

## Torah in Motion 5783 Parshat VaYishlach: The Significance of Esav's Family Tree

*Source Sheet by Sofia Freudenstein, sfreudenstein@yeshivatmaharat.org*

### FRAMING THE CHALLENGE:

#### סנהדרין צ"ט ב:ה' (1)

אמר וכי לא היה לו למשה לכתוב אלא (בראשית לו, כב) ואחות לוטן תמנע ותמנע היתה פלגש לאליפז (בראשית ל, יד) וילך ראובן בימי קציר חטים וימצא דודאים בשדה יצאה ב"ק ואמרה לו (תהלים נ, כ-כא) תשב באחריך תדבר בבן אמך תתן דופי אלה עשית והחרשתי דמית היות אהיה כמוך אוכיחך ואערכה לעיניך

### Sanhedrin 99b:5

Manasseh said: **But did Moses need to write only insignificant matters that teach nothing, for example: "And Lotan's sister was Timna" (Genesis 36:22), or: "And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz, son of Esau" (Genesis 36:12), or: "And Reuben went in the days of the wheat harvest and found *duda'im* in the field" (Genesis 30:14)? A Divine Voice emerged and said to him: "You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother's son. These things you have done, and should I have kept silence, you would imagine that I was like you, but I will reprove you, and set the matter before your eyes" (Psalms 50:20–21).** The verses in the Torah are not empty matters, with regard to which you can decide their import.

### TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS:

#### סנהדרין צ"ט ב:ח' (2)

בעיא לאיגורי באתה אצל אברהם יצחק ויעקב ולא קבלוה הלכה והיתה פילגש לאליפז בן עשו אמרה מוטב תהא שפחה לאומה זו ולא תהא גבירה לאומה אחרת נפק מינה עמלק דצערניהו לישראל מאי טעמא דלא איבעי להו לרחקה

### Sanhedrin 99b:8

Timna sought to convert. She came before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they did not accept her. She went and became a concubine of Eliphaz, son of Esau, and said, referring to herself: **It is preferable that she will be a maidservant for this nation, and she will not be a noblewoman for another nation.** Ultimately, Amalek, son of Eliphaz, emerged from her, and that tribe afflicted the Jewish people. **What is the reason** that the Jewish people were punished by suffering at the hand of Amalek? It is due to the fact **that they should not have rejected her** when she sought to convert. Therefore, the verse is significant.

#### סנהדרין צ"ט ב:ט'

וילך ראובן בימי קציר חטים אמר רבא בר' יצחק אמר רב מכאן לצדיקים שאין פושטין ידיהן בגול וימצא דודאים בשדה מאי דודאים אמר רב יברוחי לוי אמר סיגלי ר' יונתן אמר (סיבסוך) [סביסקי]:

### Sanhedrin 99b:9

**"And Reuben went in the days of the wheat harvest" (Genesis 30:14). Rava, son of Rabbi Yitzhak, says that Rav says: From here it can be seen that the righteous do not extend their hands to engage in robbery even of small items, as rather than taking wheat, Reuben took only the ownerless *duda'im*.** The verse continues: **"And he found *duda'im* in the field."** The Gemara asks: **What are *duda'im*?** Rav says: They are a plant called *yavruhei*. Levi says: They are violets.

**Rabbi Yonatan says:** They are *seviskei*.

### (3) רמב"ם מורה נבוכים, חלק ג' נ:ה'

אמנם סיפור משפחות 'בני שעיר' ויחסם בפרט הוא מפני 'מצוה אחת'. והוא – שהאלוה ית' ציוה למחות זרע עמלקי לבד ועמלק אמנם היה 'בן אליפז' מן 'תמנע אחות לוטן' אך שאר 'בני עשו' לא ציוה להרגם; וכבר נתחתן עשו עם 'בני שעיר' ... לכן באר הכתוב משפחותיהם ואמר שאלו תראו אותם בשעיר ומלכות עמלק אינם כולם 'בני עמלק' אבל הם בני פלוני ובני פלוני ונתיחסו לעמלק להיות אמם מעמלק. זה כולו יושר מאלוה עד שלא תהרג משפחה בתוך משפחה אחרת – כי 'הגזרה' לא היתה רק על זרע עמלק.

### Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 50:5

The list of the families of Seir and their genealogy is given in the Law (ibid. 36:20-36), because of one particular commandment. **For God distinctly commanded the Israelites concerning Amalek to blot out his name** (Deut. 25:17-19). Amalek was the son of Eliphaz and Timna, the sister of Lotan (ibid. 36:12). The other sons of Esau were not included in this commandment. But Esau was by marriage connected with the Seirites...If the genealogy of these families of Seir had not been described in full they would all have been killed, contrary to the plain words of the commandment. For this reason the Seirite families are fully described, as if to say, the people that live in Seir and in the kingdom of Amalek are not all Amalekites: they are the descendants of some other man, and are called Amalekites because the mother of Amalek was of their tribe. **The justice of God thus prevented the destruction of an [innocent] people that lived in the midst of another people [doomed to extirpation]; for the decree was only pronounced against the seed of Amalek.**

### HISTORICAL:

#### (4) אבן עזרא על בראשית ל"ו:ל"א

ואלה המלכים. יש אומרים כי בדרך נבואה נכתבה זאת הפרשה. ויצחקי אמר בספרו כי בימי יהושפט נכתבה זאת הפרשה. ופלי' הדורות כרצונו הכי קרא שמו יצחק כל השומע יצחק לו. כי אמר כי הדד הוא הדד האדומי ואמר כי מהיטבאל אחות תחפנחם. וחלילה חלילה שהדבר כמו שדבר על ימי יהושפט וספרו ראוי להשרף

### Ibn Ezra on Genesis 36:31:1

AND THESE ARE THE KINGS. Some say that this chapter records a prophecy. **However, Yitzchaki claims in his book that this chapter was composed during the reign of King Jehoshaphat.** He explained the generations as he saw fit. Was he not rightly named Yitzchak? Everyone that heareth his interpretation will laugh at him. For he identified Hadar (v. 39) with Hadad the Edomite (I Kings 11:14) and also said that Mehetabel (v. 39) is to be identified with the sister of Tahpenes the queen of Egypt. **Far be it for one to believe that our chapter was written in the days of Jehoshaphat as Yitzchaki maintains. Indeed his book is fit to be burned.**

### 5) JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum Sarna, at 408.

This list is not genealogical like the others, but it simply details eight kings who ruled in Edom prior to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy. The register is characterized by a lack of uniformity and by an assortment of anomalies: The length of the monarch's reign is never given; in four cases the father's name is recorded, in four not; a place-name is attached to seven kings,

but in three instances the formula is “the name of his city was X,” and in four there is simply the particle “from”; no place-name is repeated; with two kings some additional information of a personal nature is brought; remarkably, no king is succeeded by his son, yet the invariable formula “When X died, Y succeeded him as king” suggests unbroken continuity. The royal record inserted here is unique in the Hebrew Bible.

### IN CONTRAST TO JACOB:

#### (6) רש"י על בראשית ל"ז:א:א'

וישב יעקב וגו'. אחר שכתב לך ישובי עשו ותולדותיו בדרך קצרה, שלא היו ספונים וחשובים לפרש היאך נתשבו וסדר מלחמותיהם איך הורישו את החר, פרש לך ישובי יעקב ותולדותיו בדרך ארכה כל גלגולי סבתם, לפי שהם חשובים לפני המקום להאריך בהם, וכן אתה מוצא ב' דורות שמאדם ועד נח פלוני הוליד פלוני, וכשבא לנח האריך בו, וכן ב' דורות שמנח ועד אברהם קצר בהם, ומשהגיע אצל אברהם האריך בו. משל למרגלית שנפלה בין החול, אדם ממשמש בחול וכברו בכברה עד שמוצא את המרגלית, ומשמצאה הוא משליך את הצרורות מידו ונוטל המרגלית.

### Rashi on Genesis 37:1:1

AND JACOB ABODE — After it (Scripture) has described to you the settlements of Esau and his descendants in a brief manner — since they were not distinguished and important enough that it should be related in detail how they settled down and that there should be given an account of their wars and how they drove out the Horites (see Deuteronomy 2:12) — it explains clearly and at length the settlements made by Jacob and his descendants and all the events which brought these about, because these are regarded by the Omnipresent as of sufficient importance to speak of them at length. Thus, too, you will find that in the case of the ten generations from Adam to Noah it states “So-and-so begat so-and-so”, but when it reaches Noah it deals with him at length. Similarly, of the ten generations from Noah to Abraham it gives but a brief account, but when it comes to Abraham it speaks of him more fully. **It may be compared to the case of a jewel that falls into the sand: a man searches in the sand, sifts it in a sieve until he finds the jewel. When he has found it he throws away the pebbles and keeps the jewel** (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeshev 1).

#### 7) Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis, pg. 247-249

[Rashi] contrasts the account of Esau's *toledot* - his children and descendants - with that of Jacob's *toledot*...

**The main difference between the two accounts of settlings and offspring is a matter of length.** Esau's children produce children no more time than it takes to read the words on the page; Esau himself "settles in the hill country of Seir" (36:8), with equal, uncomplicated promptitude.

**The narrator is simply not interested enough to give us the complexities of a story of settlings and childbearings.** When it comes to Jacob and his *toledot*, his *yeshuvim*, however, the story is told in all its complication, in all the terrible, heart-stopping details. The turnings of the wheel of fortune, the wrenching reversals of the plots, which - retroactively - can be seen to create a chain of causality, all this is given in full, circumstantial detail in Jacob's case.

**The difference between the two narratives, however, is clearly more than a matter of length.** The real issue is one of importance. Esau's family is not, literally, worth thinking about (*hashuvim*), their lives resolve themselves predictably and simply; there are no secret areas

(*sefunim*), no crevices out of which God can speak. They settle down in their own country; they bear children; they even produce kings - exemplars of national coherence - many generations before Jacob's children are ready to do so...

**Jacob's settling is a long story; it is also a story of contingency and cruelty that tears apart the elegant closure that Jacob speculated he could read in his own lifetime.** But for this very reason, paradoxically, Jacob and his children are called *sefunim va-hashuvim*. **They are substantial, complicated, with secret potentialities, which take time to explore.**

### MYSTICAL UNDERPINNINGS:

#### 8 רבנו בחיי בראשית ל"ו:ל"ט:ג'

ועל דרך הקבלה. ואלה המלכים אשר מלכו בארץ אדום. ירמוז על העולמות שכרא הקב"ה במדת הדין קודם שכרא העולם הזה, וקודם שיתגלה מלכותו בעולם הזה, זהו לפני מלך מלך לבני ישראל, ומכאן שהיה בונה עולמות ומחריבן עד שכרא את אלו ושתף בהם מדת הרחמים, ולא אוכל לפרש כי הדברים עמוקים נשגבים ונעלמים עומדים ברומו של עולם.

#### Rabbeinu Bahya, Bereshit 36:39:3

The kabbalistic perspective: The words: **“and these are the kings who reigned over the land of Edom (Gen. 36:31).”** hint at **the worlds the Holy Blessed One created with the attribute of judgment before God created this world, before God revealed dominion in this world, and before the rule of a king of the children of Israel.** From here, God built worlds and destroyed them until God created these and joined them with the attribute of mercy. It is not possible for me to explain for the words are deep, elevated and concealed, standing at the pinnacle of the world.

#### 9 ספר הזהר ב"ק"ח ב:ג'

ישראל אינון מוחא דעלמא, ישראל סליקו במחשבה, שאר עמין דאינון קליפה אקדימו דכתיב (בראשית לו) ואלה המלכים אשר מלכו בארץ אדום לפני מלך מלך לבני ישראל. וזמין קב"ה לאקדמא מוחא בלא קליפה דכתיב (ירמיה ב) קדש ישראל ליי' ראשית תבואתה, מוחא יקדים לקליפה, ואע"ג דמוחא יקום בלא קליפה מאן הוא דיושיט ידא למיכל מניה, (שם) כל אוכליו יאשמו רעה תבא אליהם נאם יי'.

#### The Zohar, translation and commentary by Daniel Matt, (Vol. V) 2:108b

**Israel is the kernel of the world; Israel arose in thought. Other nations, who are the shell, preceded, as is written: *These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the children of Israel (Genesis 36:31).*** Yet the blessed Holy One intends to initiate the kernel without the shell, as is written: *Holy is Israel to YHVH, the first fruits of His harvest (Jeremiah 2:3)*—the kernel preceding the shell. Although the kernel will arise without a shell, who would dare extend his hand to eat of it? *All who eat of it will be held guilty; evil will befall them—declares YHVH.*

**(10) בראשית רבה ט':ב'**

דָּבַר אַחַר, וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד, רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא פִּתַח (קהלת ג, יא): אֶת הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֵה בְּעֵתוֹ, אָמַר רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא בְּעוֹנָתוֹ נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, לֹא הָיָה הָעוֹלָם רְאוּי לִבְרֵאת קִדְמָה לְכֹן. אָמַר רַבִּי אֲבָהוּ מִכָּאן שֶׁהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הָיָה בּוֹרֵא עוֹלָמוֹת וּמַחְרִיבֵן בּוֹרֵא עוֹלָמוֹת וּמַחְרִיבֵן, עַד שֶׁבָּרָא אֶת אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת דִּין הַנִּיזוּן לִי יִתְהוֹן לֹא הַנִּיזוּן לִי. אָמַר רַבִּי פִּינְחָס טַעְמִיהָ דְרַבִּי אֲבָהוּ, וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד, דִּין הַנִּיזוּן לִי, יִתְהוֹן לֹא הַנִּיזוּן לִי.

**Bereishit Rabbah 9:2**

2. Alternately, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good." Rabbi Tanchuma began: (Eccl. 3:11) "He brings everything to pass precisely at its time." **Rabbi Tanchuma said: The world was created at its time; the world was not appropriate for creation before this. Rabbi Abahu said: From this we learn that the Holy Blessed One was creating worlds and destroying them, creating worlds and destroying them, until he created these.** He said, "This is good for me; those are not good for me." Rabbi Pinchas explained Rabbi Abahu's reasoning: "And God saw all (pl.) that He had made, and behold it was very good (sing.)." **THIS** is good for me; **THOSE** are not good for me.

**POLEMICAL:****(11) פסחים נ"ד א:יד-טו**

...ובמוצאי שבת נתן הקדוש ברוך הוא דיעה באדם הראשון מעין דוגמא של מעלה, והביא שני אבנים וטחנן זו בזו, ויצא מהן אור, והביא שתי בהמות והרפיב זו בזו ויצא מהן פרה. רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: פרה בימי ענה הינה, שנאמר: "הוא ענה אשר מצא את הימם במדבר".  
דורשי חמורות, היו אמרים: ענה פסול הינה, לפיכך הביא פסול לעולם, שנאמר: "אלה בני שעיר החרי", וכתיב: "אלה בני צבעון ואיה וענה!" אלא, מלמד שבא צבעון על אמו והוליד ממנה ענה.

**Pesachim 54a:14-15**

...**At the conclusion of Shabbat, the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted Adam, the first man, creative knowledge similar to divine knowledge, and he brought two rocks and rubbed them against each other, and the first fire emerged from them. Adam also brought two animals, a female horse and a male donkey, and mated them with each other, and the resultant offspring that emerged from them was a mule. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel disagrees and says that the first mule was in the days of Anah, as it is stated:** "And these are the children of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; **this is Anah who found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the donkeys of Zibeon his father**" (Genesis 36:24).

**The interpreters of Torah symbolism [hamurot] would say: Anah was the product of an incestuous relationship, and as a result he was spiritually unfit to produce offspring. Therefore, he brought an example of unfitness, i.e., an animal physically unfit to produce offspring, into the world, as it is stated: "These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, and Shoval, and Zibeon, and Anah" (Genesis 36:20). And it is also stated: "And these are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah" (Genesis 36:24). One verse describes both Anah and Zibeon as sons of Seir, meaning that they are brothers, while the other verse describes Anah as Zibeon's son. Rather, this teaches that Zibeon cohabited with his mother, the wife of Seir, and fathered Anah from her.** He is called Seir's son although in fact he was the offspring of Seir's son and Seir's wife.

**(12) מדרש תנחומא, וישב א'ד'**

וכן נתעסק ביהוס בני עשו, ואלה תלדות עשו, להודיע נזילין. שאת מוצא שהן בני זמה, שכן הוא אומר, בני אליפו תימן ואומר צפי וגעתם קנו ותמנע ועמלק (דה"א א, לו). ותמנע היתה פילגש לאליפו (בראשית לו, יב), מלמד שנשא את בתו. כיצד, היה בא אל אשתו של שעיר ועברה וילדה ממנו תמנע ונשארה פנושא בתו של שעיר, והיתה בתו.

**Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeshev 1:4**

**He concerned Himself also with the genealogy of Esau's sons in the chapter *These are the generations of Esau* to disclose their degeneracy.** You find that they too were the offspring of incestuous relations. Scripture states in one place: *And the children of Elephaz were: Teman, and Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. And Timna* (ibid. 36:11), and elsewhere it states: *And Timna was concubine to Elephaz* (ibid., v. 12). This clearly informs us that Elephaz had sexual relations with his own daughter. How did that occur? He had sexual relations with Seir's wife first and made her pregnant and begot Timna. Later he married Timna, as though she were Seir's daughter, when in fact she was his own. That is why it says: *And the children of Seir: Lotan ... and Timna was Lotan's sister* (I Chron. 1:38–39). She was Lotan's sister by her mother, but not by his father; Elephaz was her father, and Timna became the concubine of Elephaz the son of Esau.

**THE POWER OF NARRATIVE:****(13) רמב"ם מורה נבוכים, חלק ג' נ"ב'**

דע כי כל סיפור שתמצאהו כתוב בתורה; הוא לתועלת הכרחית בתורה, אם לאמת דעת שהוא פינה מפינות התורה, או לתיקון מעשה מן המעשים, עד שלא יהיה בין בני אדם עול וחמס. ואני אסדר לך זה.

**Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 50:2**

Every narrative in the Law serves a certain purpose in connexion with religious teaching. It either helps to establish a principle of faith, or to regulate our actions, and to prevent wrong and injustice among men; and I will show this in each case.

**(14) רמב"ם הקדמה לפרק חלק**

היות התורה מן השמים. והוא שנאמין כי כל התורה הזאת הנתונה ע"י משה רבנו ע"ה, שהיא כולה מפי הגבורה. כלומר, שהגיעה אליו כולה מאת ה' יתברך, בעניין שנקרא על דרך השאלה "דיבור". ואין ידוע היאך הגיע, אלא היה משה ע"ה שהגיע לו, וכי הוא היה כמו סופר, שקוראים לו והוא כותב כל מאורעות הימים, הסיפורים והמצוות. ולפיכך נקרא "מחוקק". ואין הפרש בין "ובני חם כוש ומצרים" "ושם אשתו מהטבאל" "ותמנע היתה פלגש" ובין "אנכי ה' אלקיך" ו"שמע ישראל". כי הכל מפי הגבורה, והכל תורת ה' תמימה טהורה וקדושה אמת.

**Rambam, Introduction to Perek Chelek, Mishnah Sanhedrin**

The 8th Principle: And this is that you believe that all of this Torah that was given by Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, that it is all from the mouth of God. Meaning that it was received by him entirely from God, which is described by the expression "spoken". And it is not known how

Moses received it except by Moses himself, peace be upon him, that it came to him. That he was like a scribe that you read to him and he writes all that is told to him: all the events and dates, the stories, and all the commandments. Therefore he is called "The Engraver". **There is no difference between "And the sons of Cham were Kush, and Mitzraim, and his wife was Mehatbe'el" and "Timnah was his concubine" and "I am Hashem your God" and "Hear Israel [God is your God, God is one]" for it was all given by God. And it is all God's perfect Torah; pure, holy, and true.**

#### **15) ספר הזהר ג':קנ"ב א**

ר"ש אמר ווי לזהוהו ב"נ דאמר דהא אורייתא אתא לאחזאה ספורין בעלמא ומלין דהדיוטי, דאי הכי אפילו בזמנא דא אנן יכלין למעבד אורייתא במלין דהדיוטי ובשבחא יתיר מכלהו אי לאחזאה מלה דעלמא אפילו אינון קפסירי דעלמא אית בינייהו מלין עלאין יתיר, אי הכי נזיל אבתרייהו ונעביד מנייהו אורייתא כהאי גוונא **אלא כל מלין דאורייתא מלין עלאין אינון ורזין עלאין...** ועל דא האי ספור דאורייתא לבושא דאורייתא איהו, מאן דחשיב דהוהו לבושא איהו אורייתא ממש ולא מלה אחרא תיפח רוחיה ולא יהא ליה חולקא בעלמא.

#### **Zohar, Bahalotecha Zohar 3:152a**

Says Rabbi Shimon: **Woe to the man who says that the Torah came to merely relate stories and ordinary words.** For if this was so, even in this present day we could make a Torah from ordinary tales; and ones probably nicer than those [in the scriptures]. If it came to present earthly matters, then even the [present] rulers of the world have among themselves works which are superior. If this is the case, let us follow their example and compose some sort of Torah of our own. **Rather, the Torah contains in all its words supernal truths and sublime mysteries...** The stories of the Torah are thus only her outer garments, and whoever looks upon that garment as being the Torah itself, woe to that man--such a one will have no portion in the next world.

#### **16) רש"י על בראשית א':א'**

**בראשית.** אמר רבי יצחק לא הוה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית?

#### **Rashi on Genesis 1:1:1**

בראשית IN THE BEGINNING — Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah *which is the Law book of Israel* should have commenced with the verse (Exodus 12:2) “This month shall be unto you the first of the months” which is the first commandment given to Israel. What is the reason, then, that it commences with the account of the Creation?