

Shabbat Shalom,

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is a holiday Jews have always been prepared to handle—a meal with all the food you can eat? We do this for every holiday!

We enjoyed our first as Texans in our new home. We hosted a small group of family and new friends. We enjoyed good company and ate our fill of food. How many of you did the same?

This week we read that our matriarch, Rebecca, gives birth to twin boys, Jacob and Esau. As they grow, they display individual identities. Esau becomes a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; whereas Jacob becomes a more wholesome man, raising livestock and staying indoors. The text states that Isaac favors Esau, *וַיֵּחַבֵּד יִצְחָק בְּכֹרֵי* because he has a taste for meat; but Rebekah favors Jacob. This wouldn't be a Jewish story without the mentioning of food but why is this taste for meat significant?

At first glance, it appears that Isaac favors Esau because of Esau's taste for meat however Rashi, the 11th century French Torah commentator, teaches that the taste is in Isaac's mouth. Ramban, the 12th century Spanish Torah commentator, expands upon Rashi's interpretation, stating that Isaac wanted meat in his mouth constantly and favored Esau who brought it to him. Ramban's interpretation makes sense understanding Isaac's history with the Akedah when he was almost sacrificed by his father Abraham, leaving him with what we know today as PTSD. Isaac only knew he was safe following the Akedah when he smelled the ram burning on the altar. If Ramban teaches that Isaac wanted meat in his mouth all day for

respite, Isaac must have been reliving the trauma of the Akedah every day since. It wasn't Esau who wanted to become a hunter, it was Isaac who desired for him to pursue that trade because of his own childhood trauma.

Like Isaac, many of us have some unhealthy pattern in our life that we wish we could change. In order to change the pattern one must ask, Where did that pattern come from and what happens when I try to change it? For me, my unhealthy work pattern was keeping my mouth shut and not standing up for myself. I was able to trace this pattern's development to my childhood when I wasn't allowed to speak out. Authority figures didn't want to hear my side, thoughts, or opinions. They wanted me to be quiet and learn.

As I got older I unconsciously sought those same personalities in my personal relationships and also the environments I worked in. This pattern of keeping quiet led to unhealthy patterns when it came to collaboration. When a tough conversation needed to be had, I was overwhelmed with fear and instead of speaking frankly and from the heart, I would lash out either to retort with a snide remark or intentionally cut them out of a project. This would only cause more strife in the workplace. That's why for a period of time in my 20s, I would leave many jobs, perceiving that no change could ever happen. That I was past the point of no return. No matter how much I wanted a new healthier environment, my trauma kept me walking through the same door, just like Isaac.

Later in the text, when Isaac is approaching death, he tells Esau that he is ready to give him his birkat nafshi, his innermost blessing and to go prepare his special meat dish. Rebecca overhears this and instructs Jacob on how to prepare meat in the way his father likes and tells him what to say

so that Isaac will think he is Esau. She dresses him up in skins and with meat in hand sends him off to Isaac.

Though blind and frail, Isaac is hesitant to believe that it is indeed Esau who is in front of him. He thinks to himself, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau.” Despite his reservations, Isaac eats the meat and has Jacob come closer. When he smells his clothes, he says ““Re’eh, Ah that the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that יהוה has blessed” and Isaac gives Jacob his blessing.” Isaac no longer associates the burning of meat with safety as he recognizes that God was in the field with him all along, watching over him, and ultimately protecting him in his darkest moment.

The Torah commands us 36 times to welcome and embrace the stranger. The stranger can be a person suffering from something painful we don’t have experience with or even our unwanted emotional state. The sages teach that in those moments, how we can help the stranger is by visiting them and saying nothing so we can hold safe space for them to heal and work out their troubles. For ourselves, it is our sitting with the pain and not running from it. It took me 4 years to work through my trauma with a professional coach and break my unhealthy pattern. I still make sure that I check in with him regularly.

The reality is, we can’t wait for God to break an unwanted pattern, we have to do it ourselves. We can help those around us by just being with them which is what Jacob does for his father. Simply by showing up for him, he enabled Isaac to embrace what happened and break his unwanted pattern. Though it took Isaac his entire life to do so we don’t need to wait to the end of our lives nor should we let others work through their pain alone. From this Thanksgiving to the next may we have the strength to welcome

the strangers both within and among us so those unwanted patterns can be turned into patterns of inner peace and blessing.

Shabbat Shalom