# Becoming A Doer

I'd like to sketch out to you how I see this story from Rebecca's perspective. In order to do that I actually want to start a little bit earlier, to the story of the births of these two children, Yaakov and Esav because our story, I think, really begins there.

Listen to the names of these children as they're born and how they get these names. "Vayetze harishon admoni." The first comes out and he's all red and all ruddy, "kulo k'aderet se'ar," and he's hairy as if he's already a mature man. "Vayikra'u shemo Esav," and they called his name Esav. Before we go on, let me just ask you a question. Who called his name Esav? Again, just look at the text. "Vayikra'u shemo Esav." Vayikra'u, that verb, is conjugated in the plural. They called him Esav. So the obvious answer is, Isaac and Rebecca, both parents, called his Esav.

Now listen to the very next sentence. "V'acharei ken yatza achiv," but after this out came his brother "v'yado ochezet ba'akev Esav," and his hand was holding on, grasping the heel of Esav, "Vayikra shemo Ya'akov," and he called his name Yaakov. So, who called his name Yaakov? You see when you look at the verb vayikra, vayikra is conjugated in singular and since it's singular masculine it's plain as day who it was who called the name Yaakov It was Isaac.

Both parents called him Esav, but when it comes to the naming of Yaakov, only one, Isaac, named him Yaakov and the curious reader has got to ask why? Why the discrepancy here?

I think maybe the names of these children may hold an important clue. Esav and Yaakov, what do they mean? Esav seems to emerge from the verb asa- done or a doer. In fact, he is an already made man. He comes out of the womb and he looks like a mature adult, already. He's got hair all over him and he's all ruddy and vigorous, and lo and behold, he is a doer. Do you remember what it is that Yitzchak commands him to do? Go out and hunt for me this venison and go and prepare for me this delicious food.

Look at this guy. He can do it all. All the way from hunting and then, plus, he's a great chef. He literally is the doer, just like his name suggests. But look at the name Yaakov. He's holding the heel, the ekev, of his brother as he comes out and that's his name. Maybe that might explain something about why Rivka was silent, about why she didn't join in naming Yaakov, Ya'akov. Maybe it's not such a nice name.

Remember, Rivka is the one who loves Yaakov. We hear that Isaac loves Esav because Esav is so good at doing everything, but Rebecca "ohevet et Ya'akov." If she loved Yaakov, then maybe she didn't want to join in naming him heel. A heel is crooked. It's not straight. Yaakov, later on in life, will get a name that means straight: Yisrael, yashar Keil, straight with God, or the one who struggles face to face with God, but the name heel doesn't really mean that. It's the consolation prize. It's holding onto your brother's heel and coming out second and maybe Rebecca doesn't want that for Yaakov The chance for Yaakov to almost shed that name emerges in the story of the blessings. Let me show you how.

What I want to do with you know is reread Genesis, Chapter 27. And we're going to almost do it in slow motion because what we're looking for is a point where things change. Remember the conclusion we came to before, that seemingly Yaakov and his mother are on the same page, that what they are plotting isn't really a deception, but somehow it degenerates into this actual deception at some point, unexpectedly. How did that happen? When did that happen? Can we isolate it by going through the story slowly, stage by stage? Let's try to do that right now.

Rivka overhears Isaac talking to Esav. He says, "Go out, hunt for me some venison. I want to bless you before I die." Rivka overhears this and summons Yaakov and she says to him, "Hinei shamati et avicha m'daber el Esav achicha lemor. - I heard your father speaking to Esav, telling him to bring him this food that he's hunted so that he can bless him before he dies. - V'atah beni shema b'koli, la'asher ani metzavah otach - - and now my son, listen to my voice, to that which I command you now. - Lech na el hatzon - go now to the sheep in the backyard - v'kach li misham shnei gedayei izim tovim - and collect for me two goats, nice ones - v'e'e'se otam l'avicha, ka'asher ohev - and I will prepare them as delicious delicacies for your father just as he loves - V'heveita el avicha - I want you to bring them to Father - v'achal,ba'avor asher y'varechacha lifnei moto - so that he will eat so that he blesses you before he dies," and that's all she says.

I want you to really focus in here and read without the end in mind. Is she telling him to deceive his father? There's no mention of deception, whatsoever. What she's really saying, seemingly, is that this is your chance to be the doer. Why is it that your father wants to bless him? Why did he love him? He loved him because he's Esav, but you can do also.

Go to your father, make a case for yourself. The mere fact that you will come to him and stand before him with confidence and make that case with you having food and you say, "Father, I overheard what

you said, I can bring food to you too. Bless me." All of a sudden that's a new Yaakov. "You can get this blessing, my son. Go to him. Become the person who can get this blessing." That's all she saying. If anything, not only does she not have deception on her mind, she has the opposite. "You're going to shed the name Yaakov. There's going to be nothing crooked about this. You're going to go to your father, you're going to make a case, straight forward and your father will bless you."

I just want to pause with you for a moment. On the one hand she's saying, "Look, you can make a case for yourself perhaps. You can be the doer." On the other hand, sort of not really, because it's not like he's going to go and prepare the food. Remember, Esav was sent out to go hunting and to go preparing food. What does she say? "Go to the backyard and get the sheep, and get the goats, and bring it to me and I'll make it for you and then you'll present it to Father." It's almost like she knows that he's no hunter and maybe he's not even much of a chef. He's not, in fact, really a doer, but I'm, sort of, going to help you out. I'm, sort of, ushering you almost into this new life; the life of the doer. You're going to stand up there and you're going to, sort of, take your first steps into this new world, but you can do it my son. Just go do it.

What happens next? "Vayomer Yaakov el Rivkah imo, hein Esav achi ish sa'ir - but Esav, he's all hairy - v'anochi ish chalak - my hands are smooth - Ulai yemusheni avi - maybe my father will feel me - v'hayiti b'einav kim'ta'te'a, - and it will seem in his eyes as if I'm deceiving him." Now, it really makes perfect sense why he says that, because it's not that he'll realize I'm deceiving him. At this point, Yaakov and Rivka, neither of them think that a deception is supposed to take place. That wasn't the plan, but he says it will seem in his eyes as if I'm deceiving him because he's going to reach out and feel me. What does that mean?

"Mom, what was your plan? I'm going to come and all of a sudden, I'm going to bring him this food and all of a sudden it's Mister Yaakov turns over a new leaf and he's the big doer. Really? Mom, it's not me and he knows it's not me. He may not be able to see me, but he can feel me. He'll feel those callow hands without any hair. He'll say, 'Yaakov, come on. Who are you? You're the big doer? Look at you. You're not a hunter, you're not a doer, you're not a chef, you're not an anything. One instance doesn't make a whole new man. Go back to your tents.' It's not going to work, Mom. It will seem in his eyes as if I'm deceiving him."

What happens next? What happens next is Rebecca gives Yaakov her response, "Alai kil'latcha beni - my son, if you're worried about being cursed, don't let that bother you. If he curses you in that kind of way, then the curse will go on me. Just listen to me and go out and do this." In her own mind what she's

saying is, "I'm just doing what a good mother would do here. I'm trying to give you confidence. You can go out and you can make this appeal to your father and if it doesn't work out, if against all odds he comes back, and your fear comes true and he does recognize you and he responds scornfully to you, I'll take that risk for you. I don't think it's going to happen. You go do what it is you need to do."

It's a heroic position, really, that she's taking, but even within that heroism, again, she's scaffolding for him, but almost undercutting him at the same time. On the one hand, you're going to be this doer and you're going to do it, but if you really think about what it means to be a doer in that situation. What does it really mean? Part of it means to make the food. Part of it means to serve it to Father, but another part of it means to take the risk. I mean, you're going to your father and you're saying, "Father, I know that you said that you'd like to bless Esav, but I want to make a case to you that you can bless me too. I can have those qualities that you desire so much in him and therefore I can be trusted to carry on this legacy that you seek to pass over." But part of that, being a doer, is taking the risk to stand up before your father and make that case. That's part of what would impress Isaac, but in a way that risk isn't really there, for him at least. Mom has taken it off the table. If he curses you, don't worry there's no risk to you, I'll take the curse.

Rebecca, in a way, she's really just trying to get him to make his case, but in a certain kind of way, at every stage, she's taking a little bit of that doer-ness away from him even as she's encouraging him to go out and be a doer. It's not really a deception, but this progression of, on the one hand, go out and assert yourself as a doer and on the other hand, I'll take the risk, I'll make the food, the contradiction between those, the tension between those reaches a climax in the very next stage of the story where, tragically, it all begins to fall apart.

Let me show you what I mean in our final video of the series.

# Jacob’s

Fateful

# Choice

Okay, what is the next thing that happens? "Vatikach Rivkah et bigdei Esav benah hagadol." This is the moment when Rebecca goes and takes "hachamudot, asher ita babayit," those wonderful clothes that she had with her in the house, "vatalbesh et Ya'akov benah hakatan," and she puts them on Yaakov. She dresses him in those clothes. "V'et orot gedayei ha'izim holbishah al Yadav v'al tzavarav." Then she puts these hairy skins from the goats on his neck and on his hands, on the parts of him that are most smooth and she hands him the food that she's made and the bread in her hand, "Vayovo el aviv," and he comes to Father.

Stop right there. Pretend you do not know what happens next. Would you really think that a deception is happening now? She never tells him to go deceive his father. She just puts those clothes on him. But why would she do that if she doesn't mean to deceive him?

Well, what's the last thing that Yaakov told her? His last insecurity that he expressed to her was, "But, Mom, he'll feel me, he'll feel my smooth hands," and she's thinking as she leaves and as she goes walking through the house, I know what's going to happen. He's going to go before his father and he's going to have that tremor in his voice and he's not going to be confident. He's not going to feel like a doer. He's going to be so insecure about those smooth hands. What can I do to help him? And she thinks about one last thing she can do to help scaffold for him, to help make him feel like that doer.

Not only will she help him by cooking the food for him, not only will she help him by assuming the risk of the curse for him, but she's going to help him one last way. She's going to find clothes, those clothes of Esav. She'll dress him in those clothes. She'll give those skins of sheep and put them on his smooth hands so that he won't have to worry about those smooth hands when he goes to Father. She'll take care of one last problem for him and maybe if he's wearing those clothes he'll feel more Esav-like. He'll feel more doer-like. It'll just be better for him.

But, here's the problem of what it is she's doing here, which is that there's still no deception here, this is still all very above board. There's a heroic mom who just wants her son to go out and make the case to Father that he's a doer and that he can be everything that he wants him to be. She's made the food for him now and she's assumed the risk of the curse for him now and now you're taking away one last thing that he can worry about and listen to that language; "vatalbesh," she dresses him, almost as if he's like this little child that mom is dressing. In a way, she's sort of undercutting in a subtle way what it is that she wants him to be. He's the doer on the one hand, or that's how he presents himself- but really is he?

Maybe that's what leads to the very next tragic moment. What happens when Yaakov actually approaches his father. Isaac says the fateful words, "Mi atah beni? - Who are you my son?" A very, very good question indeed.

Who is he now? She wants him to be the doer, but is he the doer? He doesn't feel like he's the doer. He looks at the clothes and looks at himself and then the words come out. "Anochi Esav becharecha, - I am Esav, your firstborn son. - Asiti ka'sher dibarta eilai,- I did as you've asked of me." You can imagine, sort of, Rivka listening from the kitchen and hearing these words and it's like, "Oh my goodness, what did he even say? That was off script. What are you even doing? This wasn't part of the plan."

But, Yaakov, he said it anyway. "I'm Esav," and from then on it's just like he's got to ad-lib his way through this and it turns into a deception. It was never planned to be a deception. That's not what she planned. It's not what he planned. It's just what he said. He was just, sort of, the diminutive Yaakov and it's almost as if the clothes overshadow who he really is and he just feels like Esav wearing those clothes and he just said it.

Somehow the deception has come, even though it wasn't planned. You know, if you wanted to assess blame, Rebecca pushes him out there and he's not quite ready for it. He decided to go when he's not quite ready to go and then, you know, there's Isaac who really has it only in his head that he wants to bless the doer. Here's this kid who wants to be seen as the doer. You could find enough blame to go around in the family, but it's not the way it appears.

It seems like there's a villain here with malice aforethought, in cold blood, seeks to deceive people and ruin their lives, but it's not what really happened, perhaps. It's a tragedy of small errors that come together to create conflict and pain and hatred that last through generations. It's almost a hair raising story in that way and somehow the challenge from there on in is how to pick up the pieces.

That's the challenge that faces Yaakovs as he proceeds into an uncertain future. A future, where even as he limps over to Lavan's house, his brother's hatred smolders. He will have to eventually confront his brother again and when he does, the question is will he be able to finally make Rebecca's dreams come true? She wanted him to shed the name Yaakov. He hasn't been able to do it yet, but shed that name he

will, in his final confrontation with his brother.

I want to direct you to a couple of other places that I urge you to take a look out, other videos that pick up the story in different kinds of ways and continue the journey.

# How

Could

# Rebecca Trick Her Husband Isaac?

Hello everybody. This is Rabbi David Fohrman and welcome to Aleph Beta. Today I want to look with you at the very difficult story of

[Yaakov's deception of both his brother Esau and his father Isaac](https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/jacob-deceives-isaac-esau-consequences)

. Isaac seeks to bless one of his children. He loves Esav. Rebecca, mother of both Esav and Yaakov, kind of swoops in and seems to impose her will upon the story. Dresses up Yaakov in clothes, borrowed so to speak from Esav. Before you know it, Yaakov has a blessing, Esav doesn't, and for the rest of Genesis we and the characters are left to deal with the aftermath. How do we understand the story?

# Isaac and Rebecca's

Story:

# Why Steal Esav's Birthright

for Jacob?

OK, before we dive into the story I do want to say a little bit of a word to you about perspective. We have touched the story before in Aleph Beta, in previous videos and you can find them at the links below. We have talked about the story, but we have talked about it primarily from the perspective of Jacob. What was he thinking? How could he have done what he did? What was the story like from his perspective?

Today I want to adopt a different perspective with you. I want to look at Rebecca's perspective, the mother of both Yaakov and Esav, because she really seems to be the architect of this deception; it seems to come from her. What was she thinking? Did she think that was okay? I mean, if she had an argument with Isaac, her husband, if she felt that you're blessing the wrong kid, bless Yaakov instead, then make the case to him, talk to him. Why resort to the sort of backhanded deception?

It ends up so terrible. Look at what happens. Esav is infuriated. He pledges that he's going to kill Yaakov and there's this anger, this burning anger that doesn't even seem to subside. Generations later the anger of Amalek itself, the grandson of Esav, seems to be just a carryover from this deception. So this is the beginning of this terrible family feud. What was she thinking? Why did she do this? If you were Rebecca's lawyer what would you say in her defense? Is there any possible way of defending her position in the story? And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

# Was Rebecca's Deceit of Isaac Justified?

All right. So if we are donning our Rebecca's lawyer's hat, as it were, one line of defense that we might sort of take is, Rebecca had a prophecy. She was really, when you think about it, doing nothing more than helping a God-given prophecy come into fruition because if you go all the way back to two chapters ago when Rebecca was pregnant with these two children, with Yaakov and Esav, she was troubled at that time because she felt a struggle in her womb. God came to her and explained, "Shnei

le'umim me'ayich yipareidu," there's going to be two nations and they're going to diverge from your womb. These two children are going to be independent and establish these two different nations and there'll be a struggle between them and the older will serve the younger. "V'rav ya'vod tza'ir," in Hebrew.

There it is. The older is going to serve the younger. The older is Esav, the younger is Yaakov. She knows that it's the child she loves, it's Yaakov, who is going to be the one that ultimately is going to carry the mantle of the Abrahamic promise forward. Maybe that justifies everything. She kind of waits around, waiting for this prophecy to sort of come to fruition. But here's this moment, close to the end of Isaac's life, when Isaac decides it's time to pass on the mantle of the heritage to one child and he's choosing the wrong child. He motions to Esav and he says, "Come here, I'm going to give you this blessing."

Rebecca's thinking this is wrong. Every bone in her body is screaming, this is wrong. I have to do something to make this prophecy come to fruition. Therefore, all bets are off. Whatever she does, deception, underhanded, it just doesn't make a difference. She is causing this prophecy to come to fruition.

OK, so here is the critique, though, that I would level against that line of defense. First of all, why not just talk to your husband? I mean, you've just got to come back to that point. Just talk to him. If you had a prophecy, share it with Isaac. Why resort to deception? And even if you can come up with some reason why she had to resort to deception, still, does the mere fact that she had a prophecy from God, does that really mean that you can do anything to make that prophecy happen? I'm not sure we'd accept that line of argument. I'm not sure that intuitively that argument really makes sense.

# What

Would

You

# Do in Rebecca's Situation?

Let me try to illustrate why with an analogy for you. Let's put you in a version of Rebecca's position. Let's say you go to sleep one night and you have this dream. It's a prophetic dream. The Lord himself comes to you and says, "Dear AlephBeta viewer, I have a mission for you. You are going to be the next congressman or congresswoman from the 25th district of Wisconsin. It's going to be you. I, God, am behind you and just to prove it I'm going to give you a little something to begin your campaign. A check for $182,000 and it's for you," and lo and behold you wake up.

Under normal circumstances you just discount this. You think it's not really real, but there it is, underneath your pillow. You look and there's a check for $182,000 and it's drawn on the Bank of God

and it's signed, love God. You deposit it in CitiBank and the check clears and it's real. What do you do now? Well, I mean, the one thing you don't do is just stand back and wait for it to happen. You know, you've got to put in some effort.

You open the back account and you begin to establish the campaign. You go out and you make some speeches and lo and behold it starts working. Your name recognition is going up in polling. You're neck and neck with your opponent. It looks like it's really going to happen. Until one night, five days before the election, your chief of staff calls you. He says to you, "Sir, I have bad news. Our internal polling says you're going to lose by five points. It'll be close, but you're going to lose." And just as the chagrin sets in he says to you, "But, I know somebody in central election headquarters who works with the computer systems. His name is Phil and I think if we slip Phil a little something, maybe about, I don't know, 180, let's say about 182,000 should be enough. I think we could probably make that five-point deficit go away."

Then he leaves you with your thoughts. It hits you. $182,000. That was the amount of that check. You had a prophecy. What do you do now? Do you slip the money to Phil? I think the answer is, you don't slip the money to Phil. I think what you've got to say here is that if it's wrong to commit fraud, if it's wrong to bribe an official in the central election's agency, then it's simply wrong.

This prophecy from God doesn't really justify it because you sort of have to say to yourself, "Look, on the one hand I had to establish the campaign. I had to do everything within my power, ethically, to make this prophecy happen, but ethically is the key word. I don't have to do anything to make it happen because, ultimately, there's a partnership here. I mean, God, You know, You have some power too. At some point I've got to say, look, there's five days left to the election. It's close. It looks like I'm down, but God, You know, You're the one who gave me the prophecy, You're the one who told me to run. I gave it the old college try. I did my best. It's up to You now."

If that's true, then seemingly our justification for Rebecca on the grounds that if you've had a prophecy you've got to make it happen no matter what, has just run out of gas. We have failed, really, to give a justification to Rebecca. What was she thinking?

Join me in our next video and let's try to figure that out.

# A Defense of Rebecca

Okay. So here we are. You're putting on your lawyer's hat. What really is the defense here? Is there a defense here? I want to suggest that there there's actually, three exculpatory indications, three pieces of evidence, that come from three crucial points in this story, that really add up to an astonishing new way at looking at the story from Rebecca's perspective.

To see these pieces of evidence, what I want to do is, don't read with the end in mind. You see, you know the biblical story already, but the characters, they didn't know the end as they were going through it. It was undetermined. What is it like to be them, to go through that story, not knowing what's going to happen next? Sort of occupy that space with me as we go to these three crucial points and let's see what we make of them.

The first point in the story that I want to bring you to is actually something that occurs at the very end of the story; after the deception, after Yaakov's already managed to get this blessing from his father, after Esav comes and discovers that the blessing has been stolen from him, after Esav becomes infuriated.

Rebecca finds out that Esav is angry and she summons Yaakov. "I don't want to lose you. Your brother's going to kill you," she says, "Run away. Go to my family in Charan, - ad shuv af achicha mimcha,- until your brother's anger abates - v'shachach et asher asita lo, - and he forgets what it is you've done to him, my son." Now, sort of put yourself in Yaakov's shoes, as your mother says this to you. What is it that you're feeling?

You sort of think to yourself, "Mom, what I've done to him? I mean, this whole thing was your idea. At least what we did to him, if not what you did to him. What do you mean, what I've done to him?" By the way, if you go back to the Biblical text you'll find that she literally commands him. Shem'a beni,- "Listen my son - La'asher ani metzavah otach,- to what it is that I am commanding you." That's very unambiguous. This is her. Why is she making it seem like it was all Yaakov? Why would she do that?

That's point of evidence number one.

Here is point of evidence number two, a little bit earlier in the story. This is before the deception has actually taken place. Rebecca has called in Yaakov and she sort of hatches the plan. She says, "Here's what you're going to do. Your father, I heard him telling Esav that you should go out into the fields and hunt

the game and come back and bring me the food so I want you to do that and you go to him." Jacob, he's got these second thoughts. He says, "Mom, it's never really going to work. Father's going to feel me, he's going to know who it is that I am and he's going to curse me instead of bless me." She says, "Look, do it anyway, - alai kil'latcha beni - if he curses you the curse will be upon me, my son, - ach shema b'koli v'lech kach lach - you just do what I say."

Think of the risk she's taking here. Ask yourself this: What do you think the chances are that this plan actually succeeds? Again, just read without the end in mind. If you were a Las Vegas odds maker, what do you think the chances that this cockamamie plan works? That Yaakov, dressed up in his best Esav clothes, Yaakov, impersonating the voice of Esav can somehow manage to fool dad who's heard these guys ever since he was a kid. If anything, by the way, being blind sharpens your other senses. It doesn't diminish them. The chances are vanishingly close to zero that this works. What is the risk that she's taking here? Why would she say that, upon me be the curse? It doesn't seem to make sense. That's evidence point number two.

The final piece of evidence that I'd like to suggest to you comes from the verse right before this. Again, just to set the stage. This is the moment that Yaakov sort of lodges his protest to his mother. He says, "Mom, it's just not going to work. Father is going to figure it out. - Ulay yemusheni avi - Maybe my father will reach out and feel me." Now let's stop the verse right there and ask yourself, if you were Yaakov, how would you end that argument to your mom? You would say, "He's going to reach out and feel me and he'll realize that I'm deceiving him." But it's not what Yaakov says.

Listen to what he actually says at the end of the verse. "Ulay yemusheni avi - Maybe my father will reach out and feel me - v'hayiti b'einav kim'ta'te'a. And it will seem in his eyes as if I'm deceiving him." You sort of have to ask yourself, why did he pull his punches there? Say the truth, "He'll realize that I'm

deceiving him, Mom. It's never going to work." But he doesn't say that.

What he says to her seems to be the truth as he sees it and as Rebecca sees it. "It will seem as if I'm deceiving him." It would appear that somehow at this moment in the story, Rebecca and Jacob are on the same page. It's not actually a deception. It will only seem like one. But, that's a strange thing, right, because if you fast forward to the end of the story Esav certainly thinks he was deceived. He's furious.

He's going to kill Yaakov. Yaakov is running away. It pretty much seems like a deception, right?

How does this all add up? Somehow it does all add up to an astonishing new way of seeing the story. Let's try to put together these three pieces of evidence and see what the story looks like from Rebecca's perspective.