בס"ד
Fill Your Own Cup – Year Four
Midrash – Session Five
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Fill Your Own Cup – Fall Series – Reading the Parsha Through the Eyes of the Midrash

Session Five – Chayei Sarah

1) Genesis 24:58 – 67

58)They called Rebekah and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" And she said, "I will."
59) So they sent off their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his entourage.
60) And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,
"O sister!
May you grow
Into thousands of myriads;
May your descendants seize
The gates of their foes."
61) Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way.
62) Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb.
63) And Isaac went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching.
64) Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She fell from the camel.
65) She 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.
66) The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.
67) Isaac 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.

בראשית כד:נח – סז

וַיִּקְרְאוּ לְרִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶיהָ הֲתֵלְכִי
עִם־הָאִישׁ הַזֶּה וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֵךְ׃
וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה אֲחֹתָם וְאֶת־מֵנִקְתָּהּ
וְאֶת־עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת־אֲנָשָׁיו׃
וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אֲחֹתֵנוּ
אַתְּ הֱיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה וְיִירַשׁ זַרְעֵךְ אֵת
שַׁעַר שֹׂנְאָיו׃
וַתָּקָם רִבְקָה וְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ וַתִּרְכַּבְנָה עַל־
הַגְּמַלִּים וַתֵּלַכְנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקַּח
הָעֶבֶד אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ׃
וְיִצְחָק בָּא מִבּוֹא בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי וְהוּא
יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב׃
וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׂוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֶב
וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְא וְהִנֵּה גְמַלִּים בָּאִים׃
וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־
יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמָל׃
וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעֶבֶד מִי־הָאִישׁ הַלָּזֶה
הַהֹלֵךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִקְרָאתֵנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הָעֶבֶד
הוּא אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקַּח הַצָּעִיף וַתִּתְכָּס׃
וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד לְיִצְחָק אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה׃
וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח
אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֶּאֱהָבֶהָ
וַיִּנָּחֵם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ׃ {פ}

2) Genesis Rabbah 60:16

"Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah" –
All the days that Sarah was alive, there was a cloud suspended over the entrance to her tent. When she died, that cloud ceased. When Rebecca came, the cloud returned.
All the days that Sarah was alive, the doors were kept wide open. When Sarah died, that opening ceased. When Rebecca came, the opening returned.
All the days that Sarah was alive, there was [divine] blessing bestowed upon her dough. When Sarah died, that blessing ceased. When Rebecca came, it returned.
All the days that Sarah was alive, there was a lamp kindled from Shabbat night until Shabbat night. When Sarah died, that lamp ceased. When Rebecca came, it returned.
When he saw that she was acting just like his mother, separating *ḥalla* in purity, and shaping loaves from her dough in purity, immediately, he "brought her into the tent."

בראשית רבא ס:טו

טז וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ (בראשית כד, סז), **כָּל יָמִים** שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה
קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה עָנָן קָשׁוּר עַל פֶּתַח אָהֳלָהּ, כֵּיוָן
שֶׁמֵּתָה פָּסַק אוֹתוֹ עָנָן, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה
חָזַר אוֹתוֹ עָנָן. **כָּל יָמִים** שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת
הָיוּ דְּלָתוֹת פְּתוּחוֹת לְרִוָחָה, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁמֵּתָה
שָׂרָה פָּסְקָה אוֹתָהּ הָרִוָחָה, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁבָּאת
רִבְקָה חָזְרָה אוֹתָהּ הָרִוָחָה.
וְכָל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה בְּרָכָה
מְשֻׁלַּחַת בָּעִסָּה, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁמֵּתָה שָׂרָה פָּסְקָה
אוֹתָהּ הַבְּרָכָה, כֵּיוָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזְרָה.
כָּל יָמִים שֶׁהָיְתָה שָׂרָה קַיֶּמֶת הָיָה נֵר דּוֹלֵק
מֵלֵילֵי שַׁבָּת וְעַד לֵילֵי שַׁבָּת, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁמֵּתָה
פָּסַק אוֹתוֹ הַנֵּר, וְכֵיוָן שֶׁבָּאת רִבְקָה חָזַר.
וְכֵיוָן שֶׁרָאָה אוֹתָהּ שֶׁהִיא עוֹשָׂה כְּמַעֲשֵׂה
אִמּוֹ, קוֹצָה חַלָּתָהּ בְּטָהֳרָה וְקוֹצָה עִסָּתָהּ
בְּטָהֳרָה, מִיָּד וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה.

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3) Leviticus 24:1-9

GOD spoke to Moses, saying:
Command the Israelite people to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly.
Aaron shall set them up in the Tent of Meeting outside the curtain of the Pact [to burn] from evening to morning before GOD regularly; it is a law for all time throughout the ages.
He shall set up the lamps on the pure lampstand before GOD [to burn] regularly.
You shall take choice flour and bake of it twelve loaves, two-tenths of a measure for each loaf.
Place them on the pure table before GOD in two rows, six to a row.
With each row you shall place pure frankincense, which is to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to GOD.
He shall arrange them before GOD regularly every sabbath day—it is a commitment for all time on the part of the Israelites.
They shall belong to Aaron and his sons, who shall eat them in the sacred precinct; for they are his as most holy things from GOD's offerings by fire, a due for all time.

ויקרא כד:א–ט

(א) וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר.
(ב) צו את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן זית זך כתית למאור להעלת נר תמיד.
(ג) מחוץ לפרכת העדת באהל מועד יערך אתו אהרן מערב עד בקר לפני ה' תמיד חקת עולם לדרתיכם.
(ד) על המנרה הטהרה יערך את הנרות לפני ה' תמיד.
(ה) ולקחת סלת ואפית אתה שתים עשרה חלות שני עשרנים יהיה החלה האחת.
(ו) ושמת אותם שתים מערכות שש המערכת על השלחן הטהר לפני ה'.
(ז) ונתת על המערכת לבנה זכה והיתה ללחם לאזכרה אשה לה'.
(ח) ביום השבת ביום השבת יערכנו לפני ה' תמיד מאת בני ישראל ברית עולם.
(ט) והיתה לאהרן ולבניו ואכלהו במקום קדש כי קדש קדשים הוא לו מאשי ה' חק עולם.

4) Exodus 40:34-38

The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the Presence of GOD filled the Tabernacle.
Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of GOD filled the Tabernacle.
When the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set out, on their various journeys;
but if the cloud did not lift, they would not set out until such time as it did lift.
For over the Tabernacle a cloud of GOD rested by day, while fire would appear in that cloud by night—in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.

שמות מ:לד–לח

(לד) ויכס הענן את אהל מועד וכבוד ה' מלא את המשכן.
(לה) ולא יכל משה לבוא אל אהל מועד כי שכן עליו הענן וכבוד ה' מלא את המשכן.
(לו) ובהעלות הענן מעל המשכן יסעו בני ישראל בכל מסעיהם.
(לז) ואם לא יעלה הענן ולא יסעו עד יום העלתו.
(לח) כי ענן ה' על המשכן יומם ואש תהיה לילה בו לעיני כל בית ישראל בכל מסעיהם.

5) Genesis 18:1-8

(1) The LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of the tent in the heat of the day.
(2) He lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing over him. He saw, and ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and bowed to the ground.
(3) He said: My lords, if I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass by your servant.
(4) Let a little water be brought; wash your feet and recline under the tree.
(5) Let me bring a morsel of bread, and sustain your hearts; afterward you may go on, since you have passed by your servant. They said: Do as you have spoken.

בראשית יח:א–ח

(א) וירא אליו ה' באלני ממרא והוא ישב פתח האהל כחם היום.
(ב) וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו וירא וירץ לקראתם מפתח האהל וישתחו ארצה. (ג) ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אל נא תעבר מעל עבדך. (ד) יקח נא מעט מים ורחצו רגליכם והשענו תחת העץ.
(ה) ואקחה פת לחם וסעדו לבכם אחר תעברו כי על כן עברתם על עבדכם ויאמרו כן תעשה כאשר דברת.

(6) **Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah** and said: Quick, three se'ahs of choice flour! Knead it and make cakes. (7) Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the young man, who hurried to prepare it. (8) He took curds and milk and the calf he had prepared, and set them before them; and he stood over them under the tree, and they ate.	(ו) וימהר אברהם האהלה אל שרה ויאמר מהרי שלש סאים קמח סלת לושי ועשי עגות. (ז) ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל הנער וימהר לעשות אתו. (ח) ויקח חמאה וחלב ובן הבקר אשר עשה ויתן לפניהם והוא עמד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו.

6) Sarah's Tent *Anat Yisraeli, Dirshuni I, "Matriarchs and Patriarchs"* *(translation by Claude)* "And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother" (Gen. 24:67). Do not read *ha-ohelah*, "into the tent," but *Elohah*: "the God of Sarah his mother." For Sarah worshipped the God of Abraham her husband, yet she called Her *Elohah*, and saw within her faces that had not been revealed to Abraham. Elohah dwelled with her in her tent always and comforted her. Therefore "Sarah laughed within herself" (Gen. 18:12), for that vision filled her with happiness and joy. And when Rebecca entered Sarah's tent, she too saw that same Elohah, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, as She had been revealed to Sarah. At once her soul cleaved to the soul of Isaac: "And she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother" (ibid. 24:67).	**אוהל שרה** ענת ישראלי, דרשוני I אימהות ואבות 'וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֹהֱלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ' (בראשית כד, סז) אל תקראי 'הָאֹהֱלָה' כי אם 'אֱלֹהָּהּ שרה אמו'. שהייתה שרה עובדת את אלוהי אברהם אישה, ומכנה אותה אֱלוֹהָה, ורואה בְּקִרְבָּהּ פנים שלא נגלו לאברהם. והייתה אלוהה שרויה עמה באוהלה תמיד, ומנחמת אותה, ולכן 'וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ' (בראשית יח, יב), שמילאה אותה הראייה ההיא אושר ושמחה. וכשנכנסה רבקה לאוהלה של שרה, ראתה אף היא אותה אלוהה, אלוהי אברהם ואלוהי יצחק, כאשר נגלתה לשרה. מיד דבקה נפשה בנפש יצחק 'ותהי לו לאשה ויאהבה וינחם יצחק אחרי אמו'. (שם, כד, סז).

7) Aaron Koller, "Dirshuni and Classical Midrash: Form, Language, Contents, and Purpose," Journal of Textual Reasoning 16:1 (May 2025)

Why midrash? What is midrash for, for the Rabbis and for Dirshuni? Midrash is such a diverse category that it would seem that no simple answer to this question is possible. At different points, midrash seeks to educate, to elucidate, to amend, to appropriate, and to entertain.58 On a fundamental level, though, the entire enterprise is driven by one assumption: that the Torah is infallibly and infinitely true, and therefore that the more one probes it, the more angles one approaches it from, the more surface
irregularities can identified and exploited, and the more connections can be made, the closer we can come to grasping the Torah is all its splendor...

Textual idiosyncrasies and aberrations for a midrashist have been compared to the grain of sand for an oyster. They are fodder for thought, to be rubbed over and over, turned, toyed with, and built upon, and finally a pearl emerges…

The midrashist of Dirshuni looks at the plain reading and says, "Well, that can't be right, since it clashes with a central value." It is important to stress that this type of reading is found in rabbinic literature as well. For example, Psalm 44:24, "Wake up! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Awaken, do not reject us forever!" presupposes that God is asleep. The Rabbis look at this and say, "Well, that can't be right!" Uncomfortable with the presupposition, they tackle it head on and neutralize it: "Is there sleep with regard to God…? Rather, God as if sleeps, when Israel is in straits and the other nations are thriving." Other rabbinic texts voice objections to God's actions on moral grounds…

To return to the central point: Is Dirshuni driven by the same considerations as classical midrash? It seems that on a fundamental level, the answer is yes. Given the theological assumptions articulated above in Section 3, a midrashist has to respond to certain passages in the Torah with recoil. Can it really be that God would dictate that man should rule over woman? Is it possible that God would demand the sacrifice of Isaac from Abraham and not consult or even include Sarah? Can the Haggadah systematically exclude daughters from the narrative of the Jewish people? A faithful reading leads to a clear "no" in response to all of these questions. Just as Rabbi Aḳiva said that it is not possible that the Torah meant for a couple to drift apart during her menstrual period, and so the text must mean something else, it is not possible for the Torah to be discriminatory, and so the text must mean something else.

This allows for one final observation about the midrashic endeavor. In a sense, Rabbi Ze'ira is right: "This turns and turns again, and we learn nothing from it!" But this is precisely what makes it so useful as a genre as well. An attempt to overturn halakhah would strike deep at the root of contemporary Orthodox Judaism. Aggadic midrash, even theologically profound and radical midrash, leaves that edifice untouched. The writers and their readers can thereby remain traditional in practice and identity, even while raising the most profound questions about the Torah and its enduring value. In this way, too, Dirshuni is continuous with rabbinic midrash. The Rabbis also had daring things to say, and the traditional genres were flexible enough to accommodate even the most radical. "In those days, and in this time," Dirshuni shows that the traditions of rabbinic midrash are alive and well.