

SHABBAT TOLEDOT 5781...GENESIS 25:19-26

Searching for the divine in others and ourselves

יט וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן-אֲבִרְהָם אֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק : כ וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן-אֲרִבְעַיִם שָׁנָה בְּקָחָתוֹ אֶת-רֵבֶקָה בֵּת-בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדוֹן אֲרָם--
אֲחֹת לָבָן הָאֲרָמִי לֹא לְאִשָּׁה : כא וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לֵנַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ יְהוָה וַתַּהַר רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ : כב וַיִּתְרַצְּצוּ הַבְּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר אִם-בֶּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְדָּךְ לְדָרֶשׁ אֶת-יְהוָה : כג וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ שְׁנֵי גֵיִים בְּבֶטְנֶךָ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֹאִם מְלֹאִם יֶאֱמָץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד
צָעִיר : כד וַיִּמְלְאוּ יָמֶיהָ לָלֶדֶת וְהִנֵּה תוֹמֵם בְּבֶטְנָה : כה וַיֵּצֵא הָרֹאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוּנִי כִּלּוֹ כְּאֲדָרֶת שֶׁעַר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו : כו וְאֲחֵרֵי-כֵן יָצָא אַחִיו וַיִּדּוּ
אֲחִזָּת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְחָק בֶּן-שָׁשִׁים שָׁנָה בְּלֶדֶת אֹתָם :

¹⁹This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac. ²⁰Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹Isaac pleaded with Adonai on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and Adonai responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of Adonai, ²³and Adonai answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." ²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

25:23...*And God said to her: "Two nations are in your womb, two separate people shall issue from your body; one people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."*

RASHI [11thC French commentator]...Still in the womb, they are already separate; one wicked, the other righteous.

NECHAMA LEIBOWITZ [20thC Israeli scholar]...In the homiletic commentary, Esau is not an individual, a specific historical figure at a certain point in time, but a prototype, a symbol of historic Jew-hatred...And a symbol cannot contain both good and bad, but must be all of one piece. Esau is the symbol of hate. In the Torah narrative, however, Esau is a human being, the son of Isaac and Rebecca.... Like all human beings, he has good and bad qualities. His good side was his respect for his parents...and we dare not overlook this...nor forget that he was a person.

TALMUD [5th/6th Century interactive discussion of Jewish law]...Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Read the text not as GOYIM but GAYIM – proud ones. This refers to Antoninus, descended from Esau, and Judah HaNasi, descended from Jacob, from whose tables there was never lacking neither radish nor lettuce, whether in summer or winter! Indeed, though proud and powerful men, they were personal friends with one another. [Avodah Zarah, 11a]

RABBI BRAD HIRSCHFIELD [President of CLAL–The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership]...Too often we think that by making room for each other we are somehow surrendering our integrity- that integrity involves a pushing away, a discarding of beliefs and parts of ourselves that are compromised. But the word integrity has the same root as integrate. When we fight for the integrity of our beliefs...we are actually fighting to consider integrating that which seems threatening, or alien. We have the most integrity when we are integrating the widest possible range of ideas and people...When we work from that place- a place not of uniformity but of endless diversity- we will begin to find the kind of unity that will heal us and begin to heal our world. We will figure out that the challenge is not how to fit everyone into a single room, but how to build structures with enough rooms for everyone.

(You Don't have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right, p 154)