



TOLDOT

IT'S NOT SO GOOD TO BE A GOODIE-GOODIE

The Beauty of 'The Struggle'

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Toldot

Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years until their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the “children struggle inside her”; G-d tells her that “there are two nations in your womb,” and that the younger will prevail over the elder.

Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau’s heel. Esau grows up to be “a cunning hunter, a man of the field”; Jacob is “a wholesome man,” a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves

Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew.

In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father, Abraham, and digs a series of his own wells. Over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the new wells are enjoyed in tranquility.

Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father’s favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau’s clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father.



PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Toldot

Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder.

Jacob leaves home for Haran to flee Esau's wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother's brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife—Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael.

What would
you advise?



TEXT 1

Genesis 25:24

וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לֵלְדוֹת, וְהִנֵּה תוֹמָם בְּבֶטְנָהּ.

And her days to give birth were completed,
and behold, there were twins in her womb.

TEXT 2A

Rashi, ad loc.

"וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ". אָבֵל בְּתִמְרָה כְּתִיב: "וַיְהִי בְּעֵת לְדָתָה"
(בְּרֵאשִׁית לַח, כִּז). שְׁלֹשׁ מְלֵאוֹ יָמֶיהָ, כִּי לֹא הִדְּשִׁים יְלֶדְתָּם.

“And her days . . . were completed.” But regarding Tamar, the passage phrases it differently: “And it came about when she gave birth [and behold there were twins in her womb]” (Genesis 38:27). This is because [Tamar’s] pregnancy term was not filled; she gave birth to them after seven months.

TEXT 2B

Rashi, ad loc.

"וְהָיָה תוֹמָם." חֶסֶר. וּבְתָמָר תְּאוֹמִים מְלֵא, לְפִי שְׁשֻׁנֵיהֶם צְדִיקִים,
אַבְל כָּאֵן אֶחָד צְדִיק וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע.

“There were twins in her womb.” [תוֹמָם, the word for twins, is spelled] defectively [missing an *alef* and *yud*]. Tamar’s [twins] are described as תְּאוֹמִים—with the complete spelling [including the *alef* and *yud*]. This is because Tamar’s twins were both righteous, but in this case, one was virtuous, and one was wicked.

Complete

Nine months

One righteous, one wicked

Incomplete

Seven months

Both righteous



TEXT 3

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 30, p. 110*

נתבאר כמה פעמים, שכאשר ישנה סתירה בין שני כתובים, דרכו של רש"י ליישבה בכתוב השני, במקום שמתעוררת הסתירה.

ואם כן קשה בנדון דידן – מה ראה רש"י לעמוד כאן על השינוי בין לשון הכתוב כאן ולשון הכתוב לקמן בתמר?

We explained many times that when there is a discrepancy between two passages, Rashi's method is to resolve it in the second passage, where the discrepancy arises.

This raises a question: Why does Rashi address the discrepancy between this passage and the later passage at this [earlier] point?

QUESTION

Why does Rashi address a discrepancy that will only come to light later in the narrative?

Why did Rashi address a grammatical issue he does not usually address?

TEXT 4

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid., p. 111*

נתבאר כמה פעמים, וכן כתבו כמה מפרשי רש"י, שהשינויים ד"מלא" ו"חסר" כשלעצמם אינם ענין המעורר קושי בפשוטו של מקרא (שלכן על פי רוב אין רש"י מבאר הטעם לחסרות כו' שבמקרא), ובמקום שרש"י מבאר טעמים, הרי זה רק משום שעל ידי זה מתבאר דבר הקשה בפשוטו של מקרא.

ועל פי זה יש להבין בנידון דידן – מה קשה בלשון הכתוב "והנה תומים בבטנה" שבגלל זה מדייק רש"י ש"תומם" חסר כתיב?

We explained many times, and several supercommentaries to Rashi agree, that Rashi does not ordinarily address defective spellings because they don't impact the text's plain meaning. On the rare occasions when Rashi addresses them, it is only because the unusual spelling resolves a difficulty in the text.

This raises the question: What is the difficulty in the words "behold, there were twins in her womb" that compels Rashi to address the defective spelling?

TEXT 5

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 30, pp. 111–112*

לולא הכתוב כאן "וימלאו ימיה" (ברבקה), לא היינו יודעים לדייק שהכוונה בתיבות "בעת לדתה" (בתמר) היא "לחסרים" (והיינו מפרשים הכתוב כפשוטו, שרק בעת לדתה נודעה לתמר שתאומים בבטנה).

אבל לאחר שנאמר ברבקה הלשון "וימלאו ימיה", מה שאין כן בתמר כתיב "ויהי בעת לדתה" . . . הרי שינוי זה שבין הכתובים מלמדנו, שבתמר "לא מלאו ימיה".

If not for the passage “And her days were completed” about Rebecca, we would not have known that the words “when she gave birth” about Tamar tell us that it was less than nine months. We would have understood it to mean that Tamar only discovered she was carrying twins at birth.

Now that the Torah says “And her days were completed” about Rebecca and “when she gave birth” about Tamar, we see the discrepancy. This tells us that Tamar’s pregnancy did not last for nine months.

TEXT 6

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid., p. 112*

וכדי ליישב שאלות אלו ממשיך רש"י
בדיבור המתחיל שלאחרי זה "והנה
תומם – חסר, ובתמר תאומים מלא
לפי ששניהם צדיקים, אבל כאן אחד
צדיק ואחד רשע".

כלומר: לאחרי שרואים שהכתוב
מחלק בין שתי הלידות דרבקה ותמר
כדי ללמד שזו למלאים וזו לחסרים,
מסתבר לומר שיש להשוות ולדייק גם
בשאר השינויים שביניהם.

שכאן כתיב "תומם חסר, ובתמר
תאומים מלא" – כי בזה מודגש, שכל
כוונת הכתוב כאן היא להשוות את
שתי הלידות ולהדגיש את השינויים
ביניהן, דאף ששתיהן ילדו תאומים,
מכל מקום היה שינוי עיקרי ביניהן.

To resolve these questions, Rashi continues with the following comment: "Here, the word 'twins' is spelled in defective form. Concerning Tamar, it is spelled in complete form because [her twins] were both righteous. However, in this case, one was righteous, and the other was wicked."

Rashi's meaning: once we see that the Torah contrasts the two births to teach us that one was brought to complete term and the other was not, it follows that we should compare and contrast all the discrepancies between them.

The reason the word "twins" is spelled in defective form here and in complete form there should also be examined. The purpose is to compare the two births and highlight their differences. Though both gave birth to twins, they had some essential differences.



The more righteous
the children, the
shorter the pregnancy.

TEXT 7

*Rabbi Yisachar Ber
Eilenburg, Tzedah
Laderech, Genesis 38:27*

והטעם, לפי שמיהר הקדוש ברוך הוא להביא שני
צדיקים בעולם הזה.

The reason is simple: G-d hastened to bring two
righteous people to the world.

QUESTION

Why does Rashi address a discrepancy that will only come to light later in the narrative?

ANSWER

Rashi did not address the discrepancy. He explained why the length of the pregnancy is relevant.

QUESTION

Why did Rashi address a grammatical issue he does not usually address?

ANSWER

To help us understand why Rebecca's pregnancy was longer, which makes the information about the length of her pregnancy relevant.

QUESTION

1. Why are we painting a full-term pregnancy as a negative thing?
2. How is it fair that Tamar's righteous children were born as preemies, yet the wicked Esau enjoyed nine whole months of development?
3. Considering Isaac and Rebecca's holy union and Judah and Tamar's less-than-stellar union, why did Tamar's children turn out righteous and Esau wicked?

TEXT 8

*Midrash, Bereshit
Rabah 63:6*

בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהִיְתָה עוֹמֶדֶת עַל בְּתֵי כְּנִסְיֹת וּבְתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת, יַעֲקֹב
מְפָרֵס לְצֵאת . . . וּבְשָׁעָה שֶׁהִיְתָה עוֹבֶרֶת עַל בְּתֵי עֲבוֹדַת
כוֹכָבִים, עֲשׂוֹ רָץ וּמְפָרֵס לְצֵאת.

When Rebecca stood near a synagogue or house of Torah study, Jacob struggled to emerge. When she passed a house of pagan worship, Esau struggled to emerge.

TEXT 9A

Maimonides,
SHEMONAH PERAKIM,
Introduction to Avot,
chapter 6

אמרו הפילוסופים, שהמושל בנפשו, אף על פי שעשה המעשים הטובים והחשובים, הוא עושה אותם והוא מתאוה אל הפעולות הרעות ונכסף אליהם, ויכבוש את יצרו . . . ויעשה הטובות והוא מצטער בעשיתם.

אבל החסיד הוא נמשך בפעולתו אחר מה שתעירהו אליו תאותו ותכונתו. ויעשה הטובות והוא מתאוה ונכסף אליהן.

The philosophers maintain [that there are two personalities]: those whose deeds are good and important, but who crave and desire terrible things. They subdue their inclinations and rein in their desires.

Then there are the pious ones. Their good behavior is stimulated by their desires and inclinations. They perform good deeds because they crave and desire them.



Whose path is
more virtuous?

TEXT 9B

Maimonides, ibid.

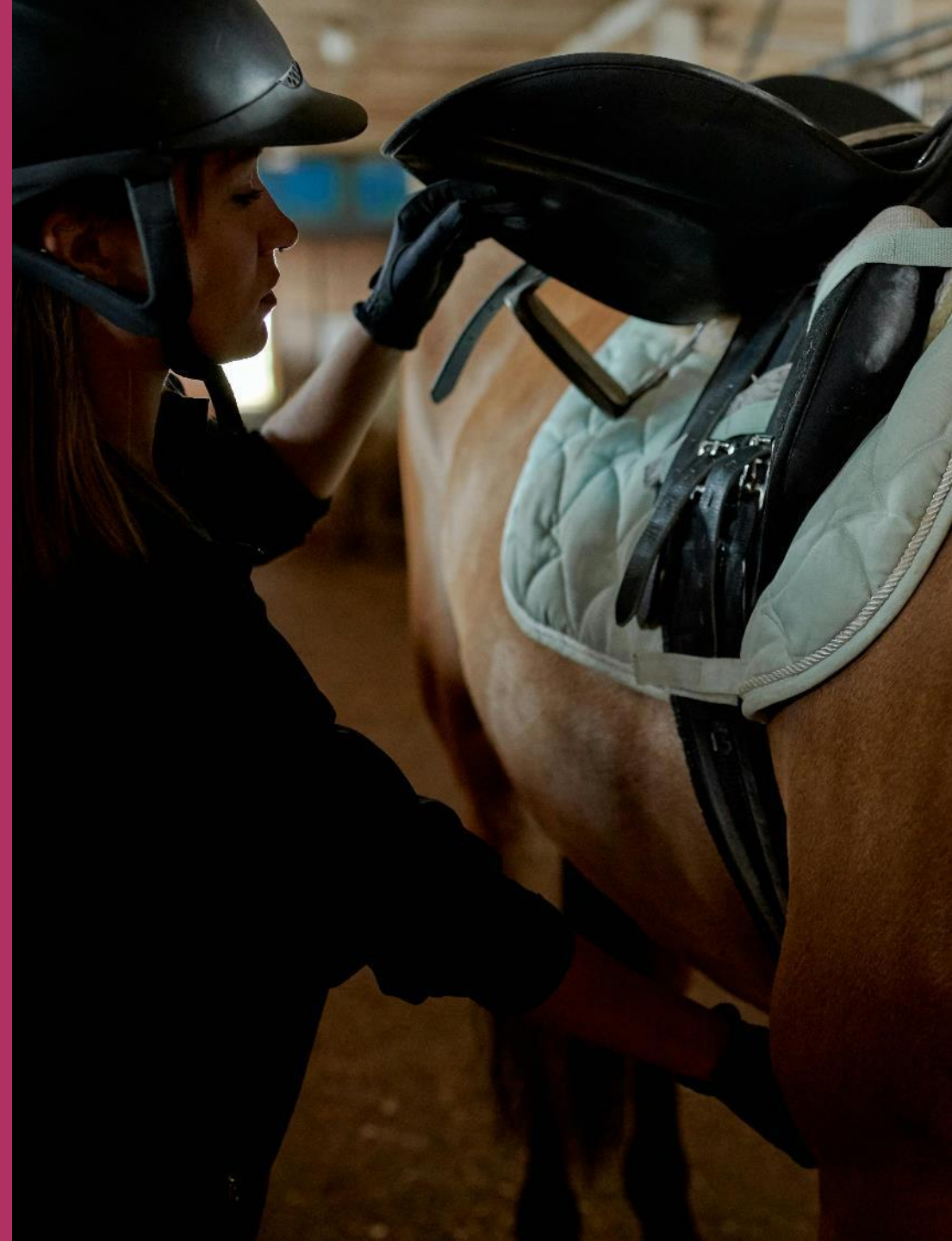
ובהסכמה מן הפילוסופים שהחסיד יותר חשוב ויותר שלם מן המושל בנפשו. אבל אמרו אפשר שיהיה המושל בנפשו כחסיד בענינים רבים, ומעלתו למטה ממנו בהכרח, להיותו מתאוה לפועל הרע. ואף על פי שאינו עושה אותו מפני שתשוקתו לרע, היא תכונה רעה בנפש.

וכאשר חקרנו דברי חכמים בזה הענין, נמצא להם שהמתאוה לעבירות והנכסף אליהם יותר חשוב ויותר שלם מאשר לא מתאוה אליהם, ולא יצטער בהנחתם. עד שאמרו, שכל אשר יהיה האיש יותר חשוב ויותר שלם, תהיה תשוקתו לעבירות והצטערו בהנחתן יותר גדול. . . ולא דים זה, אלא שאמרו ששכר המושל בנפשו גדול לפי רוב צערו במשלו בנפשו.

The consensus among philosophers is that the pious are more praiseworthy and perfect than those who rein in their passions. The latter might be identical to the righteous in behavior, yet they are of lower stature due to their negative tendencies. Even if they don't surrender to these tendencies, these tendencies stain their souls.

Yet, when we examine the words of our wise sages, we find that those tempted to sin are more praiseworthy and complete than those with no sinful cravings. They went so far as to say that the more perfect and complete one is, the more desirous of sin one becomes, and the more difficult it becomes for one to overcome those desires. . . . Moreover, they said our reward is commensurate with how difficult it is for us to resist our tendencies.

Before G-d gives us a challenge, He equips us with the ability to overcome it.



TEXT 10

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5646–
5650, p. 186*

אמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה: "אין הקדוש ברוך הוא בא בטרוניא עם בריותיו" (עבודה זרה ג, א).

ומזה יובן שמה שניתן לישראל תורה ומצוות, אין זה יותר מכפי כוחן. דהגם דתורה ומצוות לקיים כדבעי למהוי היא עבודה עצומה, ומכל מקום ניתן לישראל לקיימם, דדוקא נשמות ישראל יש בהם כח זה לקיים המצוות.

Our sages of blessed memory said, “G-d makes no unfair demands of His creations” (Talmud, Avodah Zarah 3a).

From this, we infer that the Torah and *mitzvot* that G-d gave us are not beyond our capacity. Though it is tough to comply correctly with all the Torah’s requirements, the Torah was, nevertheless, given to us because we can live up to the challenge.

ANSWER

Esau had great potential for good—even more than his brother Jacob.

Those with the
worst tendencies
have the greatest
capacities for good.



KEY POINTS

1. Some people are born with the capacity to be righteous, and others with the capacity to be wicked. This doesn't mean they will be that way: just that they can.
2. Most parents prefer that their children be among the former. However, there is one benefit to being among the latter.
3. The capacity to be wicked comes with the resources to overcome temptation.
4. G-d never asks of us what we can't deliver. If He challenges us, it means He gave us the ability to overcome the challenge.
5. This means that a child with the capacity to be wicked has greater inner resources than one born righteous. To access and activate these resources, this child requires a challenge. But once challenged, their innate strengths emerge.

