

## Morality and Isaac's blessing to Jacob

Choose a "hat" and read the following biblical source with a partner asking questions with the perspective of the "hat" you choose:



בראשית כ"ז

א

וַיְהִי כִּי-זָקַן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְתְּבֵינָה עֵינָיו מִרְאֵת וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-עֵשָׂו אָבְנָו הַגָּדֹל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו בְּנִי וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְנִי:

When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am."

ב

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה-נָא זָקַנְתִּי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי:

And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die.

ג

וְעַתָּה שֵׂא-נָא כְלֵיךָ תַלְיֶיךָ וְקִשְׁתְּךָ וְצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה וְצֹדֵה לִי צִידָה [צִיד]:

Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game.

ד

וַעֲשֵׂה-לִי מִטְעָמִים כַּאֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֵּתִי וְהָבִיָּאָה לִי וְאֶכְלָה בְּעֵבֹר תְּבָרְכֵךָ נַפְשִׁי בְטָרִם אָמוֹת:

Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."

ה

וְרִבְקָה שָׁמְעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל-עֵשָׂו בְּנֵו וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו הַשָּׂדֶה לְצֹד צִיד לְהָבִיא:

Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home,

י

וּרְבֵקָה אָמְרָה אֶל-יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה לְאִמֶּר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-אֲבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר אֶל-עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ לְאִמֶּר:  
Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau,  
saying,

ז

הַבִּיאָה לִּי צִיד וְעֲשֵׂה-לִּי מִטְעָמִים וְאֶכְלָה וְאַבְרַכְכָּה לְפָנַי יְהוָה לְפָנַי מוֹתִי:  
'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with יהוה's  
approval, before I die.'

ח

וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי לְאִשָּׁר אֲנִי מְצַוָּה אֹתָךְ:  
Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you.

ט

לְרֶגֶל נֹא אֶל-הַצֹּאן וְקַח-לִּי מִשְׁנֵם שְׁנֵי גְדִי עֲזִים טָבִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מִטְעָמִים לְאֲבִיךָ כְּאִשָּׁר אֶהֱבֶה:  
Go to the flock and fetch me two choice kids, and I will make of them a dish for your father,  
such as he likes.

י

וְהֵבֵאתָ לְאֲבִיךָ וְאָכַל בְּעֵבֶר אִשָּׁר יְבָרְכֶךָ לְפָנַי מוֹתוֹ:  
Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies."

יא

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-רְבֵקָה אִמּוֹ הֵן עָשָׂו אָחִי אִישׁ שָׁעַר וְאֲנִכִּי אִישׁ תָּלֵק:  
Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I am  
smooth-skinned.

יב

אִוְלִי וּמִשְׁנִי אָבִי וְהִינֵיתִי בְּעֵינָיו כְּמַתְעַתֵּעַ וְהֵבֵאתִי עָלַי קָלְלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה:  
If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not  
a blessing."

יג

וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי קָלְלָתְךָ בְּנִי אֲךָ שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וְלֶךָ קַח-לִּי:  
But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch  
them for me."

יד

וַיִּלְךָ וַיִּקַּח וַיָּבֵא לְאִמּוֹ וַתַּעַשׂ אִמּוֹ מִטְעָמִים כְּאִשָּׁר אֶהֱבֶה אָבִיו:  
He got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared a dish such as his  
father liked.

טו

וַתִּקַּח רְבֵקָה אֶת-בְּגָדֵי עֵשָׂו הַגְּדֹל הַחֲמֹדִית אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה בְּבֵית וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ אֶת-יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה הַקָּטָן:  
Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there\* in the house,  
and had her younger son Jacob put them on;

טז

וְאֵת עֶרְתַּת גְּדֵי הָעֲזִים הַלְּבִישָׁה עַל-יָדָיו וְעַל חִלְקַת צַוְּאָרָיו:  
and she covered his hands and the hairless part of his neck with the skins of the kids.

יז

וַתִּתֵּן אֶת-הַמִּטְעָמִים וְאֶת-הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשְׂתָה בְּיַד יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה:

Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the dish and the bread that she had prepared.

יח

וַיָּבֹא אֶל-אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אָבִי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי מִי אַתָּה בְּנִי:

He went to his father and said, "Father." And he said, "Yes, which of my sons are you?"

יט

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אָבִיו אֲנִי עָשׂוּ בְכֹרְךָ עָשִׂיתִי כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֵלַי קוּם-נָא שֹׁבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצִּידִי בְּעָבוּר תִּבְרַכְנִי נַפְשָׁךְ:

Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing."

כ

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-בְּנוֹ מִהֲזָה מַהֲרָתָּ לְמַצָּא בְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי הִקְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְפָנָי:

Isaac said to his son, "How did you succeed so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because your God יהוה granted me good fortune."

כא

וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל-יַעֲקֹב גָּשָׁה-נָא וְאִמְשָׁךְ בְּנִי הֲאֵתָה זֶה בְנִי עָשׂוּ אִם-לֹא:

Isaac said to Jacob, "Come closer that I may feel you, my son—whether you are really my son Esau or not"

כב

וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיִּמְשָׁהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הֲקֹל הַקֹּל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עָשׂוּ:

So Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and wondered. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau."

כג

וְלֹא הִכִּירוֹ כִּי-הֵיוּ יָדָיו כִּיְדֵי עָשׂוּ אֲחִיו שְׁעָרַת וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ:

He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; and so he blessed him.

כד

וַיֹּאמֶר אַתָּה זֶה בְנִי עָשׂוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנִי:

He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And when he said, "I am,"

כה

וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּישָׁה לִי וְאָכְלָה מִצִּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תִּבְרַכְךָ נַפְשִׁי וַיִּגַּשׁ-לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּישַׁת:

he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank.

כו

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יִצְחָק אָבִיו גָּשָׁה-נָא וּשְׁקָה-לִי בְּנִי:

Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come close and kiss me, my son";

כז

וַיִּגַּשׁ וַיִּשְׁקָה-לוֹ וַיַּרַח אֶת-רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר רֵיחַ רִיחַ בְּנֵי כְרִיחַ שְׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְוּ יְהוָה:

and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that יהוה has blessed.

After the discussion, read again and reflect on the morality and deceit as it appears in the Pshat (simple explanation) of the story.

1. What are the moral problems you can identify in the way Jacob received his blessing?
2. Was there an intent to consider the moral issue and the long term results?
3. What light does the following source shed on the connection between morality and faith?

בראשית כ"ה

כב

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבְּנִים בְּקֶרֶבָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי וַתִּלְקַח לְדַרְשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:

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

כג

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ שְׁנֵי גַיִם [גוֹיִם] בְּבֶטְנְךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעַיֶךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֵאמֹם מִלְאָם יִאֲמָץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צְעִיר:

and יהוה 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."

Rashi's commentary on these pesukim tries to help us understand how faith was the reason the immoral act was committed.

AND TWO RACES — The word לאם always denotes a people that has all the characteristics of a kingdom (Avodah Zarah 2b)

SHALL BE PARTED FROM THY BOWELS —as soon as they leave thy body they will take each a different course — one to his wicked ways, the other to his plain life (Genesis 5:27)

SHALL BE STRONGER THAN THE OTHER RACE —They will never be equally great at the same time: when one rises the other will fall.

4. What does the added information help you understand?
5. What do you still wonder?

**Rabbi Sacks on Morality:**

*Morality*, p.159

“Morality makes a difference to the way we think about problems and their solution. It shifts us from self-interest to concern for the common good, and from a narrow focus on immediate gain to more distant horizons. We need to be able to think in this collective, long-term way if we are to avoid the short-sightedness that led people to think that you could abandon morality without paying a momentous price.”

6. How should morality influence our decision making process?
  
7. Can you think of an example where you had to consider morality when making a decision?

The concept of measure for measure in Judaism means that a person’s actions are related to their reward or consequences. The following pesukim describe another lie.

בראשית ל"ז

לא

וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת יוֹסֵף וַיִּשְׁחֲטוּ שָׁעִיר עִזִּים וַיִּטְבְּלוּ אֶת־הַכְּתֹנֶת בַּדָּם:

Then they took Joseph’s tunic, slaughtered a kid, and dipped the tunic in the blood.

לב

וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפְּסִים וַיְבִיאוּ אֶל־אֲבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ זֹאת מָצְאנוּ הַכְּרֹנָא הַכְּתֹנֶת בְּנוֹ הוּא אִם־לֹא:

They had the ornamented tunic taken to their father, and they said, “We found this. Please examine it; is it your son’s tunic or not?”

לג

וַיִּפְיֶרָה וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתֹנֶת בְּנֵי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלְתָהוּ טָרֵף טָרֵף יוֹסֵף:

He recognized it, and said, “My son’s tunic! A savage beast devoured him! Joseph was torn by a beast!”

8. How is this lie an example of measure for measure?
  
9. The bible is not a history book. Why do we need to learn about the way Jacob, our nation's father, got his blessing?
  
10. Do you believe that the goal sanctifies the means?
  
11. What do you think Rabbi Sacks would say about it, based on the sources you read so far?

***Morality, p. 288***

Cooperative groups survive; others fall by the wayside. Unexpectedly, some such view seems to be implicit in the Hebrew Bible. God punishes Cain for murdering Abel despite not having told him, 'You shall not murder.' He punishes the citizens of Sodom, despite not having revealed a moral code to them. The Egyptian midwives who disobey Pharaoh and save the lives of the Israelite children- the first recorded act of civil disobedience in history- are described by the Bible as God-fearing. This is a general term that the Bible uses of everyone who acts morally. So the relationship is inverse: it is not that you need to fear God to be moral. Rather, being moral shows that you fear God. The Hebrew Bible, in these early stories, seems to assume that we have an innate moral sense. This is the voice of God within the human heart- which exists even prior to the rules and rituals, holy deeds and holy days that we call religion.

12. According to Rabbi Sacks, the bible gives us many examples of people who did not behave morally. Why do you think that is?

***Morality, p.315***

"I had the privilege of studying with some of the greatest philosophers of our time, yet I learned more about morality in my years as a congregational rabbi than I did at Oxford and Cambridge, and I did so by conducting funerals. As a young rabbi in an aging congregation, I often did not know the deceased personally, so I had to ask relatives and friends what they were like and what they would be remembered for. No one ever spoke about the clothes they wore or the cars they drove, the homes they lived in or the holidays they took. They spoke about their role in their family, their place in the congregation and its activities, the good deeds they did, the causes they supported, the voluntary work they undertook, and the people they helped. It is not what we do for ourselves but what we give to others that is our epitaph and that ultimately floods life with meaning. We are moral animals."

13. As you reflect on this quote and your own moral virtues. Can you describe a moral virtue that is very important to you?
14. Can you identify for yourself a place of potential growth?