

Lay_Your_Hands_On_Me_Toldot_Nov2_2013_raw

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I don't know what it is, if it's the moon, or the mercury, or whatever, some other... Pluto, Uranus, only in my community somebody would actually say Pluto, Uranus, in one sentence. I don't know what it is, but I feel like giving nine Torahs tonight instead of one, and so I'm going to give two. And I'll leave it up to you.

I mean, really I'm going to focus on one thing in a moment, but I wanted to preface that by saying something that's been on my mind all week. You know, it's not lost that this is the week when little children were running around dressed as tigers, and wolverines, and Spiderman, and Superman. It also happens to be the week where the food bill and the draconian cuts to food, food that is necessary, not food that is in abundance or over in abundance.

That this week, a week of dressing up in costumes and conversations about food, and we read in this week's reading, in the Torah, also about dressing up and about food. Of course, the one who dresses up this week is Jacob, and the food that is the lesson of the beginning of this week's reading is that when people are hungry they do all kinds of stupid things. Esau, the brother of Jacob, the twins, he comes back from the field and he's hungry.

And Esau is hungry, and Esau is hungry, and Jacob is preparing some kind of lentil, some kind of red stuff. And the bechora, the inheritance, the blessing, not even the blessing, the bechora, meaning that he's the firstborn, primogeniture, I'm the firstborn, I get the firstborn's portion, is given away for the price of some soup. And it isn't a surprise when we come to know their father, Isaac, because Isaac, as we will learn, loves Esau specifically because of food.

Right? That Isaac had a relationship with his son that was instrumental. The verse tells us, He loved him because he gave him good food. And Rebecca loved Jacob, we're not told, for any reason.

She just loved him. And so the failure of the father, the failure of the father in this week's reading is profound. Isaac's maturity and Isaac's requirement to become the one who passes on to his children the way of his father, Abraham, is at stake.

And no better way to bring out his weaknesses than to create a situation where he has to choose, as his father had, between two sons. And so the Torah tells us that Esau, the firstborn, is loved because he was the one who could bring good food to his father and then, lo and behold, he's willing to sell the most available and the most valuable thing for something he deems less valuable. After all, where did he learn that from? His father.

And it doesn't end in the beginning of the reading because at the end of the reading, the end of the story is that there will be a subterfuge, there will be a ruse that is played where Jacob

replaces his brother, we'll get to that in a moment. And Isaac is still interested in food. At the end of this week's reading, Isaac will say to his sons, well, both of them, really, at both moments thinking it's Esau, but really it's Jacob and then it's Esau, he says, bring me good food so I can bless you before I die.

B'Avod tevarachecha nafshi b'terem hamut. Isaac has a problem with vision. Isaac has a problem where he can't see.

And it's literal in the text, he can't see, but he can't see. He can't see Esau, and he certainly can't see Jacob. And the deepest, deepest Torah, that isn't the Torah I want to teach, but I just want to make a footnote, is that this week's reading is a Halloween Torah.

Because Jacob can't become Jacob until he wears Esau's clothing and says, I am Esau. Right? Jacob can't receive the blessing of inheritance until he can say about himself, ani Esau b'chorech, I am Esau. I am Esau, too.

So that's one very beautiful way of talking about shadow and the importance of being able to dress in other people's clothing, being able to see ourselves in the situations of others, and certainly it's relevant. But what I really want to talk about is something that I couldn't stop thinking about all day. Three words.

Three words that happen in this reading that in some way might have been, might have been the most important moment in the Torah had it been seized, and we will never know what would have happened because it wasn't. So the background is that Jacob's tragic life will be that Jacob will never ever be truly blessed by his father. He'll only be blessed by his father if he is acting like his brother Esau.

And the tragedy of Jacob's life is that he's always scheming. He's always making deals and he's always running. He's very mituchkam.

He's very smart. He's very strategic. Even though the Torah says that he's tam, which means simple, it doesn't mean simple.

He had a way. And the way that Jacob will be redeemed will not happen until he gets a new name, until he's able to be straight, not crooked, until he's able to come frontally to something and not from behind, until he can face what he needed to face, until he can face his demons. Jacob will not become the inheritor of the way until he comes out from behind his brother's clothing.

And it's going to take two weeks at least. And of course, Jacob's work won't be done because the one who dressed up in someone else's clothing will give his own favorite son clothing too. And the whole karmic cause and effect will keep going and going and going until it finally ends.

When stripped of clothing and unrecognizable, Jacob and his sons will have to recognize a brother without external appearances. He'll have to recognize Joseph not by what he looks like

because he won't recognize Joseph but what he feels like, what he smells like, what he sounds like. And in this week's reading, there's a moment which could have changed all of history.

When Rebecca, who is in many ways a hero in this week's reading, when Rebecca realizes that the birthright which should have gone to her younger brother, if you notice the pattern, younger brothers get things in the Torah, the younger son is supposed to receive the birthright and Rebecca has her own scheme. She comes to, she's listening. Isaac can't see, but Rebecca can hear.

And Rebecca listens and she hears that Isaac is about to give a blessing to Asaph and she preemptively runs to her younger son, her younger son Jacob, and she says to him, Go prepare that food that your father wants so that he can bless you before he blesses Esau. And then Jacob says something so profound. He says, If I go to my father and I ask him for the blessing, And I say to him, Maybe my father will touch me.

I read this a thousand times and it hit me so deep when he said that. Perhaps my father will touch me. And then he will see that I am not being honest.

And I wondered about this, Is Jacob saying, I'm afraid that my father will touch me and therefore the whole thing, the entire ruse will be lost. He'll touch me and know right away because my brother is hairy, Esau is a hairy man, and I'm not. I'm a smooth man.

So perhaps he will touch me means what, everybody? Maybe he'll touch me and he'll know that I'm lying. Right? So what does he want? He wants him not to touch him, right? Everybody getting this? He wants him not to touch him. He says to Rebecca, He says, Mom, listen, it's a great idea, but there's only one problem.

I'm really smooth and my brother's really hairy, and maybe my father will touch us. Maybe he'll touch me and then he'll know. So ulay means maybe he will.

And I don't want that. But listen to what the Meforashim say, listen to what the commentators say. Ulay, meaning perhaps, doesn't mean I hope he doesn't.

In everywhere in the Bible where the word ulay appears, it means I hope it happens. If the Torah wanted to say I hope it doesn't happen, it would have said pen, P-E-N, pen yimusheni avi. It says the Ketava Kabbalah, it says, Ulay yimusheni avi, is that Jacob was hoping his father would touch him.

He was praying, I hope my father touches me, and then he'll know that I'm lying. And then maybe for once in my life, I can stand in front of my father, as I really am. Maybe once in my life, I can stand in front of my father who doesn't look at me because I don't bring him these delicious things, and maybe he'll know how many lengths I went to to be seen, to be heard, to be known.

Maybe he'll know that I'm really the one that deserves the blessing. Maybe he'll touch me. I hope he does.

I hope my father touches me. The pathos of this moment is so profound. The whole game of him running away from the house now and marrying and being himself deceived by Laban in order to, again, deception upon deception, the entire edifice of Jacob's life is hanging in this fulcrum.

Maybe my father will touch me. I hope he does. I hope that the game that I'm playing will be seen for what it is, and the rug will be pulled out from underneath my entire agenda.

After all, it's not me that wants this, it's you, Mom. The Torah says very explicitly that he took his time bringing the delicacies. Vayelech, Vayavo, he went without alacrity, without any kind of yearning.

He was part of a plan much bigger than his own. And what he wanted, really, was that it would be seen through. It's hard not to feel.

It's hard not to identify with that place in Jacob. The hope that when we're in our places where we're disconnected, that somebody will see through it. When we're in our places where we're hiding, that somebody will know that we're hiding.

It's hard not to feel that so much of the stories that go on in people's lives and in our cultural and social life is because we're playing a game that we wish we weren't playing. And so Jacob will be taken through many, many stages. He will be taught to say that I am Esau.

He'll be taught that deception doesn't work. He'll suffer the loss of a child, the loss of the love of his life for seven years. Jacob will be led down many paths, all of them for his ultimate education.

But what would have happened? What would have happened on that fateful day? What would have happened had he gone in without Esau's skins? What would have happened if his father, having felt his smooth skin, had said, Hmm, it's my son Jacob. He's come straight this time. Maybe I will name him the straight one.

Maybe I will bless him that he continues to walk a straight path. It's hard. It's hard to give up games.

It's hard of our own accord to say I'm going to be straight. It takes the Torah 50 chapters to get to a place where the children of the crooked one finally know how to be straight. I want to bless all of you.

There's a lot of things in this week's reading. We could go on forever. But I want to bless you that Ulayimusheni avi Perhaps my father will touch me.

Perhaps someone in my life whom I can designate will say, I think you need to be touched. I think

you need to be seen. I think that underneath this there's something else that you really, really want.

May God bless each and every one of us with the power to be straight. To take a path that is difficult but ultimately rewarding. The path of admitting that we want to be in connection.

The path of honesty and integrity. May that be so and let us say amen.

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