

Parashat Toldot - Parashat VaYetze

Today, we present two stories, the story **Toldot** that was read in synagogues last Shabbat and the Torah portion **VaYetze** that will be read in synagogues this coming Shabbat.

Toldot is the only parasha in the Torah, which puts Isaac at the centre of the action. The portion begins with the birth of Isaac and Rebecca's twin sons Jacob and Esau. Like Sarah, Rebecca is deemed to be childless, but then miraculously gives birth later in life. During her difficult pregnancy, G-d tells her that she is carrying twins. The first child Esau emerges all red and hairy. The second Jacob comes out holding onto his brother's heel. He is named Jacob, from the Hebrew root meaning "heel." When they grow up, Esau becomes a hunter, "a man of the field." Jacob is described as a "mild man," more of a homebody Isaac favors Esau and Rebecca prefers Jacob. This story includes both parental favoritism and sibling rivalry. Esau as the first born is entitled to receive the inheritance of his father's blessing but at the time is pre-occupied with being an outdoorsman and does not seem to be very desirous of this rite. Jacob takes advantage of him and gets him to sell his birthright for a bowl of lentils that he has prepared. The story continues some time later when Isaac is old and blind. Fearing the end of his days is near; he called Esau to go out and hunt for some food and return to receive his father's final blessing. Rebecca overhears this request and favoring Jacob she prepares the food and dresses him like his brother and sends him in to receive the special blessing in Esau's place. Esau comes in later, and it is then that he and his father Isaac realize they have been tricked. Isaac offers Esau a secondary blessing, but it is not enough. Having now been tricked out of both his birthright and his blessing, Esau declares his hatred for Jacob and his intention to kill him. Rebecca hears of the plot and arranges for Jacob to flee to Haran, to the home of her brother Laban.

This coming Shabbat the parasha VaYetze is read. In the Torah portion Jacob begins his long journey, both physically and spiritually, from his home and family. Shortly after he leaves home, God appears to Jacob in a dream, presenting the image of the ladder from heaven to earth. God speaks to Jacob and promises him protection, offspring, and the land of Haran. Jacob travels to Haran, where he meets and falls in love with his cousin Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban. Jacob arranges with Laban to work seven years to marry Rachel.

However Laban, who has something of a shady reputation, substitutes his older daughter Leah for Rachel on her wedding night. Jacob confronts Laban, but is told, ironically, that the older daughter has precedent over the younger. Jacob agrees to work seven more years for Rachel as well. Years pass and the sisters, as well as their servants who are given to Jacob as mistresses, bear Jacob twelve sons and a daughter. These sons will become the ancestors of the 12 tribes of Israel. At the end of the story, Jacob and his family depart from Haran and from Laban, and begin their journey back to Canaan.

These two torah portions represent issues that occur in today's families. Family dynamics can be complex. How often have we felt, heard or been accused of parental favoritism? How often in our families is there sibling rivalry? As we all know being a parent is not an easy task and sometimes being a child isn't either. Being a parent at times can be metaphorically equal to changing four flat tires at 60 miles per hour, and being a child and a sibling at times can feel like oh no, what did I do now? Here it comes. More often than not, as parents and as children we try to do our best with the issue at hand. Multiple personalities and reactions are always complex and being a parent or a child can be very stressful. Favoritism, jealousy and entitlement fuel that stress. As we see in both Torah portions, back then it occurred and it still occurs now. Let's not be quick to judge. Let's not allow anger to close us off to remembering that we are "all equal for we have all been created in the image of G-d. " As we continue on the journey, let us look at each situation and determine what is for the good of all.

Oseh Shalom Bimromav Hu Ya'aseh Shalom Aleynu. May You, The Holy One of Blessing bring forth peace in our land quickly. Amen.