RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY כנסת הרבנים

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Jacob the Trickster

Parashat Toledot 2026/5787 | Rabbi Ben Goldberg*

A. From the *Parashah*

1. Genesis 27:5-13	1. בראשית כז:ה–יג
(5) Rebecca had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home, (6) Rebecca said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying, (7) 'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with GOD's approval, before I die.' (8) Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you. (9) 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. (10) Then take it to your father to eat, in order that he may bless you before he dies." (11) Jacob answered his mother Rebecca, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man and I'm a smooth-skinned one. (12) If my father touches me, I shall appear to him **as a trickster** and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing." (13) But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."	(ה) וְרִבְקָה שֹׁמַעַת בְּדַבֵּר יִצְחָק אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּנוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ עֵשָׂו הַשָּׂדֶה לָצוּד צַיִד לְהָבִיא: (ו) וְרִבְקָה אָמְרָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־אָבִיךָ מְדַבֵּר אֶל־עֵשָׂו אָחִיךָ לֵאמֹר: (ז) הָבִיאָה לִּי צַיִד וַעֲשֵׂה־לִי מַטְעַמִּים וְאֹכְלָה וַאֲבָרֶכְכָה לִפְנֵי ה' לִפְנֵי מוֹתִי: (ח) וְעַתָּה בְנִי שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי לַאֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֹתָךְ: (ט) לֶךְ־נָא אֶל־הַצֹּאן וְקַח־לִי מִשָּׁם שְׁנֵי גְדָיֵי עִזִּים טֹבִים וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתָם מַטְעַמִּים לְאָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָהֵב: (י) וְהֵבֵאתָ לְאָבִיךָ וְאָכָל בַּעֲבֻר אֲשֶׁר יְבָרֶכְךָ לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ: (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל־רִבְקָה אִמּוֹ הֵן עֵשָׂו אָחִי אִישׁ שָׂעִר וְאָנֹכִי אִישׁ חָלָק: (יב) אוּלַי יְמֻשֵּׁנִי אָבִי וְהָיִיתִי בְעֵינָיו **כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ** וְהֵבֵאתִי עָלַי קְלָלָה וְלֹא בְרָכָה: (יג) וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִמּוֹ עָלַי קִלְלָתְךָ בְנִי אַךְ שְׁמַע בְּקֹלִי וְלֵךְ קַח־לִי:

Discussion Questions:

- What are Jacob's two (perhaps related) objections to Rebecca's plan? Is he afraid that this plan won't work, or that it will?
- Consider the unusual word כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ ("as a trickster") in verse 12. From context, what seems to be Jacob's concern?

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B. What is כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ?

2. II Chronicles 36:14-17	2. דברי הימים ב לו:יד–יז
(14) All the officers of the priests and the people committed many trespasses, following all the abominable practices of the nations. They polluted the House of GOD that had been consecrated in Jerusalem. (15) The ETERNAL God of their ancestors had sent word to them through messengers daily without fail, having taken pity on the people and on the temple. (16) But they mocked the messengers of God and disdained those words and **taunted** those prophets until GOD's wrath against this people grew beyond remedy. (17) [God] therefore brought the king of the Chaldeans upon them, who killed their youths by the sword in their sanctuary; neither youth nor maiden, elder, or graybeard were spared—all were delivered into his hands.	(יד) גַּם כָּל־שָׂרֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהָעָם הִרְבּוּ (למעול) [לִמְעָל־]מַעַל כְּכֹל תֹּעֲבוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וַיְטַמְּאוּ אֶת־בֵּית ה' אֲשֶׁר הִקְדִּישׁ בִּירוּשָׁלִָם: (טו) וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם עֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַד מַלְאָכָיו הַשְׁכֵּם וְשָׁלוֹחַ כִּי־חָמַל עַל־עַמּוֹ וְעַל־מְעוֹנוֹ: (טז) וַיִּהְיוּ מַלְעִבִים בְּמַלְאֲכֵי הָאֱלֹקִים וּבוֹזִים דְּבָרָיו **וּמִתַּעְתְּעִים** בִּנְבִאָיו עַד עֲלוֹת חֲמַת־ה' בְּעַמּוֹ עַד־לְאֵין מַרְפֵּא: (יז) וַיַּעַל עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־מֶלֶךְ (כשדיים) [כַּשְׂדִּים] וַיַּהֲרֹג בַּחוּרֵיהֶם בַּחֶרֶב בְּבֵית מִקְדָּשָׁם וְלֹא חָמַל עַל־בָּחוּר וּבְתוּלָה זָקֵן וְיָשִׁישׁ הַכֹּל נָתַן בְּיָדוֹ:

Discussion Questions:

- This passage, from the very end of the entire *Tanakh*, describes the events that led to the destruction of the First Temple. It is also the one other passage where our word כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ appears. How does this passage help us understand this word?

C. From the Commentators

3. **Ibn Ezra, Genesis 27:12** [R. Abraham ibn Ezra, 12th century, Spain]	3. אבן עזרא, בראשית כז:יב
AS A MOCKER. The root of *ki-metatea'* ("as a mocker") is doubled. It comes from the same root as *to'eh* (err). The meaning of *ki-metatea'* is: as one who misleads his fellow man.	כמתעתע. כפול מגזרת תועה כאיש שמתעה אחר:

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Discussion Questions:

- According to Ibn Ezra, what was Jacob afraid of doing?
- Why is he so afraid of this? What may be the consequences of his actions for his relationship with his father?

4. ***ha-Emek Davar*, Genesis 27:12** [R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv), 19th century, Lithuania]	**4. העמק דבר, בראשית כז:יב**
I SHALL APPEAR TO HIM AS A DECEIVER. That is, as someone who has strayed from his usual way. For he knows me to be "a straightforward man, dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27), and that is my customary character. But when he finds me acting with cunning and deceit, I will appear to him as someone who has lost his way. This is worse than someone who has acted with cunning and shrewdness from the outset.	והייתי בעיניו כמתעתע. תועה מדרכו שהרי יודע אותי איש תם יושב אהלים (בראשית כה:כז) וזהו מדתי. וכאשר ימצא אותי בדרך ערמ' ותחבול' אהי' בעיניו כתועה בדרך אשר הוא גרוע מן ההולך בדרך ערמה וחריצות מתחלה:

Discussion Questions:

- According to *ha-Emek Davar*, what is Jacob worried about?
- Does he think his father would be angry or disappointed? Which is worse?

5. Rav Hirsch on Torah, Genesis 27:12 [R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 19th century, Germany]	**5. Rav Hirsch on Torah, Genesis 27:12 [original German]**
כמתעתע, as a cheat, as one who would deceive somebody. This כ ["as a"] explains everything. Jacob was no cheat and did not want to deceive. But he was afraid he would not be given time to explain to his father that he was only blindly obeying his mother. Isaac would at once curse him for trying to deceive him. But thereby he also told her, indirectly and in the most respectful manner, how objectionable	wie ein Betrüger, wie einer, der ‚כמתעתע' erklärt "כ" jemanden irre führen will! Dieses alles. Jakob war kein Betrüger, wollte nicht täuschen, allein er wird, meint er, gar nicht Zeit haben, Jizchak aufzuklären, daß er nur der Mutter nicht ungehorsam sein wollte, Jizchak wird ihm sofort als Betrüger fluchen. Damit hatte er ihr aber auch indirekt auf die ehrerbietigste Weise gesagt, wie verwerflich ihm das Ganze, wie es ihm als fluchwürdige

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the whole affair seemed to him, as a deception meriting being cursed.	.Täuschung erscheine

Discussion Questions:

- What is Jacob afraid of, according to Rav Hirsch?
- Why does Rav Hirsch emphasize the prefix כ?
- What might be motivating Rav Hirsch's reading? (Does he make Jacob look better or worse ethically?)
- How is Jacob caught between his parents here?
- How does Rav Hirsch understand the nature of Jacob's objection to his mother's plan?

D. In *Midrash*

6. Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 92a	6. תלמוד בבלי, סנהדרין דף צב עמוד א
And Rabbi Elazar says: With regard to anyone who amends the truth in his speech, it is as though he worships idols. As it is written here, [regarding Jacob] "I shall appear to him as a trickster [*ki-metatea'*]" (Genesis 27:12), and it is written there [with regard to idol worship]: "They are vanity, the work of deception [*ta'tu'im*]" (Jeremiah 10:15).	וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: כָּל הַמַּחְלִיף בְּדִיבּוּרוֹ כְּאִילּוּ עוֹבֵד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה. כְּתִיב הָכָא: "וְהָיִיתִי בְעֵינָיו כִּמְתַעְתֵּעַ" (בראשית כז:יב) וּכְתִיב הָתָם: "הֶבֶל הֵמָּה מַעֲשֵׂה תַּעְתֻּעִים" (ירמיה י:טו).

Discussion Questions:

- This Talmudic text cites the one other appearance of this root (but as an abstract noun) in the *Tanakh*, in Jeremiah. What homiletical connection does this text make?
- What deeper connection might there be between the true worship of God and honesty in speech?