

פרשת תולדות
Ramban Chabura Notes

Part I. Understanding the conversation between רחל אמינו and יעקב אבינו and more on the topic of the אמהות wanting children

To Highlight:

Source #1:

a) Style:

Paragraph 1

- Quotes רש"י and ראב"ע; רמב"ן agrees, as his lack of argument implies and as will be seen below
- Provides basis for רש"י from חז"ל (as opposed to it being רש"י's own words)
- "Astonished" by this – but doesn't say it's wrong (as he may have, were it רש"י or ראב"ע or someone else later); clear reverence for חז"ל's interpretation
- Uses logical points and proofs from historical incidents recorded in תנ"ך as basis for his beliefs
 - Even proofs are exceedingly precise and relevant
- Suggests his very questions prompted חז"ל to offer an interpretation which they did
 - [Source of מדרש doesn't need to be מסורה; he knew חז"ל to be brilliant analysts and readers of text, and that they know how to determine פסט]

Paragraph 2

- Walking away from **רחל**, refers to this as **פנט**
- Combines close reading of the text with knowledge of the context (for example, **רחל** and **לאה**'s relationship, and their feelings towards one another), as well as with knowledge of the human condition (for example, that women will more often speak this way)
- Not afraid to chastise great figures if there are many reasons (such as the ones highlighted) to support such a read
 - However, still with extreme reverence (for example, still calls **רחל** a **צדקה**), and still with minimization of the sin (limited to what's actually implied)
- Major philosophical ideas are assumed axiomatic and referenced; worth mining and paying attention to as one reads his words

Paragraph 3

- Typically, because of great respect for חז"ל, wants to a) align himself with them, and b) to show how they're in accordance with פסט in their מדרשים
- Ends with confidently saying this is correct (both of the explanations which he himself has proffered, and in the פסוק in general)

b) Content:

Paragraph 1

- Quotes מפורשים (רש"י) (ראב"ע) – the request was for him to daven
 - [This is as opposed to some other request, that he do something physical to give her children, as the words might sound]
- Quotes רש"י – someone without children is as if they are dead
 - רמב"ן notes that רש"י is coming off חז"ל with this statement
 - [Four people listed there: a) poor, b) childless, c) blind, d) צרעת. Common denominator? Limited in action and continuity].
- רמב"ן is surprised by this, and asks two questions. If so:
 - a) Why did יעקב אבינו get upset at her, and say “Am I in the place of ‘ה’?” After all, ה' listens to the prayers of צדיקים!
 - [Mention מהר"ל and that תפילה is really about one's own needs; thus, the ability to daven for others requires one to truly feel that person's pain]
 - b) What does it mean when חז"ל say that he said “My father had no children; I have children. It is withheld from you, not me”? Why would he respond like this – do צדיקים not daven on the behalf of others?!
 - אלישע cites examples proving they do, from אליהו and אלישע רמב"ן
 - [He chose these in specific, since they are for barren women unconnected to them – in contrast to יעקב אבינו davening for his dear wife!]
- Therefore, רמב"ן suggests this as the basis for the מדרש in which חז"ל chastise אבינו יעקב and say he received some degree of punishment for this action.

Paragraph 2

- פשט now moves away from that interpretation based on חז"ל, and suggests one according to פשט:
- רמב"ן still sticks with her request being for him to daven for her.
 - [That is the simple פשט still; it makes less sense to say she would demand something he couldn't really do anything about]
- However, רחל אמינו's request was different in two ways:
 - a) She wanted him to ensure her that she would have children through his תפילות no matter what
 - b) And if not, she threatened to kill herself in her pain
- He explains that this was a mistake which she made.
 - Out of jealousy of her sister, she spoke inappropriately. רחל אמינו hoped that יעקב אבינו would don sackcloth and daven as intensely as possible in order to save his beloved wife from dying, so that she should have children and not kill herself out of her emotional pain.
- יעקב אבינו became angry on both accounts:
 - a) The צדיקים תפילות are not in their hands to ensure that something will happen no matter what
 - b) Her exaggerated language, typical of women, was inappropriate; one doesn't refer to killing oneself as a legitimate course of action
 - [See בראשית כז:כו by "למה זה אנכי," versus רש"י (ראב"ע and רש"י). See also כז:מו]
- Accordingly, יעקב אבינו responded that the problem was hers — not his — intending to rebuke her and embarrass her
- Once תפילות recognized that she could not rely on יעקב אבינו, she turned to ה' herself
 - And therefore, the פסוק says ה' answered her in specific
 - [See parallel with וְהָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַוּכָהּ אֵין עֲשֶׂה after she realizes he can't empathize, she herself davens, and it is this תפילה which works]

Paragraph 3

- The graph now shows that maybe part of רמב"ן's interpretation (the second מדרש he quoted) can fit with his suggested one as well:
- Of course רמב"ן **יעקב אבינו** davened; however, רחל **אמינו** now demanded he daven until he was answered no matter what, as his father had done.
- To this, רמב"ן **יעקב אבינו** got angry, and responded that a) his father was a bigger צדיק than him, b) his father had a **ברית** that ה' would give him children [and this same **ברית** was irrelevant in this situation, since רמב"ן **יעקב אבינו** already had children, and it was her alone that had been withheld from having kids].