

These and These

Eruvin 13b:10-11

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel, For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, 'The halakha is like us,' and the other said, 'The halakha is like us.' A heavenly voice spoke: "These and these are the words of the living God, and the halakha is like the House of Hillel." A question was raised: Since the heavenly voice declared: "Both these and those are the words of the Living God," why was the halacha established to follow the opinion of Hillel? It is because the students of Hillel were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shammai. Not only for this reason, but they went so far as to teach Shammai's opinions first.

עירובין י"ג ב:כ"ז-ל"ב

א"ר אבא אמר שמואל שלש
שנים נחלקו ב"ש וב"ה הללו
אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו
אומרים הלכה כמותנו יצאה בת
קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי אלהים
חיים הן והלכה כב"ה וכי מאחר
שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים
מפני מה זכו ב"ה לקבוע הלכה
כמותן מפני שנוחין ועלובין היו
ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש ולא
עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי ב"ש
לדבריהן

Genesis 28:5

(5) Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.

בראשית כ"ח:ה'

(ה) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדָנָה אֲרָם
אֶל־לָבָן בֶּן־בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי אֶתִי רֵבֶקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב
וְעֵשָׂו:

Rashi on Genesis 28:5:1

(5) MOTHER OF JACOB
AND ESAU — I do not know what the
addition of these words is intended to tell us.

רש"י על בראשית כ"ח:ה':א'

(ה) אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מַה מְלַמְּדֵנוּ:

Reflection by Rabbi Aaron Alexander on Rashi's commentary on Genesis 28:5

I guess if you just randomly opened up to Genesis 28:5, learning that Rebecca was Jacob and Esau's mother could be useful. But if one has even a cursory knowledge of the story, or has been following along up until this point, this information is totally superfluous.

Enter Rashi. He always has something to offer, an insight that doesn't render the words useless. Once again, he delivers, but not in the way we would expect. "I have no idea what this comes to teach me." Brilliant.

The super commentators are baffled. Siftei Hachamim cannot believe he doesn't actually have an answer. If not, why didn't he just say silent? They posit that in this case there were many reasonable midrashic explanations available but just he couldn't decide which one was closest to the truth.

But I think this could be Rashi's greatest one liner yet. An expression of humility from someone beyond the insecure need to always impress.

Sometimes "I don't know" is as exquisite as intellectual gymnastics. It allows for possibility. Something never before imagined or uttered.

It's the Torah I needed to stumble across today. It seems that so many answers are needed and sometimes it's hard to even know where to start.