



Parashat Toledot, November 5, 2021 – 18 Kislev, 5782

Dear TBE Friends and Family,

One of my family's stand-by's on nights when dinner must be squeezed between a late lesson and early meeting is frozen pizza. I'll set aside for now my opinion of parbaked crusts topped by a commercial sauce and instead point out (for my own benefit, if no one else's) that the point of a family dinner is "family," not "dinner".

Be that as it may, on nights when frozen pizza is our dinner of choice, there is invariably a squabble between my two boys as to who has received the more desirable slice, whether evaluated on the basis of size, toppings or crust. There is no convincing either of them that the slice that they have received is at least as attractive as that allocated to their sibling.

That is, in its own way, the dilemma faced by the two most focal characters in this week's Torah portion (Parashat Toledot). The parashah paints for us the fraught relationship between the twin brothers Yakov (Jacob) and Esav (Esau) and tensions that it evokes between their parents. The rivalry reaches its climax in a scene in which Esav, arriving home famished after a hunt, agrees to exchange his birthright – a bequest of inestimable worth – for a pot of stew that his brother has prepared. The transaction is almost comical in its asymmetry (couldn't he at least have held out for a five-course meal in a Michelin rated restaurant?), but it illustrates a more universal human tendency.

I would dare say we are all liable to fall into a "grass is greener" mindset when regarding some trinket – and, too often, something of greater substance – that another has and we lack. Why did my colleague get this perk attached to their contract? How is it that other people's homes are more attractive? Why is mine the only family that suffers the indignity of "X"?

It is easy to see worth in something that we aspire to, but sometimes harder to assign sufficient worth to that which is already in our possession – and this holds



true even when the “thing” that we possess could easily be deemed by others to carry equal or even greater value. While this is lamentable when the object that we are underestimating is a material condition or object (which already can give rise to deep-seated resentment or envy), how much worse when that which we are devaluing is a human attribute or a person?

Perhaps by holding our comparative aspirations to the lens of Jacob and Esau’s interaction, by trying to assess how an outside observer, ideally one who has the privilege of both emotional and temporal distance might regard the situation that we are in as opposed to that we yearn for, we can steer clear of squandering our own bequest for that which is unattainable or vacant.

With hopes that many of you will be joining us this Shabbat as we celebrate with the Saar family the bar mitzvah ceremony of their son Ari, which can be joined at **8 p.m. this evening (Fri)** and **10 a.m. Saturday morning** using the special bnai mitzvah [link](#) (Zoom meeting ID:871 9244 3486 Passcode: mitzvah).

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Rachel Safman