Congregation Beth Israel
Of The Berkshires

CONGREGATION Shir Ami

**SoulSpa 3.6 • P. Toldot**
**November 22, 2025 • 2 Kislev 5786**

## Blessing Before Learning

| | |
|---|---|
| בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהו״ה | *Barukh Atah Adonai* |
| אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם | *eloheinu melekh ha'olam* |
| אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ | *asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu* |
| לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה׃ | *la'asok b'divrei Torah.* |

Blessed are You, YHVH our God, sovereign of the world, who made us holy in connecting-command, and commanded us to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

## Genesis 25:19-28

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם
אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק׃ וַיְהִי
יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ
אֶת־רִבְקָה בַּת־בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרַמִּי
מִפַּדַּן אֲרָם אֲחוֹת לָבָן הָאֲרַמִּי לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה׃

19-20. And these are the generations of Yitzhak, son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzhak. Yitzhak was forty years old when he took Rivkah, daughter of Betuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram, sister of Lavan the Aramean, as [his] wife.

SHE, or HE?

וַיֶּעְתַּר יִצְחָק לַיהו״ה לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ
כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ יהו״ה
וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ׃ וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ
הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה
זֶּה אָנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יהו״ה׃

21-22. Yitzhak pleaded to YHVH in front of his wife, for she was barren; YHVH responded to his plea, and his wife Rivkah conceived. The children scampered within her; she said, "If so, why am I this?" and went to inquire of YHVH.

struggled?

drash • MIDRASH

וַיֹּאמֶר יהו״ה לָהּ שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנֵךְ
וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֵּעַיִךְ יִפָּרֵדוּ וּלְאֹם
מִלְאֹם יֶאֱמָץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר׃
וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לָלֶדֶת וְהִנֵּה תוֹמִם
בְּבִטְנָהּ׃

23-24. YHVH said to her, "Two nations are in your innards, two peoples will issue from your body separately; one people will be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." Her days to give birth were fulfilled, and behold twins were in her innards.

sibling or nation?

not so separate? relational?

why must we read this as competition?
Ya'akov trying to work out the "birthright"?

>> present-day conflicts among <siblings, neighbors, people, nations…>

וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אַדְמוֹנִי כֻּלּוֹ כְּאַדֶּרֶת
שֵׂעָר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו׃ וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן
יָצָא אָחִיו וְיָדוֹ אֹחֶזֶת בַּעֲקֵב עֵשָׂו
וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וְיִצְחָק בֶּן־שִׁשִּׁים
שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם׃

25-26. The first emerged entirely red, like a hairy mantle; they named him Eisav [=rough]. After that his brother came out, his hand holding the heel of Eisav; they named him Ya'akov [=heel holder]. Yitzhak was sixty years old at their birth.

UNITY TO DUALITY
struggle to purpose

why not mentioning Rivkah's age? Why not mentioning Rivkah at all?

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ
צַיִד אִישׂ שָׂדֶה וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב
אֹהָלִים׃ וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו
כִּי־צַיִד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת
אֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃

27-28. When the boys grew up, Eisav became a skillful hunter, a man of the field, and Ya'akov became a mild man sitting in the tents. Yitzhak loved Eisav because he had a taste for game, and Rivkah loves Ya'akov.

"hunt in his mouth"

AI implications for future economy?

YAAKOV WOULD TEND = soft skills
EISAV WOULD HUNT = hard skills

Why parental favoritism at all?
Why the tense change?
… mother's love "never dies." Yitzhak?
Family dynamics - children as reflection of the parent(s) who love them (most)

# ON PRAYER AND INFERTILITY

INTENSITY

## R. David Kimhi, Gen. 25:21

ויעתר יצחק, הרבה בתפלה על אשתו שתלד לפי שהיה אוהב אותה אהבה יתירה ... ומאהבתה לא רצה לקחת אשה אחרת עליה ולא אחת מנערותיה, לפיכך הרבה מאד בתפלה עד שנעתר לו האל.

***Yitzhak pleaded*** – He prayed greatly for his wife to bear, for he loved her [so] dearly that he did not want to take another instead of [Rivkah], even one of her maids [as his father did]. Therefore he greatly continued praying until God responded to his plea.

"Preserve" matrilineal descent?
DEPTH of heart / yearning / soul / pathos in prayer
TO PRAY THIS WAY IS TO BE **VULNERABLE**
COURAGE: NOT "SAFE"

a contiuous, ongoing choice
AGENCY

## Sforno, Gen. 25:21

** IF WE DO NOT HAVE A DIRECT CONNECTION WITH GOD, THEN WE ARE "BARREN'**

לנכח אשתו. אע״פ שהובטח על הזרע שירש התפלל לאל יתי׳ שיתן לו אותו הזרע מזאת ההגונה הנצבת נכחו׃

***In front of his wife*** – Even though he was promised that his descendants would inherit, he prayed to God that [they] would issue from this worthy person standing in front of him.

## Hizkuni, Gen. 25:21

... בשבילו לא היה מתפלל שהרי יודע היה שאינו עקור כדכתיב כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע.

He did not pray on his own behalf, as he was aware that he was not sterile, because [God told Avraham] (Gen. 21:12), "By Yitzhak your seed will be called."

כי עקרה היא מפני מה נתעקרה רבקה שלא יאמרו האומות תפלתנו שהתפללנו על אחותנו את היי לאלפי רבבה עשתה פירות אלא ויעתר יצחק, ויעתר לו.

***For she was barren***. Why was Rivkah barren? So the nations would not say that [her birth family's prayers] for her, "Sister, may you grow into thousands of myriads" (Gen. 24:60), made her fruitful; thus it was Yitzhak's plea and God's [response].

## Bereshit Rabbah 63:5 on Genesis 25:21

וַיֶּעְתַּר יִצְחָק לַה׳ לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ - רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר שֶׁשָּׁפַךְ תְּפִלּוֹת בְּעֹשֶׁר. רֵישׁ לָקִישׁ אָמַר שֶׁהֵפֵךְ אֶת הַגְּזֵרָה, וּלְפוּם כֵּן קָרְיֵן לֵיהּ עַתָּרָא דְּאַפֵּךְ אִדְּרָא.

***Yitzhak pleaded*** [וַיֶּעְתַּר] ***to YHVH in front of his wife*** (Gen. 25:1) – R. Yohanan said: He abundantly poured out prayers. Reish Lakish said: He overturned the decree, hence the word for pitchfork [עתרא], as it overturns grain.

POWER OF PRAYER
As below so above

לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ, מְלַמֵּד שֶׁהָיָה יִצְחָק שָׁטוּחַ כָּאן, וְהִיא שְׁטוּחָה כָּאן, וְאוֹמֵר רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם כָּל בָּנִים שֶׁאַתָּה נוֹתֵן לִי יִהְיוּ מִן הַצַּדֶּקֶת הַזּוֹ, אַף הִיא אָמְרָה כֵּן, כָּל בָּנִים שֶׁאַתְּ עָתִיד לִתֵּן לִי יִהְיוּ מִן הַצַּדִּיק הַזֶּה.

***In front of his wife*** – It teaches that Yitzhak was prostrated here and [Rivkah] was prostrated there, and he was saying: "Master of the Universe, all the children You are giving me will be from this righteous woman." She, too, said so: "All the children that You are destined to give me will be from this righteous man."

כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא, רַבִּי יוּדָן בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לָקִישׁ, עִקֵּר מַטְרִין לָא הֲוָה לָהּ וְנָלַף לָהּ הַקב״ה עִקֵּר מַטְרִין.

***For she was barren*** – R. Yudan [said] in the name of R. Lakish: She did not have a uterus, so the Holy Blessed One made a uterus for her.

i.e. God can do anything?
TRANS?!

(FOR MORE ON THIS, CLICK ON THE LINK IN THE ACTUAL TEXT)

## Toldot Trans: Tracing a Trans Lineage Through the Torah

In Tanakh, Rivkah is described as *na'arah* (maiden). However, [that] word, every time it's used for her, is written without the final *hey* (ה) [*e.g.* Gen. 24:56, נַּעֲרָ], allowing it to be read as *na'ar* (lad). This is almost definitely a grammar quirk arising from the fact that the *hey*-suffix for words that end with "*ah*" was developed over time as Tanakh was being canonized. But since other places in Tanakh *do* use the *hey* and Rivkah never has the *hey* used for her" we can see a transmasculinity in her "lad"-ness….

SAME THING "HAPPENED" TO AVRAM AND SARAI- they get ה added to their names

**Hagit Rappel, Dirshuni (2022)**

*And Isaac appealed to God in his wife's presence, for she was barren* (Gen. 25:21) – He would stand in his corner and pray, and she would stand and pray in hers, and they were not answered, because their prayer was divided, not flowing from one spring. The Holy Blessed One saw their distress and opened up their eyes. Isaac and Rebecca stood face to face; he in the presence of his wife and she in the presence of her husband. They removed the partitions between their hearts and saw eye to eye. Rebecca saw Isaac's splendor but also his flaws – he does not dig wells like his father Abraham did, but merely preserves them. And Isaac saw his partner in marriage, her beauty, and purity of heart, but also her flaws, the suffering of her barrenness, the pain of the words people used to speak about her: "a daughter of evil, and a sister of evil, too." They took upon themselves to live in love, in togetherness, in peace, in friendship. And some say: it was from that wave of mercy that their son Jacob drew the strength to roll that big stone off the top of the well. *And Rebecca conceived* (Gen. 25:21).

"removing barrier" = midrash, and life

Text Text

## "SCAMPERING… WHY AM I THIS?"

### Genesis 25:22

וַיִּתְרֹצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָֽה׃

The children scampered within her; she said, "If so, why am I this?" and went to inquire of YHVH.

"As Abraham Lincoln said, 'Don't believe everything you read on the internet'"

### Rashi, Gen. 25:22

ויתרוצצו. ע"כ מַמְקְרָא זֶה אוֹמֵר דָּרְשֵׁנִי, שֶׁסָּתַם מַה הִיא רְצִיצָה זוֹ וְכָתַב אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי? רז"ל דָּרְשׁוּהוּ לְשׁוֹן רִיצָה כְּשֶׁהָיְתָה עוֹבֶרֶת עַל פִּתְחֵי תּוֹרָה שֶׁל שֵׁם וָעֵבֶר יַעֲקֹב רָץ וּמְפַרְכֵּס לָצֵאת, עוֹבֶרֶת עַל פֶּתַח עֲבוֹדַת אֱלִילִים עֵשָׂו מְפַרְכֵּס לָצֵאת.

This verse says, *Darsheini!* (explain me): it is hidden what scampering is and [why] it is written "If so, why am I this?" The rabbis explained scampering (*vayitrotzetzu*) as running (*ratzah*), that when she passed the doors of Torah [academies] of Shem and Ever, Ya'akov ran to convulse to come out, and when she passed a pagan door, Eisav convulsed to come out.

Yaakov/Jews/believers - good. Counter-xenophobia

### Ibn Ezra, Gen. 25:22

וטעם ותאמר אם כן. הדבר והמנהג, למה זה אנכי בהריון משונה׃

The reason she said "If so" – If *it* is so, the way and custom of pregnancy, then why is mine different?

## Ramban, Gen. 25:22

כִּי שָׁאֲלָה אֶת הַנָּשִׁים אִם אֵרַע לָהֶם כָּכָה, וַתֹּאמַרְנָה לֹא, וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן הַדָּבָר וְהַמִּנְהָג לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי בְּהֵרָיוֹן מְשֻׁנֶּה. וְהִנֵּה הַכָּתוּב חָסֵר וְאֵינֶנּוּ שָׁלֵם בַּפֵּרוּשׁ הַזֶּה. וְהַנָּכוֹן בְּעֵינַי כִּי אָמְרָה אִם כֵּן יִהְיֶה לִי, לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי בָּעוֹלָם, הַלְוַאי אֵינֶנִּי שֶׁאָמוּת אוֹ שֶׁלֹּא הָיִיתִי.

[Ibn Ezra wrote] that she asked the other women if they had this situation, and they said no, so she said, "If so" – if the way and custom of [my] pregnancy is different, etc. But this [impermissibly] would render the text incomplete. To me, the correct view is that she said, "If it be so with me, why am I in the world! Would that I should die or never existed."

## Hizkuni, Gen. 25:22

ותלך לדרש את ה' לדרוש בנביאים שהיו בימים ההם מה הוא זה שמתרוצצים בקרבה, כל כך יודעת היתה בעצמה שלא מלאו ימיה ללדת ודואגת שמא תפיל.

***She went to inquire of YHVH*** – To ask the prophets of those times why [the children] scamper within her. She was fully aware that her term of pregnancy was not yet fulfilled, and she worried that she might miscarry.

## Bereshit Rabbah 63:6

וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת ה' וְכִי בָּתֵּי כְנֵסִיּוֹת וּבָתֵּי מִדְרָשׁוֹת הָיוּ בְּאוֹתָן הַיָּמִים וַהֲלוֹא לֹא הָלְכָה אֶלָּא לַמִּדְרָשׁ שֶׁל שֵׁם וְעֵבֶר, אֶלָּא לְלַמֶּדְךָ שֶׁכָּל מִי שֶׁהוּא מַקְבִּיל פְּנֵי זָקֵן כְּמַקְבִּיל פְּנֵי שְׁכִינָה.

***She went to inquire of YHVH*** – Were there synagogues and study halls in those days? Did she not go only to the academy of Shem and Ever? This comes, rather, to teach that anyone who receives the face of a Torah scholar, it is as though they receive the face of Shekhinah.

## R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (Kli Yakar), Gen. 25:23 (d. 1619)

ויתרוצצו הבנים בקרבה וגו'. רציצה זו היה שבעברה על פתח ביהמ"ד של שם ועבר יעקב מפרכס לצאת ועשו מעכב ע"י, ובעברה על פתח ע"ג עשו מפרכס לצאת ויעקב מעכב על ידו, והיא סברה שאין הדבר כן אלא ולד אחד בבטנה ורוצה לצאת בין לפתחי בתי מדרשות בין לפתח ע"ג וא"כ ח"ו שמא שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך אמרה למה זה אנכי כי כמוני כשאר נשים עובדי ע"ג ומה יתרון יש לי עליהם אם ח"ו שתי רשויות יש, לפיכך ותלך לדרוש את ה' ר"ל לדרוש אחר מציאת ה' ממש מהו.

***The children scampered within her*** – This scampering was when she passed the entrance of the *beit midrash* of Shem and Ever. Ya'akov convulsed to come out, and Esav restrained him. And when she passed the entrance of a pagan house, Esav convulsed to come out, and Ya'akov restrained him. [Rivkah] did not reason this matter this way, but thought she had one fetus in her belly that wanted to come out whether for a *beit midrash* or a pagan house. If so, God forbid, then were there two authorities! So she said, "Why am I so?" If my pregnancy is like pagan women, what is my advantage over them if, God forbid, there are two authorities? So "she went to inquire of YHVH" – meaning, to inquire after the existence of God and what God really is.

THIS IS SPIRITUAL LIFE!!!

## R. Adin Steinsaltz, Gen. 25:23 (d.2020)

באותה תקופה היו אנשים גדולים שהאמינו באמונה שבה דבקה משפחת אברהם דוגמת מלכי צדק מלך שלם. רבקה חיפשה הוראה נבואית מאדם כזה.

At that time, there were great men who believed in the faith of Avraham's family, such as Melkhitzedek king of Shalem. Rivkah sought prophetic instruction from such a man.

## Ellen Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Rebecca cry out when she feels twins struggling in her womb? As it is written, "*if so, why do I exist?*" (25:22) What does she mean by these words?

LEAH THE NAMER ANSWERS: This Hebrew phrase – *im ken, lamah zeh anokhi?* – is puzzling. Because Hebrew is so terse and word order so flexible, we can read the question two different ways: "If so, why me?" Or alternatively: "Why am I this?" Clearly, the most baffling word in the phrase is "*zeh* – this." To what does it refer?

MOTHER RACHEL SUGGESTS: To the pain of her pregnancy. Rebecca is questioning whether she'll survive its rigors.

SARAH THE ANCIENT ONE DISAGREES: No, she is lamenting her fate, condemned to be the mother of warring children.

REBECCA EXPLAINS: No, mine was an elemental cry, familiar to all of us. Why is this happening to me? After my kindness at the well, did I deserve such a cruel fate, tormented by my unborn children? This was not why I left my homeland and family!

SARAH THE ANCIENT ONE MUSES: God's answer – that she will give birth to two rival nations – is not the answer Rebecca wants to hear, but it is the one she has to learn to live with….

## Rev. Wilda Gafney, Womanist Midrash (2017)

In verse 22 Rebekah's agency returns; her unborn children pitch so violently in her womb that it feels like one is "crushing [the life out of] the other." Rebekah gives voice to her feelings in a difficult-to-translate expression. A generous translation might be "If this is to be so, then why am I here?" Rebekah seems to be questioning why she is pregnant with twins, only to lose one in an internal struggle. She takes her question directly to God, using the verb *d-r-sh*, "seek." When the object of the verb *d-r-sh* is God, the one from whom knowledge is being sought, the inquiry is prophetic. God speaks directly to Rebekah, without an intermediary, prophet, or messenger.

## Sruli Fruchter, Rivkah's Existentialism: Wholeness and Brokenness

"If this is so, why am I in this world?" Rivkah asked. Perhaps we can read her question more fully and, boldly, suggest an answer. If this is so, Rivkah wonders, if there can exist two feuding forces; a dualism of morality between good and evil; a clash of ethical cultures; a shattering, a breaking, a rupture, in the wholeness of life, that is designed by God, then how can I be in this world? How can human beings be in pursuit of the good life, the whole life, the godly life, when God engenders its counter-opposite?... In a world of brokenness… we can only seek out God.

## BONUS CONTENT: ON LOVE

### Genesis 25:28

וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו כִּי־צַיִד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃

Yitzhak loved Eisav because he had a taste for game, and Rivkah loves Ya'akov.

### Hizkuni, Gen. 25:28

ויאהב יצחק את עשו גבי יצחק כתיב ויאהב ללמדך שלא היה יצחק אוהבו תמיד אלא באותו זמן כי ציד בפיו, אבל גבי יעקב שהיה איש תם כתיב ביה ורבקה אהבת את יעקב אהבה תדירה.

***Yitzhak loved Eisav*** – In connection with Eisav, Torah uses the past tense (*loved*), to show that Yitzhak did not love Eisav all the time, but only when when he "had a taste for game." But in connection with Ya'akov – a mild man – Torah uses the present tense (*loves*), as Rivkah's love for him was constant.

### Sfat Emet, Toledot 7:5

ויאהב יצחק א"ע כי ציד בפיו. הכתוב נותן טעם כי לא הי' אהבה אמיתית רק תלוי' בדבר לכן בטלה דבר בטלה אהבה. ולכן כשהקדימו יעקב בצידה אבדה האהבה. אבל רבקה אוהבת א"י בלי טעם ונתקיימה האהבה לעד. וכן כוונת המדרש במ"ש כל שהי' שומעת קולו היתה מוספת אהבה. פי' שלא הי' תלוי' בדבר. וכן אהבת המקום ב"ה לבנ"י ג"כ אינה תלוי' בדבר אף לא במעשיהם. רק בחר לו חלק ה' עמו כמ"ש עליו עשיר ישמח בחלקו. וז"ש אהבתי אתכם ואמרתם במה אהבתנו הלא אח עשו ליעקב כו' פי' שאין טעם במה לתלות האהבה רק שבנ"י מדובקין אליו יתי' בשורשם׃

***Yitzhak loved Eisav because he had a taste for game*** – The verse teaches that Yitzhak's love for Eisav was conditional, a love dependent on something fleeting (Avot 5:16). Therefore, when Ya'akov surpassed Eisav by bringing food from the hunt, Yitzhak's love for Eisav diminishe d. In contrast, Rivkah's love for Ya'akov was unconditional and enduring. The midrash supports this: the more Rivkah heard Yaakov's voice, the more her love for him grew, independent of any conditions. This enduring love mirrors God's love for the Children of Israel, which is not dependent on our actions. It is an intrinsic love, with God choosing us as God's portion. This is as in (Mal. 1:2), "I love you, says God, and you said back, 'Why do you love us? Behold, Eisav is the brother of Ya'akov, yet I have chosen Ya'akov.'" This love depends on nothing but the Children of Israel cleaving to God, their source.