Perakim Ba-Mikra: Derakhim Hadashot be-Parshanut* (Jerusalem: WZO, Department of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1981). Given the position of Netsiv, that Rivka was not open with her husband, the absence of any mention of death or eulogy may be an apt instance of *midda ke-neged midda*.
8. It is unclear how she ends up at Bet El. She may have served as Rivka’s emissary to call him home from Padan Aram, presuming that Esav’s rage had abated. Perhaps, she undertook to call Yaakov to his mother’s deathbed.
9. The vagueness of the verse, failing to attribute the burial to a specific person(s), is in itself telling.
12. The midrashic literature is replete with implicit censure of Yaakov for his role in the deception of his father. For example, the *Tanhuma to Parashat*
Vayetse puts words into the mouth of Leah, which silence Yaakov's complaints against Lavan's trickery noting that he too had tricked his father.


15. This introductory paragraph, preceding Chapter 27, the story of the blessings, is offset with two Parshiyot Setumot.

16. See Malbim on 26:34.

17. Yissaschar Yaakovson, Bina ba-Mikra, (Tel Aviv: Sinai, 1974).


19. Harav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, Sefat Emet al ha-Torah, Vol. 1, (Jerusalem: 1952). See particularly, the derashot of 5634 (p. 105) and 5651 (p. 117.)

20. Both Sefat Emet and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch suggest that Yitshak's hope was that two brothers would complement one another: Esav would be charged with the economic and military welfare of the fledgling nation, while Yaakov would be charged with the spiritual and cultural domain, and the former would be subservient to the leadership of the latter just as the kings of Israel were bound to the authority and sanction of the priests and the prophets.

21. Note the marvelous play of the words, bekhora and berakha—which flies in the face of the earlier condemnation of Yaakov's deception.


23. Ibid., p. 1069.

24. See Yaakovson, Bina ba-Mikra. Also, Rashi and Bereshit Rabba, which imply that the experience of the Akeda placed Yitshak on an elevated plane removed from the fetid reality of everyday life.


26. See Torah Shelema, p. 1070.

27. Rabbi Yaakov Tsevi Mecklenburg, ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbala (Jerusalem: 1985)[first published in 1839] notes that Rivka subsumed the role of Sarah in all respects.


29. Ibid., p. 27.

30. See the closing section of Parashat Noah.

31. Note that the closing section of Parashat Vayera, when Avraham is informed of Rivka's birth (22:20) bears remarkable resemblance to the language in 27:4.

32. See Rashi to Bereshit 11:29, identifying Sarah as Yiska, who together with Milka, are the daughters of Haran, the third of Nahor's sons.

33. Eliyahu Rabba, cf. in Torah Shelema, p. 980, praises Rivka's bitahon and says that Benei Yisrael were liberated from slavery in Egypt because of the daring of the Matriarchs to "go" blindly at the behest of Hashem.

34. See Rashi to 25:20, based on Midrash Rabba.

35. Note that when Rivka is distressed by her abnormal pregnancy, "she goes
in search of Hashem,” who informs her that she is carrying two nations and competing cultures in her womb (25:22-23). While Rashi and Rashbam seem reluctant to interpret these verses as evidence of direct communication between Rivka and Hashem, the Ramban points out that the language used in these verses signifies prayer and divine response. In any event, all concur that Rivka had prophetic knowledge—attained directly or through an intermediary—to which her husband was not privy.

36. According to one view, Rivka is but three years old at the time Eliezer encounters her at the well (Masekhet Soferim 21b). An alternate position indicates that she was fourteen years old when she married Yitshak (Seder Olam; see Kasher, Torah Shelema).

37. That this blessing is not to be taken lightly is clear from its adoption into the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, where it is uttered at the time of the bride’s veiling.