

5 — Chayei Sarah: Women of Valor AND Agency

Content notes: This episode contains references to slavery and also deeply dysfunctional families of origin.

Jaz: Hey listeners, Jaz here. I'm jumping in at the beginning, before the episode really starts, because I want to give you a heads up. In like, 30 seconds, you're going to hear me say "this episode comes out on Thanksgiving" and if you're listening to this on the day it comes out, you may notice that it is not in fact Thanksgiving. If you're listening to it a week late, it is Thanksgiving, and thank you for joining us! I do that with podcasts all the time. In my defense, unlike the Jewish calendar, which sticks to a very reliable, planned schedule, Thanksgiving is kind of a fake holiday invented by Christians, that moves around. Anyway, just wanted you to know that you're not in some cool temporal loop or time skip or whatever — we just apparently didn't have calendaring down yet, which is a problem I am attempting to fix with spreadsheets. So, shouldn't happen again, and enjoy the episode, fellow kosher queers.

Jaz: Hey Lulav!

Lulav: Yes?

Jaz: Guess what is exciting about today, when our episode comes out!

Lulav: Is -- no, it's not the spooky day. Um... (*Jaz chuckles*) yeah, that's my guess. What's up?

Jaz: Okay! The obvious answer, I think, would have been Thanksgiving -- it comes out on Thanksgiving,

Lulav: Oh, right (*both laugh*)

Jaz: But the actual answer is that I'm just very excited because this is my Torah portion!

Lulav: Oh G-d, yeah! I'm so excited for you.

Jaz: Thank you. This is the one that I recited in front of a whole group of people when I was 13 years old, which leads me actually, to my favorite queer and Jewish thing that happened this week, which is that a teen came up to me and was like, "hey, so, if someone has a thing and at the time they call it a bat mitzvah and then they transition, can they call it a bar

mitzvah, then, if they want to?" And I was like, "Yes. You or hypothetically anybody, yes, totally could."

Lulav: Good. I'm so glad.

Jaz: It was very exciting

Lulav: What phrase do you use to for your joining of the covenant?

Jaz: Very good question because I, at the time, called it a bat mitzvah and I still mostly do, but sometimes, when I'm talking to kids or talking to certain cis strangers (*Lulav chuckles*) or whatever, I do call it b'nai mitzvah

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Because I think that's a perfectly fine gender neutral term and I don't always see that it is in my best interest to refer to myself in a way that other people might read as gendered.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Because I feel like it might give them --

Lulav: License?

Jaz: -- permission to do that too, and I feel fine about calling it a bat mitzvah because that's what I called it at the time and that's just a historical fact about my life.

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Jaz: But I also feel like, I don't need to give people any more license to refer to me as a woman than necessary sometimes.

Lulav: Yeah, very fair.

Jaz: Did you have a ceremony, and if so, what do you call it?

Lulav: I did not -- well, okay. So, when I was 13, I was confirmed in the Unitarian church

Jaz: Sure.

Lulav: You have to read a statement of faith and I was like, "I'm an atheist; here's why!" And everybody was like, "okay, that's cool." So I love Unitarians. I definitely am not one anymore, but they're champs for sure.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Yeah, I'm kind of in a weird place where I had enough culturally Jewish stuff growing up that I feel comfortable calling myself Jewish but also, I have had less instruction in Torah directly than people who are b'nai mitzvah. And I also, I've been doing this since 2015, where it's like, "oh yeah, I would really like to get in on the adult bat mitzvah classes" and then being like, "hey, rabbi, what should I do to get in on these classes?" and being told "well, we're starting in three months, so get back to me then," and then, six months later, I'm like, "hey, whatever happened with those -- oh, dang it."

Jaz: *(laughs)* Oh no.

Lulav: Oh, the cohort already started, huh. And I've been just doing that for like four years.

Jaz: No!

Lulav: So that's my whole situation

Jaz: So, someday.

Lulav: Next year in Jerusalem. *(Jaz laughs)* Except for probably not in Jerusalem specifically.

Jaz: Right. You'd probably do it in Minneapolis.

Lulav: Yes. Next year in the promised Twin City.

Jaz: *(laughs)* Which is which one?

Lulav: Minneapolis.

Jaz: Okay, alright.

Lulav: The other one is St. Paul and for anybody who's ever talked to me about Christian theology, I loathe Paul of Tarsus.

Jaz: Okay, fascinating. Sure. Fine.

Lulav: I just don't like his theology.

Jaz: Okay. I have no real opinions on that. *(Lulav laughs)* Why don't you like it?

Lulav: He -- hmm. You now how when we're discussing Torah, we talk about all these different stories that you can be telling and how they all reflect a certain amount of truth?

Jaz: Mm hmm.

Lulav: The way that he's coming at things is like, "no, this is true and you have to literally believe it so that your soul will be saved."

Jaz: Oh, that's annoying.

Lulav: Yeah! I don't know if he was the first Christian theologian to do this, but as a major early Church father, he definitely popularized the idea of salvation through faith alone. And I can see the necessity of distancing yourself from the ethnic limitations of the covenant, but to distance yourself from working for a good future and the goodness of things being based on how you do them rather than believing that a political figure died for you -- I don't know.

Jaz: Sure.

Lulav: Also sorry about the clacking radiator behind me.

Jaz: We'll live with that. Hopefully our listeners will live with that too *(laughs)*

Lulav: Yes, sorry. *(laughs)*

Jaz: Now that we've covered the Christian theology segment of our Jewish podcast *(Lulav laughs)* are we ready to go into this week's Torah portion?

Lulav: Yes! And that was the thing, I say, as I click through to where we have the intro written down, because I can't do it off the top of my head, is that Paul of Tarsus was a Jew! He's coming from a Jewish perspective but completely warping it -- where is the intro and outro?

Jaz: It's --

Lulav: "Use During Episode Recordings," here we go. But completely warping it! So that it is unrecognizable as Jewish.

[Brivele intro music plays]

Lulav: Welcome to Kosher Queers, a podcast with at least two Jews and generally more than three opinions! Each week we bring you queer takes on Torah. They're Jaz --

Jaz: And she's Lulav --

Lulav: And today we're gonna talk about Chayei Sarah.

Jaz: It's miine! Anyway, yes, we are *(laughs)* Sorry, I'm going to stop saying that all of the time.

6:40

Lulav: *(laughs)* You're so valid, and also, I've heard that probably a dozen times, but for the listeners, they've heard it maybe once!

Jaz: Yeah, okay, alright.

Lulav: Or I think maybe three times by this point. *(Jaz laughs)* So... you know. We're building the mythology. It's good.

Jaz: So are you going to time me? I wrote mine this time, so you actually get a prepared-in-advance summary

Lulav: Okay, so am I using the timer or the stopwatch?

Jaz: Um, I don't know if I quite can, but let's see if I can do it in 45 seconds.

Lulav: Forty-five, okay. I'm using the timer. You will hear the annoying sound that I love so much.

Jaz: Great.

Lulav: Three, two, one... go.

Jaz: This Torah portion is called The Life of Sarah, and naturally, the first thing in this parsha is that Sarah immediately dies and then Abraham has to figure out how to bury her, and he has a slapstick back and forth of excessive politeness with the local Hittites trying to one up each other in hospitality, before finally just buying a grave. Then Abraham is like, "well, before I die too, I have one last thing on my bucket list, and that is messing around in my kid's romantic life," (*Lulav laughs*) so sends his former heir to go get a wife for his current heir, without bothering to bring said current heir along. So the dude goes on a quest and decides to pick a kind girl, and when he meets Rebecca, who's nice to animals, he concludes that's sufficient information, gives her jewelry, and only after that discovers that she is the first cousin of her intended husband. Nothing daunted, he speaks to her dad, who says "it's up to G-d, I guess!" But then the family stalls until Rebecca says, "no, I wanna go!" and then Isaac falls in love at first sight (*timer starts going off*) and then Abraham remarries and then dies and his sons bury him together and it's sweet.

Lulav: It is sweet, I think. Yeah. I'm so glad.

Jaz: We'll talk about that when we get there. I did pretty good!

Lulav: You did really good, especially the part about, "Rebecca, who's nice to animals." I can see how she's just a fairy tale princess right there

Jaz: (*laughs*) That's a whole long bit -- anyway.

Lulav: Good. That was a great short summary. I'm proud of you.

Jaz: Great.

Lulav: I think that's the first time that somebody has done it within time. Oh no -- I did get it the first time. Current record holder for 19 seconds. (*laughs*) Because it was a haftorah.

Jaz: Yeah. Yeah. Are we ready for our longer summary?

Lulav: Yes please.

Jaz: Okay, so, it really does begin with Sarah dying. It starts with "Sarah lived for 127 years -- such was the span of Sarah's life." And I looked it up in a couple translations and that's what it said, but the thing I had in my head was a version that just said, "Sarah lived for 127 years and then she died"

Lulav: *(laughs heartily)* Which version was that?

Jaz: That's not a version that I found anywhere when I went looking for it, but that's the verse that I have in my head as my memory of it.

Lulav: Okay. It's not wrong.

Jaz: *(laughs)* Yeah. Do you have any questions about the very very beginning?

Lulav: Not the very very beginning about her dying -- i mean living! Right. Liiving.

Jaz: So then there is this whole back and forth about Abraham trying to find a grave and he says, like, "I am a foreigner living for a time among them. Please won't you sell me a grave. I'll buy it -- I just beg your indulgences," basically.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And they're like, "oh no, you sir are mighty and a prince and it would be our honor and none of us would stoop to refusing to give you a grave," and then he bows to them. They have this back and forth about it, and then he asks for a specific one and someone offers to give him a grave for free and he insists on paying for it.

Lulav: Yeah. So two things: one, what is it about Avraham that Hittites are so flattering and eager to help him despite him being, "a stranger and an alien residing among you?"

Jaz: Well, I have two things about this, One of them being practical and one more ideological and a little bit fan-fiction-y. Which is to say, we did have all that stuff in earlier texts about him winning a military victory, so maybe they are just scared of him. *(Lulav laughs)* He is wealthy and has fought wars and maybe they're just a little bit worried about it. And they're like, "I don't know, an old dude whose spent all of his life with his wife? We don't know what he's going to be like without her." So.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Avraham cleaning his handgun as he asks the Hittites whether they have a burial plot for him.

Jaz: Right. My more sweet version of this story --

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: -- is just like, the text has gone out of its way a bunch of times to emphasize hospitality, like Abraham offering stuff to the strangers, and maybe this is more like, hey, he is a stranger in a strange land; this is how you should treat strangers in strange lands. Hint hint at your immigration policies.

11:21

Lulav: And also, this is how you should act as a stranger in a strange land.

Jaz: Mm. Right.

Lulav: Instead of just stomping in and taking burial plots willy-dilly and driving people out, you should make friends, offer them 400 shekels.

Jaz: Right. Insist on paying for things even if they are willing to offer them to you. This one is more of a dig at colonialism maybe.

Lulav: Yeah. So I want to point out that 400 shekels is about 10 pounds of silver.

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: And in D&D, a coin is 1/50th of a pound, so 10 pounds of silver is 500 silver coins or basically, Avraham paid 50 GP for his wife's burial plot.

Jaz: *(laughs)* Okay, great.

Lulav: The second question I had is, why does Avraham insist on compensation?

Jaz: I don't know the answer to this, but it did make me think about the back and forths we've had also, about how we were going to interact with people when we were making stuff for the podcast.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Like, we paid the person who did our art, even though they're a friend of mine, and didn't necessarily ask for that so much, but maybe there is some sense of we all have to exist and we all have to struggle, and maybe this is the polite way to interact with someone? But also, I am not trying to exploit these people. I really do want to behave in what I think is the best and most ethical way, and obviously this is not per se a capitalist system, in the way that I think of how, under capitalism, you want to compensate people as much as possible, but I do think that there is some amount of, "I don't want to be just taking things from people. I want this to feel beneficial to both of us."

Lulav: Yeah. An interpretation I had, informed by centuries of diaspora, is that he was saying, "no, I want to make sure to pay you so that if there is ever a question about whether this is my wife's burial plot or not, we have record of I paid you 10 pounds of silver."

Jaz: Yeah. That's also a really good one.

Lulav: So I really like both of those.

Jaz: I do too. Okay, so then he pays them and "Ephron's land in Machpelah, looking on Mamre -- the field, its cave, and all the trees in the field within its boundaries -- passed to

Abraham by purchase, in sight of the Hittites and of all the town leaders." Like, it's very specific, which seems to validate the thing you were saying, about they wanted a very specific record about like, this is the part we got and it was all aboveboard and everything like that.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: So that's cool. And so, but then, the next bit is, Abraham' old and he wants his son to have a wife and they have this weird bit.

Lulav: (stifling giggles) Oh yeah?

Jaz: Well, okay. Two things before we get fully -- (*Lulav laughs*). The first bit is I had remembered before I read this that the person who went out to get Rebecca had a name, which was Eliezer who is mentioned by name in one of the previous -- I was about to say episodes. One of the previous parashot. (*Lulav chuckles*) But they are never mentioned by name here. They are only referred to as "the slave," which is gross. But when I said, "the former heir," this one says, "this is the most senior person of his household."

Lulav: That was my understanding too.

Jaz: And we did hear in the other parsha that before Abraham had biological children he was going to give it to the person who was head of his household. Anyway, but the thing he says to who I'm just going to call Eliezer, even though we don't get his name in this parsha --

Lulav: You're welcome to.

Jaz: Yeah. Which is really rude, that we don't get his name, he should be treated as a full person, but anyway, that's what I'm going to do. He says, "put your hand under my thigh, that I may have you swear" by G-d basically, of heaven and earth "that you will not take a wife from among the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose midst I dwell" but that you'll go to the place where I was born and get a wife from there.

Lulav: Mm-hmm!

Jaz: But so, he's like, good enough to -- anyway, do you have questions about this bit?

Lulav: What's your read on this situation? To my first instinct, Abraham seems like a racist grandpa.

Jaz: So, ah, yes. I definitely see that interpretation (*Lulav chuckles*) and it seems like a very valid reading of the text. I also, I don't know. It reminded me a little of the idea of... he's an immigrant. And maybe sometimes people in their immigrant communities are like, I don't fully want to assimilate and I'd like for my kid to marry somebody from my birth community and people can have all sorts of feelings about that, for sure, but that in and of itself, if there isn't

certain power dynamics there, isn't necessarily racist depending on who has power in the situation.

Lulav: Yeah, and that was Tova's first interpretation of this when I was talking to them earlier and reading through the parsha. I really like that. That makes sense. I just was thinking of this from the point of view of white people, as opposed to the point of view of Jews specifically,

Jaz: Yeah. But I don't think it has to be a Jewish-exclusive experience.

Lulav: No, yeah.

Jaz: And in fact, it's not a Jewish-specific experience, because the people Abraham comes from in this situation aren't Jewish, right? Abraham is the first Jewish person.

Lulav: Mm. True.

Jaz: They're just from the same area and the same culture type of deal.

Lulav: Yeah, that makes sense. And I also like how he says, "see to it that you do not take my son back there." Like, I want this to be as we made the promise with the Lord, that going forward we are these people in this land but I do want him to have a connection to where I came from.

Jaz: Mm. Yeah.

Lulav: Also, when it says, put your hand under my thigh --

Jaz: That's where I thought you were going to go. Okay, alright.

Lulav: *(laughs)* So, he's basically just like, "hey, Eliezer, come over here. Put your hand on my balls. No, do it, do it. *(Jaz laughs)* Okay, promise me that you will get a wife for Isaac from the homeland."

Jaz: Yeah! Yeah. I do think so.

Lulav: And they're just being a little euphemistic?

Jaz: Well, there's a little bit of interpretation and commentary in my Torah commentary that I'm reading, which, actually I should say, because I've been referring to it as "the Reform translation" for the last few episodes, I have this translation because I got it for my bat mitzvah, so when I opened to Chayei Sarah, I found my old sticky notes of "start here" and "stop here."

Lulav: Jaaaz!

Jaz: Which was very sweet. Anyway, that's why I have this particular translation that I use for this recording.

Lulav: What do they say about the significance of this?

Jaz: Well, it's a little unclear from context where he's supposed to be touching but that there is this implication of like, you're promising it and if you break this promise, you'll be sterile.

Lulav: mm.

Jaz: And you won't be able to have kids, and that's why it's located there.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Why are men like this?

Jaz: That's a really good question.

Lulav: Yeah, the note in my NRSV copy is as euphemistic as the text itself.

Jaz: Oh my G-d.

Lulav: It says, "putting the hand under the thigh, an old form of oath taking, reflected the view that reproductive organs were sacred."

Jaz: Yeah, that's not what this one says. This one is much clearer. It says, "The symbolic gesture may have implied a curse of sterility on the offender. (Sons were said to issue 'from the thigh'...) Some suggest that this act involved touching the testicles." *(Lulav laughs)* Like, so, they're just very straightforward about it.

Lulav: Yeah. Good.

19:10

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: I'm so proud of our people.

Jaz: We are in general better about that.

Lulav: Do you want to move on?

Jaz: Anyway, so and then Eliezer says okay, and he goes to the land where Abraham came from and he brought 10 camels with him, a minyan of camels.

Lulav: Oh, good point.

Jaz: I don't know if that's intentional, but he brought 10 of them and I think it's implied that he brings 10 because he's carrying so much stuff with him because he says, "laden with an abundant store of his master's goods." And then he goes to a drinking well and he prays and he says, "the way I will know if the person is going to be Isaac's wife is that someone will come and I'll ask her to drink from her water pitcher, as she's getting water from the well, and she will offer me the drink that I ask for and also offer to get water for all of the camels."

Lulav: Can you read 24:14 in your copy?

Jaz: "the girl to whom I say, 'Tip your pitcher and let me drink,' and who replies, 'Drink; and let me water your camels, too' -- let her be the one You have designated for Your servant Isaac; that is how I shall know that You have done a kindness for my master." It seems pretty straightforward.

Lulav: Yeah. From both that phrasing and the one in the NRSV, it seems like he's making up a series of events that if it comes true, will be confirmation that this is the new daughter-in-law.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Is that how you read it too?

Jaz: Yeah, it is. I sort of interpret it as him being like, yeah, this is how I'll know. This is the divine sign that I want. I am making a deal and this is how I'll know that You're listening to me.

Lulav: Cool.

Jaz: And even as he's making this deal in his head or to G-d or whatever, Rivka comes up and we get her whole genealogy (*Lulav laughs*) and she comes up, she's gorgeous, she fills up her pitcher, (*page turning noise*) he asks her for some water, and the exact scenario that he described come to pass and he stares at her and as soon as she is done giving water to all 10 of the camels, he offers her some jewelry and gold and then asks her father's name and not her's, (*Lulav chuckles*) and asks if he has a place to name and she says her father's name and says that he can stay at her house.

Lulav: Yeah. So why do you think Rivka is so helpful to this stranger in exactly the way he anticipates? Does this seem like standard practice, or is there something fairy tale princess about her?

Jaz: Yeah, I don't know. I do think that it's interesting that it says she comes up even before he's done praying for it, because it suggests that it's not like he has had time to approach multiple people and be like, "hey, can I have some water?" and be rebuffed. He has not had time to put this to the test. The first person who comes up meets the requirements.

Lulav: Baruch Hashem.

Jaz: Which does raise the question of like, in this town, are they just trained to do that? Is this a standard thing and would any of them have reacted in exactly the same way? But that seems unlikely

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: Because when I was growing up, I remember being told that the reason this test was devised is he was asking for a favor from a stranger and lots of people would have of course given him water if he said, "hey can I have some water?" But most of them would not have gone out of their way to also bring lots of water for 10 camels

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: Because that's a lot of work.

Lulav: Yeah. Cool.

Jaz: Yeah. But that isn't an answer to your actual question, of why was she so helpful. Did you have any theories?

Lulav: So, I'm going to do another "drash-maker, drash-maker, drash me midrash" segment a little later on.

Jaz: Great

Lulav: But for now, I don't particularly have a gloss on the situation.

Jaz: Okay.

Lulav: Other than that she's just nice.

Jaz: I do think she's nice.

Lulav: Cuz we don't get a lot of interiority for the women in Torah, which I hate.

Jaz: Yes, we will say, like, just in terms of how the women are portrayed in this story, that her introduction reads like this:

Lulav: Yes. *(laughs)*

Jaz: "Rivka, who had been born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, was going forth with her pitcher on her shoulder. She was an exceedingly beautiful girl of marriageable age whom no man had yet known." So...

Lulav: Thanks, we needed to know that!

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: That's relevant!

Jaz: Yeah. Yeah.

Lulav: So he gives her a nose ring and two bracelets (*page turning noise*) and she offers for him to stay the night.

Jaz: Right. And then he thanks G-d for it and not her (*Lulav chuckles*) and then she goes home and lets them know and she specifically runs into her brother first, Laban, and then Laban goes out and welcomes him in and they give him food to eat and before he eats, he's like, "no no no, I can't wait, I have to offer marriage immediately," and does that and tells the whole story again. The text repeats the promise he's made and that whole scene and repeats again the scene that happened at the well and then asks, "so, will you send Rivka to be the wife of Isaac? And if not, let me know so I can leave now and go find somebody else." Through the course of this narration, it has become pretty increasingly clear that they're really closely related, also, although nobody seems bothered by this.

Lulav: Yeah. It just doesn't seem to come up.

Jaz: Yeah. Do you have any questions on that part of it?

Lulav: Oh! I do actually have one question. (*Page turning noise*) So, in 24:32, it says, "So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him."

Jaz: Oh yeah.

Lulav: Where do these dudes come from?

Jaz: Yeah, I -- it's starting to feel a little bit, the text is just willing to have extra people added when convenient. Remember when we were talking about Cain and he was like, "other people are going to kill" and we were like, "which other people?" (*Lulav laughs*) Yeah, they just are there in the narrative. I guess the idea is they must be there to help out with the camels or something

Lulav: Right.

Jaz: or with the treasure, but then it's a really weird thing for Rebecca to do, to offer to take care of the camels --

Lulav: Right? (*laughs*)

Jaz: And not of the other people.

Lulav: Oh yeah! Hey yeah! *(laughs)* That's why this feels so weird. Thanks for pointing that out.

Jaz: Yeah, and also to be like, of course you can stay with us when it sounds like, actually she might be offering shelter to a whole garrison of them *(Lulav laughs)* So that's a little odd.

Lulav: Yeah, thanks storytellers. So yeah, they're talking about "I prayed and here she was. Can I take her with me?"

Jaz: Uh huh. The only that I'll note is that usually there is this idea that the text doesn't have any extraneous things in it, that if it repeats something, it does so for a reason, and we have this really long bit full of stuff we've heard before, like, very recently, so I know that you're supposed to be asking questions this week, but do you have thoughts about this?

Lulav: Yeah, the thought I have about that is it's just a reinforcement that it happened exactly as he said it would. Like, we first get his internal monologue, where he's talking about, "okay, if this, this, and this happens, then that's the girl and we're good." Then she comes up and this, this, and this happens, so that's the girl and they're good. Then they go to her house, and in order to convey to the family that this is why he came here and in order for us to see that he's being aboveboard and open about the fact that not only did he come there for a wife but it was for specific divine purposes, I guess. He retells the entire story of "here was my predication, here was the experiment."

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: And I think that's why there's so much repetition. Do you have feelings that are different?

Jaz: My only thing is that maybe it's supposed to make her seem extra-special in that way. We repeat so much of it to emphasize that it's really just because she's super special and important and we need to linger on the ways in which she's really important

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: And I think maybe to make it feel less like, "who is this random dude that my daughter brought home" and to establish that it's not that she wanted to run away with him or he wanted to run away with her.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: There's no canonical evidence for this except for the fact that it starts with -- never mind. We'll come back to this later.

Lulav: Okay. My next question for you is at the end of 24:60, so go on ahead.

Jaz: Okay, great. So her brother and dad say, "I guess G-d has decided, based on your story, so we're fine with that. We'll go with what G-d has decided. She can go with you." Eliezer's happy about that and gives them all gifts and they celebrate and party late into the night and he stays there. But then, it's interesting, because then her dad is removed from the narrative a little bit and her brother and mom are like, "oh, but she should stay a little bit longer with us. Maybe a few days? Maybe 10 days?" They're like, "maybe she should stay here for a while."

Lulav: Is the implication "and you can go?"

Jaz: I don't know.

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: It seems ambiguously worded. Maybe they had second thoughts. They're like, "we agreed, but now we're not certain so we'll just put it off and delay." Or also, the mother wasn't mentioned as agreeing the first time, just the brother and dad, and this time, the second time, the brother and mom are like, "I don't know -- let's delay" so it seems really possible that the dad agreed and the brother was like, "okay, I'll side with dad" and then the mom was like, "what? no!" and then the brother was like, "okay, I'll side with mom."

Lulav: *(laughs)* Good.

Jaz: That's my read of it anyway. We don't get the mom's name, but she's a hero in my opinion. She sees that her husband is like, "yeah, our daughter can go off with a stranger," and she is like, "what? not yet she can't! At the very least we can delay it and maybe he can stick around and I can see him for a little longer before we send her out of here."

Lulav *(doing an accent)*: All kinds of weirdos come to the waterin' hole these days. You just don't know. You never know.

Jaz: Yeah. Let's hear it for Jewish moms. I know she's not technically a Jewish mom, but, anyway. But Eliezer's really anxious to hit the road and this brother and mom duo, who you gotta think is mostly, again, the mom, because the brother was on the dad's side the other time, *(Lulav chuckles)* says, "well, let's talk to Rivka and see what she says." And they're like, "will you go with him?" And she says, "yeah, I want to go." Or, that's not true, she says, "I will go."

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And then they send her off again with him and his newfound men I guess, and they said with her nurse.

Lulav: Oh yeah!

Jaz: And with a blessing. And then they leave. What's your question?

Lulav: Drash-maker, drash-maker, drash me midrash: how does Rivka feel about her engagement?

Jaz: Well --

Lulav: And you can start at any point in this narrative.

Jaz: Great. Did you have a thing you wanted to say about this? Because I have lots of thoughts.

Lulav: No, I wanted to hear the very many things that you had to say about this.

Jaz: Okay. I am interested in the version of this -- this is going to be a shocker -- in which Rivka's a lesbian and --

Lulav: *(laughs)* Okay. Oh --

Jaz: She's of marriageable age, it says. We don't know how old that is, but she's being really friendly to strangers, she's really eager to get out of her parent's home, her father is kind of eager to send her off without very many questions to the first man who shows interest in her, and her mother is pretty protective of her and the only one in her corner, but she's like, "I don't want to be at home anymore," and she leaves and is like, "I will figure it out once I'm somewhere else. This is maybe going to be a better option."

Lulav: Okay.

Jaz: And also, she leaves and the people she takes with her are -- it started to say "Rebecca off with her nurse" and then it follows it up with "Rebecca and her servant girls" so my interpretation is she was being really nice and also she was like, maybe looking for a way to leave home.

Lulav: Yeah. With her gal pals.

Jaz: Yeah. I know that there's like, power dynamics of like, her servant girls, but... yeah.

Lulav: But that's a really good reading that I totally didn't think of.

Jaz: Yeah. But that is my take on the family. Also because we know from later chapters that her brother kind of sucks.

Lulav: Aw.

Jaz: And her dad was willing to give her away right away. So...

Lulav: Yeah. I'm really happy for her.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: So I had the same read as the mom is caring about her daughter and making sure that this random dude that she's leaving with is a decent person, so I just interpret the line, "will you go with this man?" as "ugh, Rivka will you go with... this guy? Do you want to go with this guy?"

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Is that what you want? *(laughs)* Will you?

Jaz: Uh huh.

Lulav: And she's just like, "yeah, of course."

Jaz: Yeah. I like it. I like that she gets to have some agency there and stuff.

Lulav: Yeah. That's a really good thing, is that she is given agency she jumps at the chance.

Jaz: Yeah. Yeah. There's also stuff there with the people who go with her who don't have agency.

Lulav: Mm-hmm.

Jaz: About who gets to have agency and it's like, the women don't have a lot of agency. Her mom isn't even named. But some of the women get to have a little more agency than the also unnamed servant girls.

Lulav: Yeah. Speaking of the *Fiddler on the Roof* references, this seems like a story that one might tell to illustrate how it is the owners of capital who always get leisure.

Jaz: Ooh.

Lulav: And we do not regard the leisure of servants as important.

Jaz: Yeah. Yeah.

Lulav: I forgot the name of that character. What's his name? It's not Fyedka

Jaz: The Communist that you like?

Lulav: Yeah *(laughs)*

Jaz: Perchik.

Lulav: Perchik! Thank you. *(laughs)*

34:19

Jaz: Yeah, okay. And then, for our last bit, that happens all at once, they go back to where Abraham and Isaac are. Isaac is out for a nightly stroll and he sees them come back and he does butterflies in his stomach, heart eyes, and he's like, "oh I love her!" Then they have this bit of like, "and Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah" and she became his wife and he loved her. And that helped him get over the death of his mom.

Lulav: Yeah, that's cool, I think. No, I don't like that, because it's replacing one woman who does emotional support with another woman who does even more emotional support, but.

Jaz: No, I also don't like it in that light, but my again, not really grounded in text interpretation, I will say, is if she really wanted to leave home so she that could just do her own thing and he's like, "listen, we're going to be best friends now and you do emotional stuff and I will do all of the making sure you always have a place to stay stuff" and that's it, I could see a version in which she's like, "alright, this seems like a practical arrangement. I will accept it as a practical arrangement."

Lulav: Yeah. I'm so glad. So, you said Yitzchak did a lot of heart eyes stuff, but what I have is he doesn't really have reactions here. It's the Rivka looks up and when she saw Yitzchak she slipped quickly from the camel and said to the servant "who is the man over there walking in the field to meet us?" and the servant said, "it is my master," so she took her veil and covered herself.

Jaz: Oof.

Lulav: And I like the reading of both "oh my G-d, who is that, he's so cute, I need to, like, cover up" and the reading of "aw heck, who's that dude? I need to put my veil on." *(both laugh)*

Jaz: Both have good possible interpretations.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: good versions of who Rivka is.

Lulav: So we were told that there would be angel sent ahead of Eliezer and generally when that happens, a literal messenger of the Name shows up in the narrative.

Jaz: Right.

Lulav: We don't see any of that on screen here. Do you have thoughts about that?

Jaz: I don't know. It could be that it's our first metaphorical use of angels, one where we do have precedent for later I think, which I guess would make this one the precedent, (*Lulav laughs*) but it does show up later

Lulav: We have post-cedent. (*laugh*)

Jaz: (*laughs*) Yeah. But also it could be that it happens off screen, like you're saying. Off page as it were, that somebody does come along and that's why Rivka knows down to the letter -- somebody showed up and said to her, "hey, you want to go? This is the thing you should do exactly. Somebody will show up, he'll ask for drinking water, it'll be a stranger, you should offer water to his camels. Gotta go, bye!" (*laughs*)

Lulav: Good. Oh yeah. I like the midrash which is totally unsupported by the text, that one of her gal pals was like, "you're the cutest one of us. You should find a cool stranger whose coming from a distant land and water the heck out of his camels and get him to take you away as a wife." (*Jaz laughs*) Both that this gal pal was in this instance an angel and that it turned out exactly like that.

Jaz: Yeah, and also --

Lulav: And that everybody's a lesbian.

Jaz: -- they ran away together.

Lulav: Yes.

Jaz: And then she found a convenient husband along the way.

Lulav: Right. That's my favorite part.

Jaz: Great, okay. The end of this summary is that Abraham actually remarries and has several more kids.

Lulav: Like a lot more kids,

Jaz: Who we never talk about. Abraham is old. The premise of this whole story of Chayei Sraah is "I have to do this whole thing in my old age" and instead he marries Keturah and she bore to him, Zimran, Jokshan, (*page turning noise*) Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. (*Lulav laughs*) Which is a lot of kids.

Lulav: Yeah. And also instead of having them be his kids, he kept doing the Hagar thing and sending them away. In this case, he gave them gifts instead of bread.

Jaz: Yeah, he gives them money and then sends them on their way. I think the implication is you'll be provided for and you'll be fine

Lulav: Mm hmm.

Jaz: But this land is going to be Isaac's land.

Lulav: Yeah. Yeah.

Jaz: You just get money as your inheritance instead. And none of those people come back to bury him. So he dies and Isaac and Ishmael bury him.

Lulav: Yeah. Just a note: there are 12 grandchildren who make 12 tribes of Ishmaelites and I think that's supposed to mirror the 12 tribes descended from Yitzchak.

Jaz: Oh wow. Cool. I didn't notice that.

Lulav: And then it smash cuts to -- oh wait, are these the -- no, sorry, I conflated two things. The grandchildren was tracing some ancestry of various Arabian tribes, including Midian. I've never read the Bible, maybe that comes up later! That's a joke. I did. *(Jaz laughs)* Yeah. I watched the Prince of Egypt, listen.

Jaz: Good enough.

Lulav: And then the Ishmael thing is the very end of this chapter where there are unrelated genealogies in case you were worried about never hearing about Ishmael again.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Like don't worry, he did get that nation.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Full of 12 tribes.

Jaz: Yeah! My last comment on the parsha before I wrap is, and I know I said I would try to dig up my old d'var Torah, and I will try to do that, but I do, just in this bit, want to comment that my recollection, having not looked at that thing in years, is that one of the things I talked about is this bit at the end here about how they have a blended and unconventional family

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And that's kind of cool and they have lesser-known members of the family with Keturah and her children and as far as we can tell, those people peacefully coexisted with Isaac and even at the end there, when Sarah is long dead and Abraham dies and Isaac and Ishmael comes together to bury him and you could imagine a version in which Isaac said, "Hey, I'm so sorry for what my mother did when I was a baby and I didn't know, but I don't think that was right and you're my brother."

Lulav: Hmm.

Jaz: I don't think that that's textually supported. I just think it's a possible reading.

41:06

Lulav: It's not, but I really like that story. Thank you.

Jaz: Yeah.

Lulav: Now we come to the segment Rating G-d's Writing, where we rate G-d's writing on two different scales. Jaz.

Jaz: Yes.

Lulav: How many camels gifts would you rate this parsha?

Jaz: I would give it -- you gave me an open ended scale?

Lulav: Yeah, this is payback for last time.

Jaz: Ugh! Okay.

Lulav: Or episode three? The one with numbering stars.

Jaz: Whatever. I would give it, uh, five pounds of silver and two gold bracelets, because I liked this one, and I thought it was pretty good.

Lulav: Nice.

Jaz: There's still slavery stuff happening and I don't love that, but there are cool women and they get agency.

Lulav: Yeah.

Jaz: And there is a plot happening where somebody goes on a quest and there's a romance subplot, which I guess is technically plot-plot, but it happens mostly off screen, and so, I'm kinda into it.

Lulav: Cool. I'm glad.

Jaz: Yeah. Out of 127 years that you could live before dying and having a parsha named after you --

Lulav: *(laughs)* Uh huh

Jaz: What would you give this parsha?

Lulav: *(page turning noise)* You know honestly, I think I'm going to give this 127 years. Cuz like, this is the first parsha that's just straight up narratively coherent and doesn't any atrocious things as far as I can remember *(page turning noise)* other than all of the implications that go along with having servants. But yeah, it's good storytelling, we get back to a character who had been done dirty in a previous parsha and he seems to be doing alright, there are blended families, *(page turning)* we invented some lesbians *(Jaz laughs)* and yeah! This is great. 127 years.

Jaz: That's great.

Lulav: Dying peacefully like in the Notebook. Spoilers for the Notebook.

Jaz: That's such a strong recommendation. *(Lulav chuckles)* I do just want to say one thing about your narrative coherency thing, which is that Eliezer does have friends who just pop out of nowhere.

Lulav: *(laughs)* Yeah. That's true.

Jaz: And make that whole story with the camels real confusing.

Lulav: Yeah. It wasn't like other things where it was like, why are we getting two creation stories? Guess we're going to have to write 5000 doctoral theses about this.

Jaz: Right, right.

Lulav: It's like, okay! We did the thing, I'm repeating it to make sure that we're clear the thing is done.

Jaz: Yeah, yeah. Okay. My one Continuity Corner thing: I didn't have anything to look up from last week, but I did have a bit that we refer to in episodes one and two, things about the creation of humans and how animals come in binaries. And so, the other day, my friend Brin made a comment on Facebook and I'm just going to read it because I really liked it.

Lulav: Hmm.

Jaz: "Hypothesis: male and female G-d created them is a merism, not a list." And I was like, okay, but what's a merism? Can you tell me more? And so they explained, "anyway, just to de-jargon this before i go make crêpes: a merism is a rhetorical device where you list two opposites to express a vaster totality: 'i looked high and low' doesn't mean 'i exclusively looked in high and low places only,' it means 'i looked everywhere i could think to look.' so if you read this as a merism, it goes from meaning 'G-d created male humans and female humans and THAT'S IT' to meaning 'G-d created humans of every gender'"

Lulav: So instead of a dichotomy, it's -- yeah! G-d did all of that.

44:51

Jaz: Yeah!

Lulav: I like that.

Jaz: Yeah! I thought that was cool and a good addition to our discussion about creation.

Lulav: What was that friend's name again?

Jaz: Their name is Brin, I believe Brin Solomon.

Lulav: Thank you Brin! Jaz, can you take us to the close?

Jaz: Yeah! Thanks for listening to Kosher Queers! If you like what you've heard, you can support us on Patreon at patreon.com/kosherqueers, which will give you bonus content and help us keep making this for you. You can also follow us on Twitter @kosherqueers or like us on Facebook at Kosher Queers, or email us your questions, comments, and concerns at kosherqueers@gmail.com. Our artwork is by the talented Lior Gross. Our music is courtesy of the fabulous band Brivele, whose work you can find on Bandcamp. Go buy their album, they're great. Our sound production is done by my lovely co-host, Lulav Arnow.

Lulav: I was going to have a thing here, but couldn't figure out one.

Jaz: *(laughs)* I'm Jaz Twersky and you can find me @WordNerdKnitter on Twitter. I recorded this audio on the traditional lands of the Lenape people.

Lulav: I'm Lulav Arnow and you can find me @spacetrucksix on Twitter, or yell at me @palmliker! I recorded this audio on the traditional lands of the Wahpékute and Anishinaabeg.

Jaz: Have a lovely queer Jewish day!

[Ending Brivele music]

Jaz: This week's gender is: "spiritually impressive."

Lulav: This week's pronouns are: "fae" and "faen."