

The Mysterious Death in the Parlor

Rabbi David Fohrman and Learning Partners

INTRO:

Hillary Gutman: Hi, Producers! This is Hillary, a huge Aleph Beta fan, and now proudly one of the audio editors! Have you ever noticed how learning Chumash can sometimes be like playing a game of Clue? Get the clues, work out the kinks in your theory, and bam -- you've solved the mysterious murder in the parlor. Well, studying Torah with Rabbi Fohrman is a lot like that, too.

This month's behind-the-scenes look is the Aleph Beta version of a game of Clue. Rabbi Fohrman is discussing with his chaburah the story of Yaakov -- specifically when he returns from the house of Lavan to Beit El. When he arrives, he gives a sacrifice to God to thank Him for his safe return. And then we're informed about the death of Devora, Rivka's nursemaid. Wait, what? Where did that come from? Who did it, and how did she die? And even better, why now?

Have I asked enough questions yet? Oh, and hey -- where's my set of cards for this round? That's where Rabbi Fohrman steps in with his Sherlock Holmes hat and his chevruta by his side. Listen in, and be prepared for an entirely unexpected ending. I'll give you a hint: it wasn't Yaakov.

Rabbi David Fohrman: We went back and forth a bunch of times, and there was something I was working on a while back, that I am still kind of working on. And I thought I would share it with you. So let me show you something that I noticed. So, I believe that there is a murder mystery that is put in sefer Bereishis, of a very small, minor character. And she is Devora, the nursemaid of Rivka, right?

You hear about this death of Devora, which comes in completely out of nowhere. It happens when Yaakov's on his way back from Beit El. Okay, so here's God telling Yaakov to go to Beit El, and He says, make a mizbeach for the

God who appeared to you when you ran away from Eisav [Gen. 35:1]. So he goes, he does that, right?

Learning Partner: It's interesting that Hashem refers to Himself that way, as opposed to just saying to Me.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes, that is interesting, isn't it? Right. And keep that in mind, because I think that's a really important point, right? You should make a mizbeach, not to Me, but to the God who appeared to you when you were running away from Eisav. Right?

Learning Partner: Have you ever done a study about the various ways God refers to Himself, or Itself?

Rabbi Fohrman: I've never done a study of that as a group. But that would be an interesting study. It's certainly significant here. God seems to be saying that the reason why he should make a mizbeach seemingly is for hakaras hatov. Essentially, why? Because if you recall what it was that Yaakov said way back at Beit El, if you go back there, he's returning to Beit El now, after his exile in the house of Lavan. He had originally been at Beit El when he was running away from his brother.

Learning Partner: And that's where he makes that tannai, right?

Rabbi Fohrman: And that's where he makes that tannai. Now interestingly, by the way, if you think about what's intervened in chapter 34, you have the whole massacre at Shechem. But if you look at the text right before the massacre, you get this: Vayavo Ya'akov shalem ir sh'chem asher b'erezt cana'an [Gen. 33:18]. The text seems to be -- that word shalem there -- very similar to yashavti b'shalom b'beit avi, right? So the text is kind of saying that here he is, he's returning from Lavan's house, and it's indicating that the tannai is the ____, that even though chapter 34 is war, but that's not God's fault. Right?

That's because Shimon and Levi decided to do bad things. The text is saying, before that, before the debacle of Shechem, right, God had brought him back in peace. And therefore kum alai beit el v'yashav sham v'aseh sham mizbeach,

I've done what I was supposed to do -- now you do yours [Gen. 35:1]. Anyway, so, here's this moment, right, on the way back from Beit El, and God says make this mizbeach.

By the way, interestingly, there was supposed to be ma'aser on the way back, that the ma'aser would express itself v'asei sham mizbeach. Seemingly God's calling in His checks, right? You know what I mean? It's an interesting thing, right? That that's the ma'aser, so to speak, if that's the ma'aser. Just bringing that up.

Learning Partner: Yeah, I don't know if I buy that that's the ma'aser.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right. But it seems he responds to the promise, or maybe it's a response to You will be my God, right? So there's this getting rid of the neichar, making this mizbeach, and then look at what happens. Vayavan sham mizbeach vayikra lamakom el beit el ki sham niglu alav haelohim bvarcho mifnei achiv [Gen. 35:7]. He renames the place Beit El, and all of a sudden in verse eight, coming out of absolutely nowhere, vayamet Devora meineket Rivka [Gen. 35:8]. Right?

Not only is it coming out of nowhere, but Devora is coming out of nowhere. We never knew about Devora before. The first time we hear about her, we hear about her and she dies. We didn't even know Rivka had a meinekes. We don't know what it even means. Was it the meinekes of Rivka, the woman who nursed Rivka, or was it Rivka's nursemaid, right?

Learning Partner: When Rivka leaves home originally, who are we told goes with her?

Rabbi Fohrman: So we're not told about menekes Rivka there. We can go back --

Learning Partner: We don't have to, I trust you.

Rabbi Fohrman: I don't even know if there's any other people who go. Let's see. And then, as if nothing happened, verse nine picks up the story from where we

left off. It almost feels like verse eight should not be there. Right? Vayera elohim el Yaakov od b'vo'o mipdan aram vayevarech oto [Gen. 35:9]. And then he says, vayomar lo elohim shimcha Yaakov lo yikrei shimcha od Yaakov ki im yisrael yihyeh sh'mecha vayikra et sh'mo Yisrael [Gen. 35:9]. And then there's this promise that many children and kings should come from him.

Learning Partner: Did you notice there's a parsha petucha there right after Devora makes her appearance, which at least is an indication that it belonged to the previous section, not the coming section?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah, that is interesting. Now, let's just take that fast look at Rashi here, while we're at it. So Rashi picks up on the obvious question, a little bit different. He's not bothered by the textual question of what the story of Devora's death is doing here. But he's worried about a more physical question, which is what in the world was Devora doing? Why would she have been with Yaakov returning from Beit El, of all places?

In other words, seemingly if Devora was a thing, if she was around, she would have been back with Rivka, back in Eretz Canaan. What was she doing on this trip accompanying Yaakov to the house of Lavan? Along comes Rashi and says, because Rivka said to Yaakov, don't worry, I will eventually bring you back, right? Remember in chapter 27 in the aftermath of the story of the deception?

So Rivka guarantees Yaakov that his exile in Lavan's house will not be permanent; when it's safe to return, because Eisav's anger has quieted down, [quote], I will bring you back. And therefore it finally happens. See, the problem Rashi's dealing with here is that we actually never hear that it happens, right? How come she never does it? She did it -- that was Devora. It must be Devora [quote], right? She sent Devora, [quote], and she died on the way.

Learning Partner: Or after she completed her mission.

Rabbi Fohrman: Well, it would have been after, right? In other words, she was the one who came to Lavan's house and told him that it was time to leave. He

left, right? And this is the moment where she dies on the way. Right? It explains what she was doing there.

Learning Partner: Before Yaakov leaves Lavan's house, I think there is a strange set of pesukim there, where he decided to leave, and then he doesn't leave, and then he calls his wives out to the field and again agrees to leave, and then finally leaves.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah. And there's also when the angel comes to him in a dream and says leave. So the way I always understood it was that Yaakov thought the angel in the dream came from his mom. But the way Rashi sees it is, oh, it was Devora. So here's the interesting thing. Let's go with Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan's chapter for a moment, and just explore it. Why did Devora of all people, why would Rivka have sent Devora? If you're gonna send somebody, why send Devora? So let's get to the point -- I mean, any thoughts on that?

Learning Partner: Uh, no!

Rabbi Fohrman: So, that's the question of who exactly is Devora. When we say she was the nursemaid of Rivka, does she mean the one who nursed Rivka, or she means the one who nursed Rivka's babies? If you take the latter, then that means that she would have been the one to have nursed Yaakov. Right? That then would begin to make sense for why you would send Devora. Because there's a sense of a mission, which it is safe to come back home now. Now, we know that Eisav's trying to kill him. Now if you send the wrong person, what's Yaakov going to think?

Learning Partner: It's a trap.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's a trap. Right? She had to send someone with absolute complete trust, someone whose integrity with Yaakov is unimpeachable, right? Who better to send than the one who nursed you when you were a kid, who was your nanny, who brought you up, who was the, you know, was your early childhood caregiver? That is Devora, seemingly. That seems to be what Reb Moshe Darshan is contending.

It's just occurred to me as I'm talking now that, you know, sometimes you always wonder with Biblical names whether they're real or the name from the Torah assigns the person, based upon their function. For example, Nachash, the king of Amon, who goes and acts very snake-like when he attacks Shaul, right? And he attacks Yavesh Gilad in a brazen kind of way. So was his name really Nachash, or is the Torah naming him Nachash because he was acting like a nachash?

I'm wondering if Devora might also get her name from her function, as well. If she is the nursemaid of Yaakov, she's like a bee, right? How do humans relate to bees? In two ways. First of all, they can sting, so they can be dangerous. The second thing is, they nurture -- they provide wonderful honey for their young, right? So, it makes me think of the expression zavat chalav udevash, what does that mean? You ever wonder what that meant? How did they come up with that expression? It's such a strange one, a land flowing with milk and honey. Right? Where does that come from?

So it struck me yesterday that it's an expression that Torah gives when the Jews are in the desert about what the land is going to be like. In the desert, in Devarim perek ches, the Torah says that when you get to Eretz Yisrael, it's going to be an eretz nacheli mayim, right? With these waterfalls and wellsprings coming out of the mountains, the crags and the rocks. And if you think about that, that's an expression in the land of what happened to them when they were in the desert. In the desert, there was also water coming out of a rock.

So God was saying, there's water coming out of the rock -- it's not just a miraculous thing that I'm doing to you here in this world of miracles, in the cloistered world of the desert. It's also a derech hatepah, because when I'm going to bring you to the land, the land is going to be the place where there's always water coming out of rocks, right? It's such a lush and wondrous land.

And by the way, Zion National Park was named so by the Mormon settlers there, because of this idea of [quote], right? That it reminded them that if you walked on the burgeoning river path and the narrows in Zion, you actually see [quote],

and you can understand why they named it Zion, right? There's something about that vision which is lush and wondrous, like something from Avatar, right? There's nothing that creates a better sense of wonder and lushness than [quote], the water just coming out of these rocks, these fountains, these showers 3000 feet high.

And that's what they saw in Zion National Park, and that's what God's promising there, which is sort of this wondrous, natural version of what was happening miraculously, with the water coming, gushing out of the rock, of how they're being fed. So, what's interesting is that if you go into Ha'azinu, right, Ha'azinu's way of describing that -- in other words, the experience of the people in the desert -- is -- listen to the words in Ha'azinu. In this creation story of the Jewish people that Ha'azinu sees, there's this creation moment in Israel where God brings Israel to life in the desert, and then like a new mother, suckles the baby, right, [quote], nurses the baby. But instead of a breast, there's a rock. It's as if to say that God is the creator, like a mother, right? And a breast is the child's way of getting sustenance, and the mother's way of expressing love.

So for God, God has this rock which is like the opposite of a breast, it's this hard thing. But the same way that milk is what allows, is perfectly formulated to allow a baby to grow, if you think about what is God's milk that He provides humanity, the answer is water. Right? And that's like [quote]. The same way, I think -- why are we talking about water as if it's oil, and water as if it is honey? And the answer is because a child thirsts or finds delight in a mother's milk. Right? And it's perfectly calibrated for its life. The biochemistry of water is perfectly calibrated for human life -- it's the ultimate, magical nutrient, the hydration that we all depend on. It is the Creator's milk.

Anyway, [quote], just to bring that idea back -- so God is the mother who suckles the young in the desert with the rock, the water coming from the rock, and the mother who continues to suckle the young by giving them the land of Israel. God's saying, I'm still with you, even though it's no longer a world of miracles, it's a world of derech hatepah. But I'm still the Creator behind this. He still has [quote], there's still that experience that you're having. There's that line

you can draw from your current experience in the desert to the experience in the land, and it's going to be wonderful. I'm going to be there -- it's just going to be a derech hatepah existence, and I'm still going to be taking care of you.

That's it, right? It's picking up on Ha'azinu. I think it's chalav being a mother's milk, or a calf's milk, being the most fatty of liquids that you can imagine. Basically just means that when we get to the land, right, the land is going to be an expression of the same thing that you've had.

Learning Partner: As I took care of you in the desert, the land will take care of you in the land.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes. The land will take care of you. The land -- that's really Me. So, if you think about d'vash v'chalav, right, d'vash and chalav -- chalav is the way that a human mother supplies for its young. The commonality between the chalav and d'vash is these are the liquids that different kinds of creators use to take care of their young. A human creator, a mammal, takes care of its young through the chalav. An insect, like a bee, takes care of its young through d'vash. God takes care of His young through a different liquid, which is water. But it's the Creator taking care of you the same way that these other beings take care. What milk is to mammals and what d'vash is to bees, water is to God. Right?

And if you think about it, we just take water for granted. We never actually think water's a big deal. But if you don't have water, and all of a sudden here's this thing called water, it's the single most refreshing thing that exists. It's the basis for all life, it catalyzes all biochemical reactions. It underlies, right, the one thing you look for in extraterrestrial life is, is there water there? Maybe it is the Creator's milk. So with that in mind, Devora, maybe she's called Devora because what is she? She's the mammal who bears chalav, right? So, her nickname is the bee, best known for honey. Anyway, just a thought.

But of course the other thing you think of when we think of Devora is getting stung, right? Because bees aren't just providers; they also are combat beings. They sting you, and they can be dangerous. So I wonder if there's a part of Devora which is the stinger also, and if so, where is that part of her? So anyway,

the murder mystery, I believe -- the minor murder mystery of Bereshis is what in the world is going on with the death of Devora? And who cares? First of all, who cares? Who cares that Devora dies? She has to die sometime. Why do we need to know that she died here? It seems completely superfluous. Why did she die at all?

So this is the beginning of the mystery I'm trying to solve here. Okay, so this is question number one. Let's go back now to the other time when you would have thought that we'd meet Devora, right? And if we're right about this, that Devora's not the person who nursed Rebecca, but Rebecca's nursemaid that she used for her own young -- where would you have expected to meet that Devora? What stories would you meet her at?

Learning Partner: Yaakov's birth?

Rabbi Fohrman: Something like that -- the very early stories of Yaakov. So let's go back to those for a moment. Here you have the early stories of the birth of Yaakov and Eisav, and you'll notice, no Devora. But let's see what we do find. [quote] So, she has twins. [quote] Now, notice the difference between vayikru over here, in pasuk chaf vav or chaf heh, and vayikra over here in pasuk chaf vav. You see that? Who's "they"? "They" would probably be Rivka and Yitzchak, right?

Learning Partner: Right.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay. Now, they call him Eisav. Who calls Yaakov Yaakov? Vayikra shmo Yaakov. Someone's missing. So who is it?

Learning Partner: We can't tell gender from vayikra... yeah, we can! It's gotta be Yitzchak.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's gotta be Yitzchak. He has to be the one, because vayikra sh'mo Yaakov -- He's the only guy in the picture. So it has to be that Yitzchak is calling Yaakov Yaakov, which means who's not calling Yaakov that?

Learning Partner: Rivka.

Rabbi Fohrman: Rivka. So the story of these sentences is Rivka's silence when it comes to Yaakov's name, leading to another mystery -- why was she silent?

Learning Partner: Because there's an inherent criticism in the name Yaakov, right?

Rabbi Fohrman: Good. That would seemingly be the answer, right? [quote] She's not willing to accept that name. It's not a nice name.

Learning Partner: Which is reminiscent, by the way, of Binyamin's birth, right?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes.

Learning Partner: Because she calls him Ben-oni, and then Yaakov calls him Binyamin.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yup. Another disagreement about names. But this disagreement seems to be expressed in silence, right? She didn't like his name. Okay, let's keep on reading. Vayigdelu hane'arim vayehi Eisav ish yodea tzid ish sadeh v'Yaakov ish tam yoshev ohalim, vaye'ehav Yitzchak et Eisav ki tzayid bifnav v'Rivka ohevet et Yaakov, Vayazed Yaakov nazid vayavo Eisav min hasadeh v'hu ayef [Gen. 25:27-29]. So it seems to me that there's a blizzard of information here, and it seems to be out of order. If you have to rearrange these verses to make this a bit more clear, you could take one verse and change its placement and things would have made more sense. That verse is chaf ches. What in the world is chaf ches doing where it is? When is it relevant to know vaye'ehav Yitzchak et Eisav ki tzayid bifnav v'Rivka ohevet et Yaakov?

So, if you tell me Rivka ohevet et Yaakov is the main part that's relevant, that would have been relevant a verse earlier, right? If you wanted to tell me that the reason why Rivka remains silent is because she kind of liked Yaakov and didn't want to name him, that, then I would have understood it earlier. If you're telling me that no, the main son is Eisav, that he loved Eisav, now where should the verse be? It shouldn't be here at all; it should be in the beginning of chapter 27. What is it doing here after? It just seems like a dangling thing.

Learning Partner: I don't think so, because *vayedlu ha'na'arim*, that *pasuk*, *chaf zayin*, describes the nature of each of the children, and then what immediately follows and makes sense logically, is that different parents love different children because of the nature of the two children.

Rabbi Fohrman: True. My only point is that there's -- you're right, in terms of what's pushing them. The verse is appropriately there if... let me actually take it back a little bit. I understand why the verse is there, you're right. The verse is there because if you want to understand why it was that each parent loved the one they did, you could understand it by looking at the way they grew up. But I could ask another question, which is what difference does parental love make? There is no answer to that here.

Learning Partner: But that's the entire story of *sefer Bereshis*, which is the constant choosing among the children.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah, but the point is that if you told me this verse at the beginning of chapter 27, the story of the deception, that would make a lot of sense. It's a predicate for why it is that Yitzchak is calling Eisav to bless him. He loves him. But why there? Why tell me right before the story of Yaakov and Eisav's first confrontation, which is the story of the sale of the *bechorah*?

So my question is, is the story of the sale of the *bechorah* impacted by Yitzchak loving Eisav and Rivka loving Yaakov? I want to suggest that the text is telling you that it is. In other words, that the natural way to read this is that *Vayigdelu hane'arim vayehi Eisav ish yodea tzid ish sadeh v'Yaakov ish tam yoshev ohalim, vaye'ehav Yitzchak et Eisav ki tzayid bifnav v'Rivka ohevet et Yaakov*, leading directly to *vayazed Yaakov nazid*.

But now the question is, but one second -- how is Rivka's love, or any parental love for any kid, relevant to the story of *vayazed Yaakov nazid*? No parent is involved! In the story of the deception later on, clearly the parents are expressing love. But in this story they're not. I think what the text is saying is, in this story they are too. In other words, if you look closely, and now put it back to the

other question we have before, which is, where is the missing Devora. This would be where you'd find Devora, but you don't.

Learning Partner: Why would you find Devora here?

Rabbi Fohrman: This is their early life. But there's no Devora.

Learning Partner: Right.

Rabbi Fohrman: Right, okay. So now, let's add up all the clues. We just heard that Rivka did not name Yaakov Yaakov, because she didn't like the name, seemingly. Immediately after that, we hear that she loves Yaakov. We then hear about the story Yaakov makes this porridge. Eisav is coming back home, right? And he is tired. Eisav then says to Yaakov, *haliteni na min ha'adom ha'adom hazeh ki ayef anochi* [Gen. 25:30].

So, there's a great mystery over here, which is what's the reader supposed to make of this story? Was this a little childhood prank? We don't know how old the kids were. I guess it makes a difference how old the kids were. Were they 18? That's different from being six, right? Were they six and eight, were they seven, eight years old? And part of that issue is, here's Yaakov, he sets up his lemonade stand, this porridge stand. Eisav comes home, he's really exhausted, and he wants some porridge. And then Yaakov says no no no, not until you sell your bechorah.

Can you really sell a bechorah? What would it even mean? The right of a firstborn -- can that really be sold? Another way of reading it is, sell the fact that you were born first. Sell that, sell me actual firstborn-ness. It's the ultimate thing that can't be sold -- you can't change the reality that Eisav came out first by having him sell you that back.

Learning Partner: He can sell the entitlement that comes along with being the firstborn.

Rabbi Fohrman: Possibly, right? But it's unclear exactly what it is to sell the bechorah. What exactly is the bechorah? And notice that we never hear back

from this again. It's never referred back to again. It's just, you know, it would have been the easiest thing for Yaakov to tell Yitzchak, you know, I had this transaction with my brother, and I think I'm entitled to this blessing because I bought it. But he never says that, and it's unclear if that would even obtain. So, there's this question we have of trying to buy something that can't be sold. So here's my conspiracy-laden theory. Here's what I think might be happening. Add it all up. Let me ask you this: what a strange verb, vayazed. What does that remind you of?

Learning Partner: Meizid is when you do something on purpose -- it was a setup?

Rabbi Fohrman: Meizid is when you do something on purpose.

Learning Partner: What comes to mind is [quote].

Rabbi Fohrman: It does, it might play off that later. Maybe, possibly. Right? So, the Torah seems to be suggesting that it's a verb form of nazid, right?

Learning Partner: So Yaakov clearly had a plan here, is what the language is telling us.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes.

Learning Partner: It's very intentional.

Rabbi Fohrman: Very intentional. In other words, this was a deliberate plan to -- whatever you say about the second deception, his mother pushed him into it. This might have been a childhood prank, but it was a deliberate childhood prank. He set up his lemonade stand right where Eisav is going to be coming back from the hunt. He had enough of being second, being Mr. Heel, right? He comes in second place, grabbing hold of his brother's heel. He's going to buy the bechorah if he has to.

Rabbi Fohrman: So, one way or the other, he's going to get his birthright. And it's intentional. But here's the thing. If he's so intentional about it, ask yourself -- is this the same Yaakov that I know? I just heard a verse ago that he doesn't know

how to do anything, that he's yoshev ba'ohel, that his brother can go out in the fields and do everything, but this is Mr. Homebody here in the tent.

Learning Partner: It doesn't mean he doesn't know how to do anything.

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay, that's true. But he's yoshev ba'ohel, he likes to be at home. Right? But the same guy who likes to be at home, later on, can't get it together to make dinner for his father unless his mom assists, right, and says go bring me the two aizim, and I'll make -- why doesn't she trust him for how to do it? It's apparently not just that Eisav's the hunter; Eisav's the chef! Eisav's the one-stop shop when it comes to making food. Killing the animal, dressing it, baking it, presentation. Right? And Yaakov just can't be trusted to even go and slaughter the animal and make his own food.

Okay. So, isn't it strange that Yaakov would be, at a young age, so capable to make the perfect porridge, right, and go out there and put it out there for Eisav? If Mommy helped the second time, wouldn't you think Mommy would need to help the first time? But Mommy's not here. But, let's say -- why? Now, let's take [quote] and all of that, and accept that. Right? If Rivka had a meneket, that means that Rivka actually wasn't the one who directly raised her kids when she was young. Right? The very early caretaker would have been the nanny, would have been Devora.

So, put yourself in Rivka's shoes. If you're Rivka, you really didn't like that name Yaakov. Yaakov means he came in second. My child didn't come in second. He didn't come in second! And here you were thinking, how can I change this name? And then you have an idea, right? What's your idea? What if I encourage little Yaakov, right, to set up the lemonade stand. But who am I gonna get to encourage him? Who should I get to do this? Who does she talk to?

So one wonders, was Devora involved? This is my little conspiracy theory. Could it have been Devora? Could Devora have been the one who helped prepare the porridge, right? In other words, because it's interesting --

Learning Partner: And then you're gonna say that Eisav murdered Devora?

Rabbi Fohrman: No. Not that Eisav murdered Devora. Someone else murders Devora. And now the question is, who? So listen to these words for a moment. Also notice, by the way, that if Rivka really wants the name changed, because she can't stand the name, when does the name change finally happen?

Learning Partner: After the fight with a malach.

Rabbi Fohrman: No -- after the death of Devora. Look. I'm gonna take you back into the text again, what we were looking at before. Genesis 36. After the fight with a malach, there's a promise made, but the name change doesn't happen yet. There are two name changes. What happens then is God ratifies the name change of the malach. When does the ratification happen? Look, here's the death of Devora, pasuk ches.

Isn't it fascinating that right after the death of Devora is when the name change finally happens? The name change that Rivka always wanted. Enter Rashi. Rashi says, The reason why it's called bachus is that bachus suggests a double kind of crying. Why was there a double kind of crying? Not only was he told about the death of Devora, not only did Devora die -- at the very same moment, he was told that his mother died. And the Torah wanted to keep it secret, it didn't tell you about it. But there were actually two mournings: the death of Rivka and the death of Devora.

Now, if the aggada's right, the next question is, why would Devora and Rivka have died on the same day? Is that a coincidence? Or why does news of their death reach Yaakov on the same day? Is that a coincidence? Okay. So, who killed Devora? The answer to who killed Devora lies in the words vayazed Yaakov nazid, right? Vayazed sure sounds like meizid. Turns out that there's one other time you have the word yazed in the Torah. What's the other yazed? Only one yud zayin daled in the Torah.

Learning Partner: I don't know.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's in parshas Mishpatim. Let me show it to you. Ki yazid ish al re'ehu -- [Ex. 21:14].

Learning Partner: Oh, yazed has implicit in it, murder.

Rabbi Fohrman: Exactly. In other words, when the Torah says vayazed Yaakov nazid, it's foreshadowing ki yazid ish al re'ehu. Right? It's suggesting in a way that what Yaakov is doing is premeditated, much as ki yazid ish al re'ehu is. Now, it's not the case that he's trying to kill Eisav, seemingly. That's not exactly the same thing as killing him secretly.

Learning Partner: Taking his entitlements that arise from the bechorah is a kind of murder.

Rabbi Fohrman: How so?

Learning Partner: We have the concept of [quote], so in terms of stealing from him, if you will, there's -- or, what's the opposite of enriching?

Rabbi Fohrman: Right, you're impoverishing Eisav.

Learning Partner: By impoverishing him, it's a form of murder.

Rabbi Fohrman: Also, now that I'm thinking about it, think about it in the sense that what are you taking away? You're taking away bechorah, which is you're taking away birth. You think you can switch birth, but you can't just switch birth. If I'm taking away his birth, I'm killing. He's not born! That's how he was born. If you don't like how he was born, by undoing his birth, you're in essence killing him. So the deal he's making with them is, hey, Eisav, can I kill you? Because that's the only way I could be the one firstborn, is if you're dead. So, it's almost like he's plotting to do the impossible. But the plot is to kill him. So it seems like pasuk yud daled is playing off of that.

Okay. Now, let's look at the pasuk right before his. [quote] Okay, so if pasuk yud daled plays off the Yaakov and Eisav story, which is their first confrontation, what about pasuk yud gimel? Does that remind you of anything, any other

Yaakov-and-Eisav story? But if he didn't hunt him down, if God put you in the wrong place at the wrong time...

Learning Partner: So when Yitzchak asks Yaakov, how did you come back so quickly, Yaakov responds that God put the animal right there in front of me.

Rabbi Fohrman: There you go. Exactly right. That's exactly what happened, that's perfect. Right? Which is that -- by the way, what does zedah remind you of in that story?

Learning Partner: Zayid.

Rabbi Fohrman: Zayid! Which was exactly what Eisav was dispatched to do, right? Go bring zayid. Now, when Yaakov --

Learning Partner: So now you've established for me finally why you think there was a murder here. Because now there's a parallel to the Torah's language, Torah's laws of murder. Right?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes. Except I have one final twist on the murder, but we'll get there in a moment, right? Asher lo zadah -- so, who was asher lo zadah]? That was Yaakov! Yaakov at the very moment that he says, right, how did he find it so quickly? And then he tells that lie that will live in infamy, right? God just put me in the right place at the right time.

Learning Partner: God, Mommy, whoever.

Rabbi Fohrman: Whoever, right? He was not the hunter; he was pretending to hunt the game, but instead -- and he was lying about it. Right? Okay. Another way to read it is that even though it may apply to that particular moment in time and point to a kind of culpability on the part of Yaakov, another way of reading it also is that his mother put him up to it. In other words, he wasn't actually trying to lay in wait. It was unlike the first deception. The first deception, he set up his lemonade stand, right? Over here, he was pushed into it. He was minding his own business, his mother comes and says look, I have a parental command for you, right? Listen to that which I am insisting that you go and do.

He was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He wasn't seeking to deceive Eisav; it just sort of happened that he was pushed into it at the last moment, and didn't have enough guts to stand up or say no. And somehow, he ended up deceiving him. If you read an essay on this in the Genesis Parsha Companion Book, which hopefully we sent out to you, if you look in that essay, if you were Rebecca's lawyer, I made an argument that Yaakov may well have not even intended to deceive his father, and just did it at the last moment, because he didn't know what else to do.

But the bottom line is, if that's true, the Torah seems to be saying, look -- sometimes you get caught at the wrong place at the wrong time. You don't have as much capability. Somebody, something bad happens, right -- I'll give you a place to run. In fact, Yaakov did have a place to run. That's the story of running to Lavan, right?

Learning Partner: So Beit Lavan was his ir miklat.

Rabbi Fohrman: Beit Lavan was his ir miklat -- exactly so. Which is what Mom said -- he's gonna kill you. Right? And so, you have an ir miklat. But here's what's interesting: if this is intended to echo the Yaakov and Eisav story, who is the speaker? It's God! It's suggesting that God is concurring with Rivka. It's not just that -- you understand?

Learning Partner: Yeah!

Rabbi Fohrman: It's not just Rivka; God says no, I'll make sure you can run. Which is exactly what God comes and says at Beit El the second time around. When he's coming to Beit El the second time around, God says guess what? It's time to make a mizbeach l'el, to the God who answered you in your time of tza'arah. Right? When you were running away from Eisav, I gave you a place to run to. You should look to Me as the one who provided refuge, just as Shemos chaf aleph says -- that when you get pushed into something that isn't your fault, God will provide refuge. I did help provide refuge. You with me?

Learning Partner: Yup!

Rabbi Fohrman: Okay. However, the Torah seems to be suggesting that this is a different order of magnitude entirely. Whereas God might be willing to get involved compassionately, to help out somebody pushed into something at the last moment, which is Yaakov's second confrontation with Eisav. No so with Yaakov's first confrontation with Eisav. If somebody is a meizid, if someone is yazid, like vayazed Yaakov nazid, and you're trying to kill him stealthily, like Yaakov originally did, so then no -- there's no getting around culpability for that. You can try to grab hold of the mizbeach itself as an ir miklat, but I'm going to make sure that you die.

But here's the strange thing: God doesn't. God doesn't hold Yaakov culpable for that, and Yaakov doesn't get killed. Right? Why doesn't Yaakov get killed, if we're really reading the pesukim correctly? You hear? The Torah seems to ascribe a greater degree of malice, and says that Yaakov will not be forgiven for that greater degree of malice.

Learning Partner: So where's Yaakov's punishment to that? And you're going to say that Devora took it on herself instead of him?

Rabbi Fohrman: Not quite. The big question is, how old were the kids?

Learning Partner: Old enough to make porridge!

Rabbi Fohrman: Right. Let's say they were nine. What degree of culpability, as God, would you assign to a nine-year-old who's set up his lemonade stand with a little help from Mommy?

Learning Partner: Hard to argue that that's meizid.

Rabbi Fohrman: Now here's the thing. You might argue that it's meizid, right? But it's meizid -- You're a child. It's your parent running the game at that point, it's your caretaker in the game. They're the ones who have the responsibility, right? So you've been brought up in a house where you thought your name was an outrage, because your mommy never liked the name. And she always told you what a bad name it was. Right?

And then one day your nursemaid came and said, you know, you could set up a lemonade stand. Here's how you make porridge. Let me show you how you make porridge. And he goes, and is like, darn it, I'm getting my name back from Eisav. It's a complicated issue, right? But I'm only nine, I'm a minor! I can't be held responsible for that! But who could be held responsible for it?

Learning Partner: The adults in the room.

Rabbi Fohrman: The adults in the room. Both of whom die at exactly the same moment. Right? When? At the very moment I'm coming back from Beit El, I'm coming back from the place of Lavan. At that moment, I think it's all over, and Eisav was reconciled with me, it's all good, we can all go forward, it's finally time for a name change. Not quite time for a name change yet. Right? Something else has to happen first. Right? There was a lot of blood spilled over that name change, there was a lot of pain. And it was the adults in the room, and the adults in the room were the ones being held accountable. [quote], go back to Genesis 35. [quote] Make a mizbeach. When does he make the mizbeach?

Look at pasuk aleph. Vaya'aseh sham mizbeach, a specific command to make a mizbeach. To whom? To the God who was with you when you ran away and provided you a makom [quote], right? Make a mizbeach for Him. He does -- he makes the mizbeach in pasuk zayin. He then makes the mizbeach just like he was commanded, and he calls it El Beit El, the God of Beit El. And the circle is complete from Beit El, because that's the God who came to him and provided a place for him as he ran away from Eisav. What's the next pasuk? The death of Devora. What did God do? Took her from the mizbeach.

Learning Partner: Wow.

Rabbi Fohrman: And not just her -- Rivka, too, who set her up for it. And it becomes the double crying. Right? And this is the heavenly justice, with the double cries. And it's almost like -- think about what you get from the bechorah? What's the great entitlement of the bechorah? And what was it all about? Getting the bechorah. And now, finally, justice comes for getting the bechorah, and you get a double portion.

Learning Partner: And he loses the two most important women in his life.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah, a double portion of tears. The two most important women in his life.

Learning Partner: It's very good. Be careful what you wish for.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah. I mean, it really hits you between the eyes. And what's cool is if it's true, it's how hidden it is. It's how it's just one little pasuk and it's like, there's this incredible act of divine justice, which you won't even see unless you bother connecting the dots.

Learning Partner: Maybe it's a sign that Hashem didn't agree with, certainly, the lemonade stand?

Rabbi Fohrman: Oh, yeah. I think it absolutely implies that. It implies that God has some degree of sympathy for the deception, for the second act of deception. But not the first. Possibly Yaakov escapes on the first because he's so young.

Learning Partner: Even the second, because of the way the brachot worked out, it seems clear that Yitzchak never intended to give Eisav the real bracha, because at the end of the day, the bracha of land and -- what's the dual bracha in Bereshis? It's land and children?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yup.

Learning Partner: That bracha goes to Yaakov, not at the time of the deception, but only later on. So that bracha had still been preserved.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yup.

Learning Partner: So, it seems to me that the deception was also not just because Yitzchak intended to and did do the right thing, even though he was deceived.

Rabbi Fohrman: One more time, he intended what?

Learning Partner: So, if the bracha that Yaakov steals is not the ultimate bracha, I think -- and I can't quote the pesukim here, but the ultimate bracha of land and children, Yaakov receives later anyway. Even though he deceived his father and stole the gashmiut bracha from Eisav, if you will. Did that make sense?

Rabbi Fohrman: Yes. In other words, the real bracha of land and children doesn't seem to be an issue in chapter 27. Right?

Learning Partner: So if Yitzchak did not give that bracha of land and children to Eisav at that point, then he was holding it back for a reason, right?

Rabbi Fohrman: Possibly because he thought that Eisav wasn't worthy, you're suggesting?

Learning Partner: Right? Because he knew that Yaakov was the one to get that bracha.

Rabbi Fohrman: Oh, interesting. Yeah, that could well be. To me, though, what's really cool is that the notion that God might work with divine justice that's very significant, scary, and profound, and not feel a need to advertise it, but to allude to it.

Learning Partner: Yes, not something you would want to advertise, punishing Rivka for that.

Rabbi Fohrman: Yeah. It's almost like, to the extent that Rivka was behind the scenes, it's a behind-the-scenes punishment.

Learning Partner: It's very good.

Rabbi Fohrman: Thank you. So, it's a murder mystery indeed.

Learning Partner: So, well -- is it a murder, really? Or is that just --

Rabbi Fohrman: I'm calling it a murder mystery -- it's not. It's a death b'dei shamayim.

Learning Partner: Right, so the title sort of... points you in the wrong direction.

Rabbi Fohrman: It's a -- in the words of Clue, it's a mysterious death in the parlor.

OUTRO:

Hillary Gutman: Hi, Producers! Wow, didn't see that coming, did you? Me either. How incredible is it that so much of the Torah is linked? It really makes you marvel at the intricacy of the construction, and the way God left us clues to search out and discover. And finally, the subtlety of divine punishment and reward. It's so much more complex than the proverbial stick and carrot. The whole thing is so beautiful, and yet terrifying at the same time.

I hope you had as much fun listening to this behind-the-scenes offering as I did. And for that, I want to say thank you to you, our Producers, for making this Torah possible. We simply couldn't do it without you. This is Hillary Gutman, signing off until next month.