

### 1. Bereishis 25:22, 23

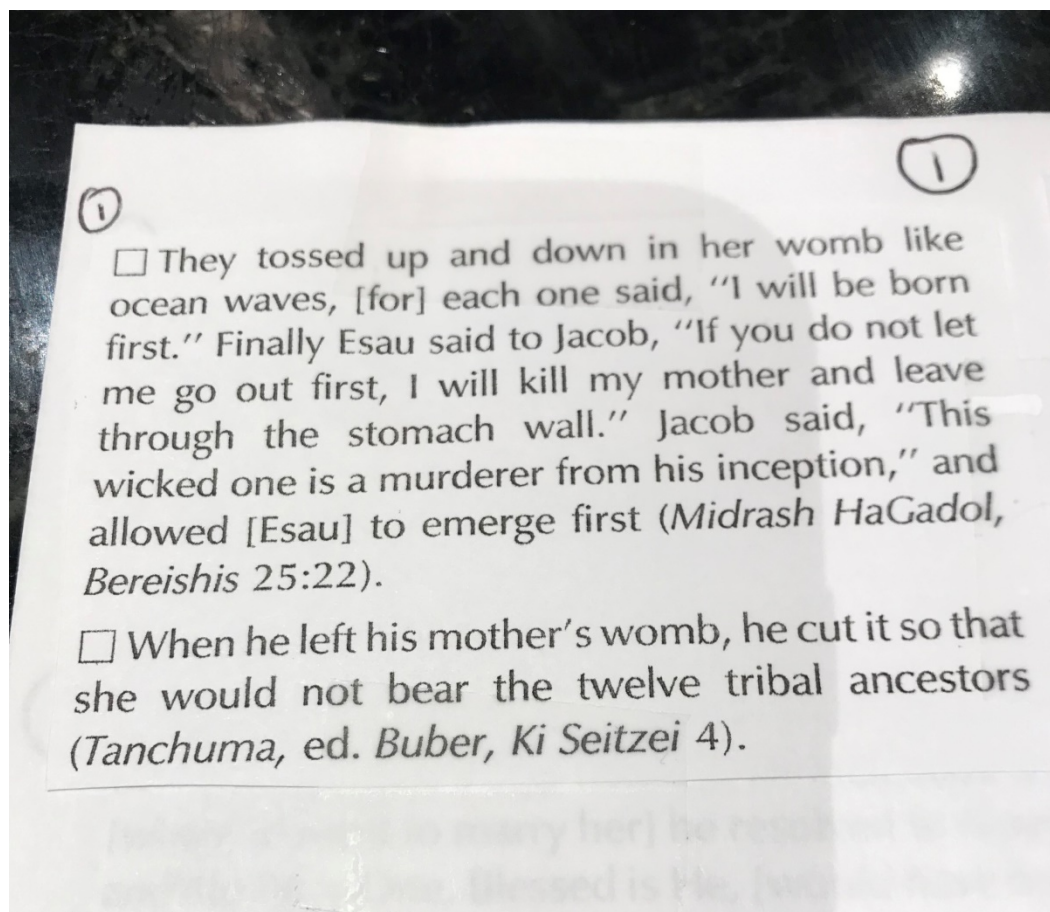
וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרֶבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:

But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the LORD

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ שְׁנֵי גֵיִים [גוֹיִם] בְּבֶטְנְךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֹאִם מְלֹאִם יֵאָמֵץ וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר:

and the LORD answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."

### 2. Midrashim



### 3. Bereishis Raba 63:8

וְכִיּוֹן שְׂרָאָה שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת דָּוִד אֲדָמוּנִי, דְּכָתִיב (שְׂמוּאֵל א טז, יב): וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיְבִיֵּאֵהוּ וְהוּא אֲדָמוּנִי, נִתְיָרָא וְאָמַר אִף זֶה שׁוֹפֵךְ דַּמִּים כְּעֶשָׂו. אָמַר לוֹ הַקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא (שְׂמוּאֵל א טז, יב): עִם יִפֶּה עֵינָיו, עֶשָׂו מִדַּעַת עֲצָמוֹ הוּא הוֹרֵג אֲבֵל זֶה מִדַּעַת סִנְהֶדְרִין הוּא הוֹרֵג

#### 4. Bereishis 25: 27, 28

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֶשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד אִישׁ שֹׁדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהֶלִים:

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp.

וַיֹּאֲהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֶשָׂו כִּי־צִיד בָּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב:

Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob.

#### 5. Rav Hirsch Bereishis 25: 27

It is just because of this — "train the youth in accordance with his way" — that each must be educated for the great goal based on his own personal way, in accordance with the future which can be foreseen for him based on his qualities. One who places Yaakov and Esav on the same study bench, and teaches them both together the same way toward a life of study and thought, is guaranteed to ruin one of them. Yaakov will draw from the well of wisdom with increasing desire, while Esav will only wait for the day where he can toss all the old books behind him, and together with them the whole great purpose in life, which he only recognized from one point of view — one which by his nature he detested.

Had Yitzchak and Rivkah penetrated more keenly into the soul of Esav, had they asked themselves how the latent energy, strength and flexibility in Esav's soul could be harnessed toward the ways of Hashem, then the future גִּבּוֹר — "mighty man" — might not merely be a גִּבּוֹר צִיד — "an excellent hunter" — but he could be a "mighty man before Hashem." Yaakov and Esav, with all their differences, could have remained brothers who complemented one another in their spirits and in their ways of life; at the very outset, Esav's sword would then have made a covenant with

Yaakov's spirit; and who knows what difference that would make in history. But that was not the way it happened. "And the boys grew up." Only after the boys grew into men were all astonished to see that even though both came from the same mother's womb, were educated and trained together, they were so totally different from one another in their actions.

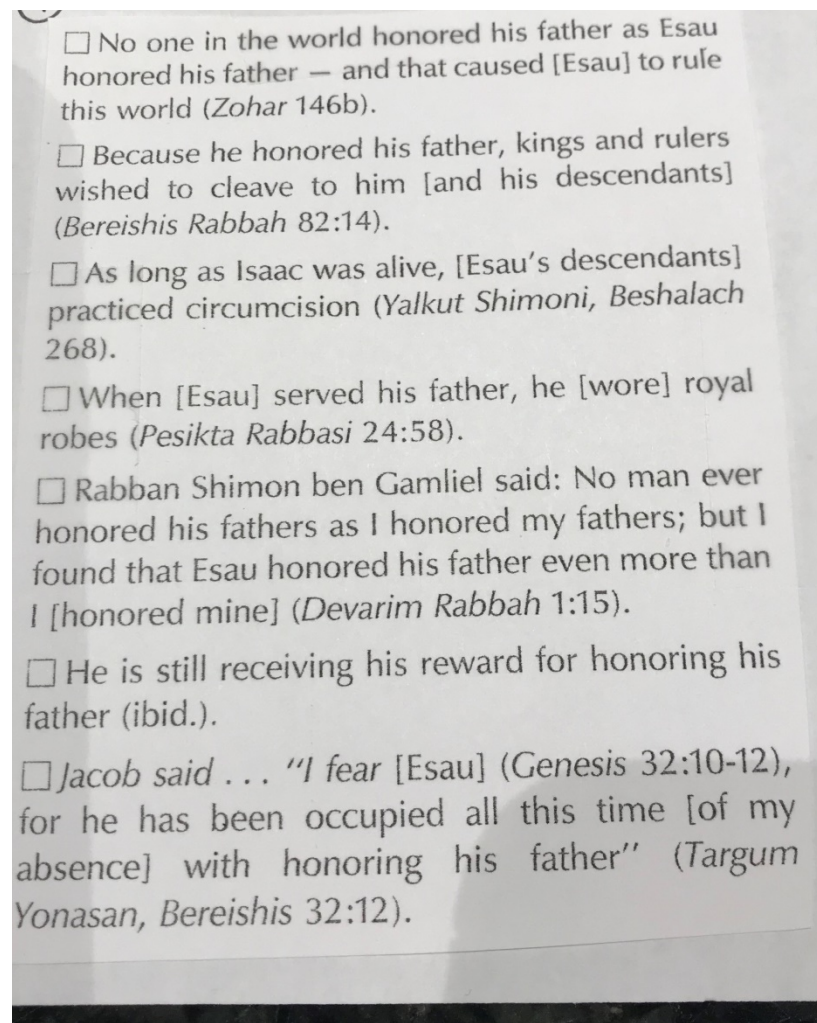
Rav Hirsch

## 6. Bava Basra 16b

אמר רבי יוחנן חמש עבירות עבר אותו רשע באותו היום בא על נערה מאורסה והרג את הנפש וכפר בעיקר וכפר בתחיית המתים ושט את הבכורה

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: That wicked Esau committed five transgressions on that day that Abraham died: He engaged in sexual intercourse with a betrothed maiden, he killed a person, he denied the principle of God's existence, he denied resurrection of the dead, and he despised the birthright.

## 7. Midrashim



## 8. Bereishis 25: 30-32

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל-יַעֲקֹב הֲלָעִיטָנִי נָא מִן-הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הִזֶּה כִּי עֵינִי אֲנִכִּי עַל-כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֲדָוִים:



And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished"—which is why he was named Edom.

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכֶּרֶה כִּי־אֶת־בְּכֹרְתִי לִי:

Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת וְלָמָּה־זֶּה לִּי בְכֹרָה:

And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?"

#### 9. Bereishis Raba 63:11

□ Esau asked Jacob, "What is the nature of this stew?" [Jacob] replied, "It is served because that sage [Abraham] has died" [and lentils were the food customarily given to a mourner upon returning from a burial]. "That sage [although so righteous] was stricken by the Attribute of Justice [without enjoying the pleasures of a long life (Eitz Yosef)]?" exclaimed [Esau]. "Yes," replied [Jacob]. "If so," said [Esau], "there is neither reward nor resurrection!" (*Bereishis Rabbah* 63:11).

#### 10. Midrash Shir Hashirim

□ Just as the [Divine] Name rested upon Jacob, so should it have rested upon Esau. Esau was worthy of producing kings, and Jacob priests. But all of these gifts were taken away from [Esau] when he sold his birthright to Jacob (*Midrash Shir HaShirim*, ed. *Buber* 18).

#### 11. Bereishis 26: 34, 35

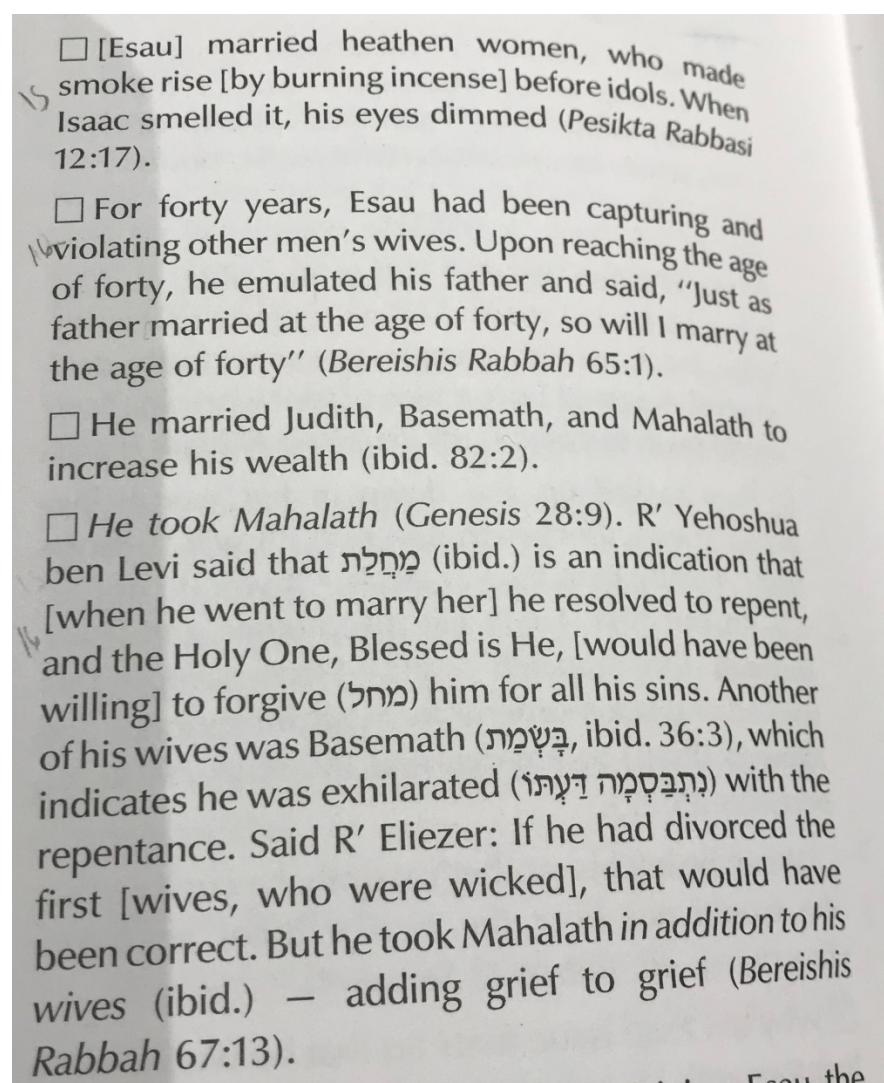
וַיְהִי עָשׂוּ בֶן־אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וַיִּקַּח אִשָּׁה אֶת־יְהוּדִית בַּת־בְּעִיר הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־בַּשְׂמַת בַּת־אֵילֹן הַחִתִּי:

When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite

(וַתְּהִינָן מֵרֵחַ לִיצְחָק וּלְרֵבְקָה)

and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.

## 12. Midrashim



## 13. Bereishis 27: 28, 29

וַיִּתֵּן־לָהּ הָאֱלֹהִים מְטֹל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמַנֵּי הָאָרֶץ וְרֹב דָּגָן וְתִירֹשׁ:

“May God give you Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, Abundance of new grain and wine.

יַעֲבֹדוךָ עַמִּים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ לְאֻמִּים הָיָה גְבִיר לְאַחֶיךָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָּךְ בְּנֵי אִמְךָ אֲרָרֶיךָ  
אֲרוּר וּמְבֹרָכֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ:

Let peoples serve you, And nations bow to you; Be master over your brothers,  
And let your mother's sons bow to you. Cursed be they who curse you, Blessed  
they who bless you.”

14. Bereishis 28: 3, 4

וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֶכְךָ אֶתְּךָ וַיַּפְרֶךָ וַיַּרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקַהֲל עַמִּים:

May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an  
assembly of peoples.

וַיִּתֵּן-לָּךְ אֶת-בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם לָּךְ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אֶתְּךָ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִגְרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן אֱלֹהִים  
לְאַבְרָהָם:

May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may  
possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham.”

15. Bereishis 27: 41

וַיִּשְׁטֹם עֵשָׂו אֶת-יַעֲקֹב עַל-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכּוֹ אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ יִקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי  
וְאֶהְרֹגָה אֶת-יַעֲקֹב אָחִי:

Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his  
father had given him, and Esau said to himself, “Let but the mourning period of  
my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob.”

16. Vayikra Raba 27:11

אָמַר רַבִּי לִוִּי אוֹי לָהֶם לְרָשָׁעִים שֶׁהֵם מִתְעַסְקִים בְּעֲצוֹת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד אוֹמֵר  
עֲצָתִי יָפָה מֵעֲצָתְךָ. עֵשָׂו אָמַר שׁוּטָה הִיא קֵין שֶׁהָרַג אֶת אָחִיו בְּחַיִּי אָבִיו וְלֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ  
שֶׁאָבִיו פָּרָה וְרָבָה, אֲנִי אֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה כֵן אֲלֹא (בְּרֵאשִׁית כז, מא): יִקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי. פָּרָעָה  
אָמַר שׁוּטָה הִיא עֵשָׂו שֶׁאָמַר: יִקְרְבוּ יָמֵי אָבִל אָבִי, וְלֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁאָחִיו פָּרָה וְרָבָה בְּחַיִּי  
אָבִיו, אֲנִי אֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה כֵן אֲלֹא עַד דְּאֵינוֹן דְּקִיָּין תַּחֲלוֹת כְּרִסְיָה אִמְהוֹן אָנָּה מְחַנֵּק יִתְהוֹן, הֲדָא

הוא דְּכָתִיב (שמות א, טז): וּרְאִיתָן עַל הָאֲבָנִים וְגו' כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹד הַיֵּאֲרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ. הָמָן  
אָמַר שׁוֹטָה הִיא פְּרַעַה שְׂאֵמֶר: כָּל הַבֵּן הַיְלֹד הַיֵּאֲרָה תִּשְׁלִיכֶהוּ, וְלֹא הִיא יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהַבְּנוֹת  
נִשְׂאוֹת לְאֲנָשִׁים וּפְרוֹת וְרַבּוֹת מֵהֶם, אֲנִי אֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה כֵן, אֲלֹא לְהַשְׁמִיד לְהַרְג' וּלְאַבֵּד. אָמַר  
רַבִּי לִוִּי אִם גּוֹג וּמִגּוֹג לְעֵתִיד לָבוֹא עֲתִיד לוֹמַר כֵּן שׁוֹטִים הֵיוּ הָרַשׁוּנִים שֶׁהֵיוּ מִתְּעַסְקִים  
בְּעֵצוֹת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא הֵיוּ יוֹדְעִים שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָהֶם פְּטָרוֹן בְּשָׂמִים, אֲנִי אֵינִי עוֹשֶׂה כֵן אֲלֹא בְּתַחֲלָה  
אֲנִי מַזְדִּיג לְפְטָרוֹן שְׁלָהֶם וְאַחֵר כֵּן לָהֶם, הֲדָא הוּא דְּכָתִיב (תהלים ב, ב): יִתְּצְבוּ מַלְכֵי  
אֶרֶץ, אָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, רָשָׁע לִי בָאתָה לְהַזְדִּיג חֲיִיךָ שְׂאֵנִי עוֹשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה,  
הֲדָא הוּא דְּכָתִיב (ישעיה מב, יג): ה' כְּגִבּוֹר יֵצֵא כְּאִישׁ מִלְחָמוֹת יַעִיר קִנְיָה, וְכָתִיב (זכריה  
יד, ג): וַיֵּצֵא ה' וְנִלְחַם בַּגּוֹיִם הָהֵם, וַיְמַה כְּתִיב תָּמָן (זכריה יד, ט): וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל  
הָאָרֶץ.

17. Rashi Bereishis 27: 41

,יקרבו ימי אבל אבי. כְּמִשְׁמַעוֹ, שְׁלֹא אֶצְעֵר אֶת אָבִי

18. Rabbi Saks "Covenant and Conversation" pages 172, 173

There is at times a tendency on the part of the midrash to separate biblical characters into the wholly good and wholly bad, and for this there are good pedagogic reasons, as Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chajes points out.<sup>6</sup> To serve effectively as role models, biblical heroes must be seen as consistently heroic, non-heroes as systematic villains.

Yet beneath this overlay of midrash, the Torah teaches a different and equally important message, albeit one that demands a certain maturity to appreciate: even heroes have their faults and non-heroes their virtues, and these virtues are important to God. "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not withhold the reward of any creature" said the sages.<sup>7</sup> The Esau who emerges from the Torah has none of Abraham's faith, Isaac's steadfastness or Jacob's persistence. He is carved of an altogether coarser grain. But he is not without his humanity, his filial loyalty and a decent if quick-tempered disposition.

This too is part of the Torah's message. Just as we cannot predict God's actions in advance ("I will be who I will be," "I will have mercy and show kindness to whomever I desire"),<sup>8</sup> so we cannot predict in advance where God's image will shine in the affairs of mankind. It was the sectarians of Qumran, not the rabbis, who divided mankind into the "children of light" and the "children of darkness." Such anthropological dualism is as alien to Judaism as is theological dualism.

Something of the deepest possible consequence is being intimated in the story of Esau. The choice of one does not mean the rejection of another. Esau is not chosen, but he is also not rejected. He too will have his blessing, his heritage, his land. He too will have children who become kings, who will rule and not be ruled. He too will have his virtues recognized, above all his love and respect for his father. Not

accidentally are our sympathies drawn to him. The Torah is saying for all time to all humanity – not all are chosen for the rigors, spiritual and existential, of the Abrahamic covenant, but all are precious to God, each has his or her place in the scheme of things, each has his or her virtues, talents, gifts, and each is precious in the eyes of God.<sup>1</sup>