



You Call That a Blessing?

The Truth About "Eishess Chayil"

THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTOR:
RABBI BINYAMIN TEITELBAUM

They blessed Rivka and said to her, "Our sister, may you come to be thousands of myriads, and may your offspring inherit the gate of its foes." (24:60)

THIS BLESSING WAS GIVEN TO RIVKA BY none other than her wicked brother, Lavan. Yet, incredibly, it is also part of our own customs, at one of the most sacred points of the life cycle! Many commentaries describe a custom where the assembled guests recite this verse as a blessing for a bride, immediately following the *badekken* ceremony, where the groom approaches his soon-to-be wife and drapes a veil over her face. It is a moment brimming with joy, significance, and mystical overtones, yet we choose at this moment to quote, of all people, the evil Lavan!

Furthermore, our Sages explain that Hashem did not allow Rivka to have any offspring until our forefather Yitzchak davened on her behalf, lest people think it was Lavan's blessing that caused her to have children. So isn't there someone else that we can quote, instead?

In *Toras Moshe*, the Chasam Sofer advances a brilliant and powerful explanation. He says that although Yitzchak was a *tzaddik ben tzaddik*, a righteous person born of a righteous person, Rivka was a *tzadeikes bas rasha*, a righteous person born to a wicked person. As such, she did not have enough merit to bear two righteous children, only one—therefore

After Sarah's tragic passing, Avraham our Patriarch returned to Be'er Sheva "*Lispod l'Sarah v'livkosah*, to cry for Sarah and to eulogize her." Midrash Tanchuma explains that at that moment, Avraham recited the now-famous verses of "*Eishess Chayil*" ("Woman of Valor") from Mishlei (Proverbs 31:10–31), applying those beautiful words and praises to our Matriarch. Furthermore, the Midrash expounds on each verse individually and applies it to Sarah.

Yet some of these explanations are quite puzzling. For example, Sarah is given credit for Avraham's performance of circumcision, for the keeping of Shabbos

in his home, and as the source of merit that enabled the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah—which occurred after she had already passed away! How do we understand the connection between Sarah's greatness and these seemingly disconnected outcomes?

Nesivos Shalom explains that in many holy works we find that the positive spiritual influence and blessings bestowed upon a house are in the merit of the home's "Woman of Valor." Any and all successful implementations of the Torah's values and performance of mitzvos in that home are directly attributed

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there was to be one Yaakov, but also one Esav. Yaakov was the product of Yitzchak's influence, but Esav could be attributed to Rivka's family. More specifically, Esav was connected to Lavan—as the Talmud (Bava Basra 110a) tells us, a mother's brother causes the children to be similar to them.

This was Lavan's nefarious intent, implicit in his "blessing:" Rivka's offspring should be successful, *but as the children of his sister*. He wanted her children to be wicked, like him! It is for this reason that Hashem withheld children from Rivka until Yitzchak's fervent supplication, so that his righteousness would allow her to bear a *tzaddik* like Yaakov.

It is exactly from this that the custom to bless the bride is derived. As the

Chasam Sofer explains, we are blessing the bride, as her veil is lowered, with the words of Lavan, *so that it be turned on its head*. We say "*our sister*"—may you be like *us* and *our* brotherly influence, so as to counterbalance the effects of the "blessing" of Lavan.

It is interesting to note that many sources see a mystical component to the lowering of the veil over the bride. When Rivka saw Yitzchak for the first time, the Torah tells us that she lowered a veil over her face. We invoke the merit of Rivka our Matriarch at that exact moment, and it is then that we bless the bride with children successfully raised—not as Lavan and Esav's family, but rather in the ways of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. ❧

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At the Kollel

Every Day

🖐️🖐️ **“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur**
(Maseches Sota)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kollel Yisgaber K’ari**
(amud-a-day of Mishnah B’rurah)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kitzur Shuchan Aruch**
Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🖐️ **Daf Yomi**
Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🖐️🖐️ **Nightly Halacha Chabura**
Rabbis Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum.....
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Chavrusa Learning
(private & small groups).....times vary

Sunday *Free brunch!*

🖐️🖐️ **America Runs on Torah**
(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbis Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

Tuesday

🖐️ **Mishnah**
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....8:10–9 PM

👤🖐️ **Partners in Torah**
at the Mayerson JCC
Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

🖐️🖐️ **Around the Table**
(Parasha & Pirkei Avos)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9 PM

Wednesday

👤🖐️ **Torah Treasures for**
Seniors at the Mayerson JCC
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....10:30–11:15 AM

👤🖐️ **Downtown Lunch-n-Learn**
at Strauss & Troy
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....12–1 PM

Thursday

🖐️🖐️ **Halacha** (based on the parasha)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

Minyanim for Standard Time

Shacharis
Sunday.....8:15 AM
*On Sundays when the Kollel is not
in session, Shacharis is at 8 AM*
Monday–Friday.....7:20 AM

Mincha
Sunday.....1:15 PM
Mon.–Thurs. thru January.....2:30 PM
Sun.–Thurs., Feb.–Mar.....5:45 PM
Shabbos.....2:40 PM

Ma’ariv
In the Beis Midrash:
Sunday–Wednesday.....9:45 PM
Thursday.....10 PM

KEY: 🖐️ Beginners
🖐️ Intermediate
🖐️ Advanced
👤 for men and women

Looking for a chavrusa? See Coordinator Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!
Chavrusos are available noon–1 PM on weekdays, and 8–9:45 PM Sun.–Thurs.

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to her. Therefore, even the fulfillment of the mitzvah of circumcision, or the safeguarding of Shabbos in the home, are attributed to her and to her merit. In fact, the Midrash says that Hashem *had* to “bless Avraham with everything” after Sarah passed away, so that people wouldn’t think that everything Avraham had until now had only been in Sarah’s merit, and that he himself was not meritorious!

Additionally, our Sages teach us that the righteous are referred to as living even after their passing, indicating that their influence has an eternal aspect, which remains in this world even after their physical death. In this way, the Midrash sees Sarah’s influence as crucial

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to the successful purchase of the Cave of Machpelah, even posthumously.

We now can understand better why we recite “Eishess Chayil” every Shabbos. As *Nesivos Shalom* explains, based on the Abudarham, Shabbos is referred to as a bride, and Hashem is her groom. This is why every Friday night we say “*Lcha dodi likras kallah, p’nei Shabbos n’kab’la*—let us go, my Beloved, to greet the bride, to accept the Shabbos,” referring to the “Woman of Valor” that lies within Shabbos. For just as the woman of the house is the source of spiritual merit in her home, so too is Shabbos the source of spiritual merit that we receive in the world throughout the other six days of the week (as explained in the Zohar).

There is an old saying that behind every great man stands a great—or even greater—woman. (Some joke and say that behind every great man stands a woman rolling her eyes.) In our worldview, we say that behind every act of kindness, word of Torah, or mitzvah in a Jewish home, stands a great woman. It is in our genetic makeup, going all the way back to our Matriarch Sarah, the very first “Woman of Valor.” 🖐️