It’s not surprising that many of the familiar Hebrew Bible tales concerning the four Matriarchs portray them very favorably. However, the Book of Genesis also relates some episodes about these women that seem to imply mixed or even negative judgments about particular aspects of their moral characters. We’ll examine how the contributions of classical rabbinic commentary create balance and nuance for our understanding of the Matriarchs’ characters—in particular, through some imaginative and often surprising stories in the midrashic literature that read against the grain of Torah in order to counter the positive or negative implications of the biblical text.

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