

[Kohelet Discussion](#)

Parshah Toldot

2022-11-26

Jeff Zhuk

Toldot in Hebrew is a word related to descendants. What descendants? Rebecca delivered two. The twins started struggling from the very beginning. They struggled for the birthright in the mother's womb, then for the father's blessings, and continued their struggle later in life.

Esau hunted in the fields and brought food for the father. Isaac loved him. Rebecca preferred Jacob. When old and blind Isaac asked for Esau to give him the blessing, Rebecca gave Jacob Esau's clothes and taught him to get his father's blessing.

Why did Rebecca do so? I am reading in the commentaries that her intuition hinted that this was the right thing to do.

For Jacob, this was the second time he tricked his brother. The first time was when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for food.

There are more details, but I choose just one main branch to ask the main question.

What can we learn from this story? Torah teaches us the rules and laws of life. And Torah gives us amazing examples when the right people in the right circumstances are not locked by the rules.

We can think of these cases as violations of rules. But can we think of that as another level of freedom? Freedom to think and act not as expected by others. Jacob had that ability. Esau was a good hunter, exactly as expected by his father.

I think that Esau was locked into this frame of behavior.

We all are under invisible pressure from society. Last century such pressure built by German propaganda slowly changed educated people into a monster nation.

Russian propaganda does it today. That is the reason for the overwhelming support for the war by Russians. It is not easy to resist the desire to follow the established structure and be like others.

To be free and independent in no way means openness to doing whatever we want. Quite the opposite. Torah teaches us self-restraint. Torah teaches us to fight for freedom from tyranny, the freedom to do what is right in God's eyes.

And what is right in God's eyes? Every day we ask and try to answer this hard question, especially hard when "times are changing."

I mentioned "freedom and independence," and I will say several words about Thanksgiving. I am deeply thankful to G-d that I am Jewish. I am thankful to our Jewish fathers, and as a former immigrant, I would like to thank the fathers of this country who came here to fight for freedom.

Thomas Jefferson is my hero.

Jefferson championed the rights of Jews. He created the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. In the Declaration of Independence, he wrote that "People have certain Inalienable Rights including Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness."

The choice of words is important here. Not "Right of Happiness" but "Pursuit of Happiness." By the way, Jefferson was one of a very small number of presidents who did not get rich but lost money being in this high position. He even lost his estate and house.

Thomas Jefferson was not only my hero.

Uriah Phillips Levy, U.S. naval officer, and a Jew, one of the great characters in American Jewish history, admired Jefferson. On his personal assets, Uriah Levy bought and restored Jefferson's house and commissioned a statue for Jefferson in Washington D.C. **What a great Thank You!**

I wish you a Happy Thanksgiving weekend!!!