

## **This Week In Torah *Toldot***

There is a story in the Talmud [Shabbat 110a] about 2 angels who follow a man home from Sabbath eve services. If when he opens the door, the house is just so; the good angel sighs and says: “May everyday be like Shabbat.” And the bad angel says “amen”. But if when he opens the door, the house is a mess and very little Shabbat preparation has been done, the bad angel nudges the good angel and says: “See? Shabbat is just like every other day!” and the good angel has to say “amen.” The moral of the story is that making Shabbat, as well as performance of so many of the mitzvot are in our hand—we do it, we bring God’s presence into the world by fulfilling these divine imperatives.

Enter Esau and Jacob—since they were in utero they fought for dominance in the real world. The text tells us that “Isaac favored Esau because game was in his mouth, but Rebecca favored Jacob.” This tension is a constant in our lives—competition vs. sedentary, hunter-gatherer vs. farmer-baker, sibling rivalry. But here we must reclaim the sanctity of home for us to gain a further explanation of what is happening. Many of us thrive on a dopamine rush—the thrill and the rush of intensity and competition. Others of us enjoy the sacred pause of being in the moment, enjoying a moment in time. It shouldn’t be either/or--- there is a way of balancing the 2!

Notice the end of the *parasha* when Isaac blesses Jacob who is dressed as Esau. Isaac questions but in the end, he blesses Jacob with the second part of the inheritance. Although Isaac was blind, some rabbinic scholars believe that Isaac knew exactly who he was blessing. He knew of the prophecy that Rebecca received from God. He knew the exchange between Jacob and Esau where Jacob acquired the birthright. Isaac knew that Jacob was the worthy heir. Rabbi Jonathan Slater teaches that Esau did not merit either the birthright or the blessing—he believed that he was entitled to them and his arrogance made him mock them rather than cherishing them. RaSHI believed that Esau hunted more than game, he was bullying—hunting people’s minds with his words and his daunting appearance. Rabbi Slater adds Ecclesiastes [7:14]: “God made this as well as that.” He understands this to mean that for every holy quality that exists, there is an impure one out there as well. Isaac’s blindness was that he could see that Esau embodied so many awful traits which he exhibited when he was not in the camp. Yet,

Jacob needed to turn them on in order to fulfill the destiny he was told was his. This sounds very much like a Machiavellian approach where the ends justify the mean—but a Chasidic master named Rabbi Shalom Noach would disagree—this is an allegory for the human condition. We need both qualities, but we need the wisdom to know when to exhibit each.

Shabbat is not a competitive sport but a sacred pause. Therefore, take the time to be like Jacob and turn from the competitive rush of the world and find the simple sanctity of being home.

Like the twins inside of Rebecca, we too find parts of our souls wrestling for dominance. But faith is such that God's *teferet* [splendor] is experienced when we actively and consciously choose to be more like Jacob rather than the aggressive Esau. Blessings will flow much easier that way!