

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶²Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb. ⁶³And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. ⁶⁴Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel ⁶⁵and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

וּתְקַם רִבְקָה וּנְעֻרֹתֶיהָ וַתִּרְפָּבְנָה עַל-
הַגְּמָלִים וַתִּלְכְּנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח
הָעֶבֶד אֶת-רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ:
וַיֵּצֵק בָּא מְבוֹא בְּאֵר לַחֵי רְאִי וְהוּא
יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב: ⁶³וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׂוּחַ
בַּשָּׂדֶה לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא
וְהִנֵּה גְמָלִים בָּאִים: ⁶⁴וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה
אֶת-עֵינֶיהָ וַתִּרְא אֶת-יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל
הַגְּמֹל: ⁶⁵וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָעֶבֶד מִי-הָאִישׁ
הַלֹּזֵה הַזֶּה לְקִרְאָתֵנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר
הָעֶבֶד הוּא אֲדֹנָי וַתִּקַּח הַצְּעִיף וַתִּתְּבֹס:
וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד לְיִצְחָק אֵת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה: ⁶⁷וַיִּבְאֶה יִצְחָק הָאֵהָלָה
שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת-רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי-לוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָה וַיִּנְחַם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי
פ שׂוֹי אִמּוֹ:

Gen.
24:63

Gen.
24:67

61. her maids Having maids was a mark of social status. In the ancient world, occasionally one gave a maid to one's daughter at her wedding.

REBEKAH AND ISAAC (vv. 62-67)

62. Beer-lahai-roi The name of a well located in the Negeb (16:14), probably part of an oasis to which sheep breeders came for water and pasturage. Isaac later settled there (25:11).

63. walking This translation of the Hebrew *lasu-ah* is based on the Arabic word *saha*, "to take a stroll." Another translation, from the Hebrew word *si-ah*, "to talk, to meditate, to pray," has Isaac "chatting" with his friends.

63-64. saw The Hebrew text, using identical phrases for the actions of Isaac and of Rebekah, conveys an impression of simultaneity. Their eyes met in instant recognition; each knew instinctively who the other was.

64. She alighted Some Jewish commenta-

tors observe that this phrase properly belongs after verse 65.

65. my master He merits this title because he is his father's sole heir.

her veil Israelite women normally were not veiled. In the ancient Near East, the veiling of the bride was part of the marriage ceremony, but wives generally went about unveiled. By veiling herself now, as a sign of modesty, Rebekah signals Isaac that she is his bride.

67. into the tent of his mother Thereby she formally became the successor to Sarah the matriarch, ensuring the continuity of the generations.

as his wife Literally, "and she became his wife." The marriage was consummated and her status was recognized by all.

loved her The first reference to love in the Bible (22:2) concerned the tie between parent and child. This, the second reference to love, relates to the bond between husband and wife.

63. walking The Talmud takes the word to mean "praying." Rebekah saw Isaac praying and was impressed by the piety of her future husband. The Sages maintain that Isaac instituted the afternoon service of *Minhah* (BT Ber. 26a-b).

67. Isaac comes to love Rebekah after he marries her. Their love is the result, not the prerequisite, of their relationship.

after his mother's death "As long as Sarah was alive, a light shone over her tent (signifying the divine Presence). When she died, it disap-

¹⁹This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If

וַיֹּאֲלֶה יְהוָה תוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן-אַבְרָהָם
 אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק: ²⁰וַיְהִי יִצְחָק
 בֶּן-אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת-רֵבֶקָה בִּתְ-
 בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדַן אֲרָם אָחוֹת לְבָן
 הָאֲרָמִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: ²¹וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק
 לַיהוָה לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא
 וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ יְהוָה וַתַּהַר רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

Gen.
25:21

ISAAC, FATHER OF TWO NATIONS (25:19–34)

THE BIRTH OF JACOB AND ESAU (vv. 19–26)

19. This is the story of Isaac This introductory formula serves as the general title for the narrative cycle that concludes with 35:29.

Abraham begot Isaac This note, seemingly redundant after the foregoing "Isaac son of Abraham," actually serves to emphasize Isaac's role as the sole successor to Abraham, in fulfillment of the promise of 21:12: "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you."

20. Isaac was forty years old Rebekah's age is omitted because, unlike Sarah, she was not beyond the age of childbearing.

Bethuel the Aramean According to 22:22, Bethuel was one of the Nahorite tribes, and Aram was his nephew.

Paddan-aram This place-name is found only in Genesis. It is either another name for Aram-naharaim, mentioned in 24:10, or a town within that region.

21. she was barren Once again we encounter the motif of the barren wife of the patriarch.

22. struggled in her womb Rebekah experiences an unusually difficult pregnancy. The fetal movements are spasmodic and she has fears of miscarrying.

If so, why do I exist? The Hebrew, an incomplete sentence, is saying something like, "Why then did I yearn and pray to become pregnant?" or "Why do I go on living?"

She went to inquire of the LORD She sought divine guidance in a moment of great perplexity and anguish. Generally, one would go to a spe-

CHAPTER 25

The sixth *parashah* of Genesis tells about the birth and early years of Isaac and Rebekah's twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Often in ancient tales, twins who are not identical are complementary, each twin representing one-half of a complete personality, each having qualities the other lacks and lacking qualities the other possesses. Jacob represents the gentle, cerebral side of a person, reaching goals by persuasion or cleverness. Esau represents the active, physical side. When the Torah describes them as struggling within Rebekah's womb and continues to portray them as rivals growing up, it may be

telling us that these two sides of many people are struggling within each individual for dominance.

19. Isaac, son of Abraham Isaac's life is defined by his being Abraham's son more than by any other single factor (*Ha-amek Davar*).

Abraham begot Isaac As Isaac was proud of his father, Abraham was proud of his son (Gen. R. 63:2).

21. Isaac does not pray for himself, for the fulfillment of his own needs, but for his wife. Rather than urging her to be content with her lot, he prays that she find fulfillment where it means most to her.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

25:21 *Isaac pleaded . . . because she was barren.* The tragedy of infertility need not be borne alone. The Conservative Movement has created a ritual for coping with infertility, published in its *Moreih Derekh*, to provide the infertile couple the support of their community (see Gen. 1:28, 30:14).

Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings.”

⁶So Isaac stayed in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say “my wife,” thinking, “The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.” ⁸When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. ⁹Abimelech sent for Isaac and said, “So she is your wife! Why then did you say: ‘She is my sister?’” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.” ¹⁰Abimelech said, “What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” ¹¹Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, “Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death.”

¹²Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold the same year. The LORD blessed him, ¹³and the man grew richer and richer until he was very wealthy: ¹⁴he acquired flocks and herds, and a large household, so that the Phil-

אברהם בקלי וישמר משמרתִי מצותִי חקותִי ותורתִי:

שני ⁶וישב יצחק בגרר: ⁷וישאלו אנשי המקום לאשתו ויאמר אחתי הוא כי ירא לאמר אשתי פן־יהרגני אנשי המקום על־רבקה כי־טובת מראה היא: ⁸ויהי כי ארכולו שם הימים וישקף אבימלך מלך פלשתים בעד החלון וירא והנה יצחק מצחק את רבקה אשתו: ⁹ויקרא אבימלך ליצחק ויאמר אך הגדה אשתך הוא ואיך אמרת אחתי הוא ויאמר אליו יצחק כי אמרתי פן־אמות עליה: ¹⁰ויאמר אבימלך מה־זאת עשית לנו כמעט שכב אחד העם את־אשתך והבאת עלינו אשם: ¹¹ויצו אבימלך את־כל־העם לאמר הנגע באיש הנה ובאשתו מות יומת:

שלישי ¹²ויזרע יצחק בארץ ההוא וימצי בשנה ההוא מאה שערים ויברכהו יהוה: ¹³ויגדל האיש וילך הלוך וגדל עד כִּי־גדל מאד: ¹⁴ויהי־לו מקנה־צאן ומקנה בקר ועבדה רבה ויקנאו אתו

Gen. 26: 8

Gen. 26: 12

POSSIBLE PERIL TO REBEKAH (vv. 6–11)

The episode that follows must have occurred before the birth of the twins. Otherwise it is hardly likely that Rebekah could have been passed off as a sister.

7. She is my sister The meaning of this stratagem is discussed in the Comment to 12:13.

8. fondling The verb translated as “fondling” (*m'tzahkek*) is a wordplay on the name Isaac (*yitzhak*), and refers to sexual dalliance.

10. might have lain In reproving Isaac, the king inadvertently confirms the patriarch's assessment of the low moral standards of the local inhabitants.

brought guilt upon us The entire community would have been blamed, as in the two previous stories about a matriarch in peril (12:17, 20:7–9).

11. who molests The Hebrew verb נגע has the sense of “causing harm,” “coming into physical contact with,” or “sexually harassing.”

ISAAC'S PROSPERITY (vv. 12–16)

Isaac reaps a bountiful harvest in a time of famine, clearly a fulfillment of God's blessing. His prosperity provokes the envy of some of the local people.

12. Isaac sowed Pastoral nomads engaged in small-scale agriculture from time to time. Isaac's experience was probably occasioned by the famine and encouraged by the favorable agricultural conditions in the low-lying plains of the region of Gerar, situated between the settled country and the grazing land of the nomads.

reaped a hundredfold The crop yield in relation to the unit of seed planted was 100 for 1.

istines envied him. ¹⁵And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth. ¹⁶And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us."

¹⁷So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled. ¹⁸Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them. ¹⁹But when Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water, ²⁰the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He named that well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹And when they dug another well, they disputed over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. ²²He moved from there and dug yet another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, "Now at last the LORD has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

פְּלִשְׁתִּים: ¹⁵וְכָל־הַבְּאֵרֹת אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ עַבְדֵי אָבִיו בְּיַמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו סָתְמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּמְלְאוּם עֹפָר: ¹⁶וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ אֶל־יִצְחָק לֵךְ מֵעִמָּנוּ כִּי עֲצַמְתָּ־מִמָּנוּ מְאֹד:

¹⁷וַיֵּלֶךְ מִשָּׁם יִצְחָק וַיַּחַן בְּנַחַל־גֶּרָר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם: ¹⁸וַיֵּשֶׁב יִצְחָק וַיַּחְפֹּר אֶת־בְּאֵרֹת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בְּיַמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו וַיִּסְתְּמוּם פְּלִשְׁתִּים אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקְרָא לָהֶן שְׁמוֹת בְּשֵׁמֹת אֲשֶׁר־קָרָא לָהֶן אָבִיו: ¹⁹וַיַּחְפְּרוּ עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָק בְּנַחַל

וַיִּמְצְאוּ־שָׁם בְּאֵר מַיִם חַיִּים: ²⁰וַיִּרְיְבוּ רַעֲיֵי גֶרָר עִם־רַעֲיֵי יִצְחָק לֵאמֹר לָנוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם־הַבְּאֵר עֵשֶׂק כִּי הִתְעַשְׂקוּ עִמּוֹ: ²¹וַיַּחְפְּרוּ בְּאֵר אַחֲרַת וַיִּרְיְבוּ גַם־עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ שִׁטְנָה: ²²וַיַּעֲתֵק מִשָּׁם וַיַּחְפֹּר בְּאֵר אַחֲרַת וְלֹא רִבּוּ עָלֶיהָ וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמָהּ רְחוֹבוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־עַתָּה רְבִיעֵי הָרְחִיב יְהוָה לָנוּ וּפְרִינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ:

15. the Philistines stopped up Prevented by the king from physically abusing Isaac, the townsfolk attempt to force him out by denying him access to water.

in the days of . . . Abraham See 21:25,30. The digging of wells or cisterns, usually in the dry beds of rivers, streams, and brooks, was essential to the survival of the pastoralists. After the winter floods would silt them up, they would have to be cleaned out. The Philistines spitefully refilled them with dirt.

16. Go away from us Given the hostility of his subjects to the foreigners, the king feels that he can no longer guarantee the safety of his guests and so requests their departure.

ISAAC'S WELLS (vv. 17–22)

Isaac submits to the expulsion order and moves

his family beyond the urban limits of Gerar to the same region in which his father had once made a prolonged stay (21:34).

19. A well of spring water A well of this type was especially valuable. In this instance it should belong to the finder, because there was no memory of its owner.

20. Esek Literally, "contention."

21. Sitnah Literally, "hostility" or "harassment."

22. He moved from there Once again Isaac avoids strife and moves away from the communal grazing ground.

Rehoboth The present-day town of Ruheibeh, located about 19 miles (30.5 km) southwest of Beer-sheba. There are wells of great antiquity in the area and traces of early agricultural settlements.

15. One commentator understands that the Philistines stopping up the wells was symbolic, not physical. They tried to block the dissemina-

tion of Abraham's ideas about God and human behavior—the need for human beings to live righteously (*Ha-K'tav V'ha-Kabbalah*).

Gen.
26: 19