

Torah Table Talk
**Are Parents Blind to
 Their Children's Faults?**
 Parshat Toldot
 Genesis Chapter 25:19 – 28:9



The conflict between Esau and Jacob began even before the twins were born. Wrestling in their mother's womb, Rebecca received a message from God of things to come: "Two nations are in your womb and two separate people shall issue from your body." Struggling over the birthright and their father's blessings, one can't help but feel that all the twins really want is their parents' approval. We are left to wonder who is at fault for the conflict that is about to tear this family asunder. Is it the overly ambitious Jacob, the insensitive and oafish Esau, the mother who has her own agenda or the father who appears to be blind to his children's ambitions? Like most family conflicts there are a whole series of conflicts that lead to unhappiness.

Genesis 27:1-2

When Jacob was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him: "My son," He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "I am old now and I do not know how soon I will die..."

1. Why is Isaac so insistent on giving his blessing to Esau instead of Jacob? What was it about his relationship to his older son that made Isaac favor him more than Jacob?
2. Notice how Esau responds to his father's call: "Here I am." Who else used this word in the book of Genesis and who is usually asking the question at the time? What is the implication of saying, "Here I am?"

Rashi

(The words in parentheses and italics are my explanation of Rashi's commentary.)

And they were dim: (His eyes became dim) because of the incense smoke of the wives of Esau. *(Esau married Canaanite women who continued to offer pagan sacrifices – the smoke of these fires 'made Isaac's eyes dim.')*

Another explanation: When Isaac was bound upon the altar and his father desired to slaughter him, at that moment the heavens opened up and the ministering angels saw it and cried, and the tears came down and fell upon his eyes. Therefore, his eyes were dimmed. *(Even though he wasn't sacrificed by his father he was permanently damaged.)*

Another explanation: In order that Jacob should take the blessing. *(Jacob became blind so that Jacob could more easily steal his father's blessing.)*

1. Rashi offers three different explanations for Isaac's blindness. What are they and why does he offer more than one explanation? Which one makes the most sense to you?
2. How would the Akedah, the binding of Isaac have "damaged" our forefather and influenced his judgments? How do you think people who are survivors of the Holocaust are influenced by their experiences?
3. The third explanation of Isaac's blindness is the most difficult one. What is Rashi suggesting here? Did God cause Isaac to become blind so that Jacob could more easily steal the blessing or did Isaac make himself blind to the ruse that was taking place?
4. How do parents make themselves blind to their children's shortcomings and failings? Do you think this similar to or different from Isaac in this story?
5. Are there times when it may be better for a parent to turn a blind eye to their children's actions?

Amy K. Blank, The Spoken Choice (1959)

Think you he was so easily misled
That blindness made confusion possible
Between the son he thought he loved and him
Whom he must bless? ... He blessed because he must,
because God wrought in him. At such a time
Could our cheap trickery prevail? He knew.
Cross purposed and reversing it might seem,
The destiny of generations: Strange
And repetitious are God's ways with man.

1. What does Ms. Blank suggest about Isaac's blindness in this poem? What does she mean when she says that Esau is the son whom "he thought he loved?"
2. Do you think Isaac realized that Jacob was the child who was destined to receive the blessing and he simply went along with his younger son's ruse? Why or why not?
3. How does "God's ways" get acted out throughout the generations according to the poet? Do you agree or disagree with her.

How to use Torah Table Talk

1. *Read the sheet out loud to one another. Discuss what it has to say.*
2. *Focus on the text in the box. It is taken from Biblical, post-biblical and modern Jewish sources. What does it mean? How does it make you feel?*
3. *Try to answer the questions following the text.*
4. *This is not a test and there are many correct answers and interpretations to each question. Share your ideas with one another. Be open and honest in sharing your ideas.*

***"All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul."***

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