## [Balance – TIFERET and Parshat Toldot](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/balance-tiferet-and-parshat-toldot)

The disciples of Rabbi Yisrael of Rizhyn once noticed that their *rebbe* was in a particularly light and open mood, so they figured they would ask him the biggest question they had: “What is the best path to *Hashem?”*

“I have no idea,” replied the *rebbe*, “but I will tell you a story. Once there were two friends who had been caught committing some crime for which the punishment was death. They were brought before the king who was a kind and benevolent ruler, and he could see that they were regretting what they had done. He wanted to figure out a way to acquit them while still honoring the law of the land, so he devised a plan: he had a tightrope stretched over a vast chasm, and told the prisoners: “If you can make it across this tightrope and not fall to your death, you can go free.”

The two friends stood before the tightrope, terrified but hopeful. After a few moments, one of them blurted, “I’ll go first!” He put one foot on the rope, testing its tautness. Getting his balance, he lifted his other foot, took a step, and quickly scrambled across the tightrope to the other side. He made it!

The second friend called to the first across the pit – “Do you have any advice for me? How in the world did you do it?”

“I have no idea,” he called back. “But I will tell you this: when I started to fall to the left, I would lean to the right; and when I started to fall to the right, I would lean to the left…”

The sixth path is the *sefirah* of *Tiferet,* which means beauty, radiance, or splendor. Situated in the middle of the Tree, it comes as the reconciliation between the opposing *sefirot* of *Hesed* (loving-kindness) and *Gevurah* (strength, boundaries). On their own, *Hesed* and *Gevurah* are primal principles of life, but they lack direction; they need to be administered wisely according to the needs of the moment. *Hesed* is always saying “yes” and *Gevurah* is always says “no.” But *Tiferet* says “sometimes” – and in this sense, *Tiferet* represents Truth; it is the truth of how much “yes” and how much “no” we need in the moment – when we need openness and when we need boundaries, when we need kindness and when we need sternness, tempering one with the other. For this reason, *Tiferet* is also called *Rakhamim,* compassion; when there is leaning too far to the left into strictness and judgment, *Tiferet* leans us back to the right, into kindness and mercy.

The truth of *Tiferet* is different from the truth of *Hokhmah. Hokhmah* is awareness; it is that which knows the experience that is now unfolding. In this sense, *Hokhmah* represents the absolute Truth of this moment.

*Tiferet,* on the other hand, is future-oriented. In discerning what thoughts, words and actions are appropriate to the Truth of the moment, it attempts to act to bring about the desired future. In this sense, *Tiferet* is *Hokhmah* in action; it is the application of wisdom.

Rabbi Pinhas of Koretz summed it up when he said: “Since I have tamed my anger, I keep it in my pocket. When I need it, I take it out.”

Meaning: first we need to take care not to be *taken over* by anger. Anger is associated with *Gevurah,* and we can avoid being taken over by the powerful forces of *Gevurah* by being rooted in *Hokhmah,* by staying present and aware of whatever feelings are arising. Then, in the inner spaciousness provided by *Hokhmah,* we can think clearly (*Binah*) and do our best to respond to the moment with the right doses of *Hesed* and/or *Gevurah.* In this way, we may choose to temporarily “clothe” ourselves in the garment of *Gevurah* without identifying with it, without being taken over by it.

There is a hint of this in the *parshah. Ya’akov,* (who represents *Tiferet)* has disguised himself as his brother *Esav* (who represents *Gevurah*), in order to receive the blessing from their father *Yitzhak* (who also represents *Gevurah*):

וַיִּגַּ֧שׁ יַעֲקֹ֛ב אֶל־יִצְחָ֥ק אָבִ֖יו וַיְמֻשֵּׁ֑הוּ וַיֹּ֗אמֶר הַקֹּל֙ ק֣וֹל יַעֲקֹ֔ב וְהַיָּדַ֖יִם יְדֵ֥י עֵשָֽׂו׃

*Jacob drew close to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice* (kol) *is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands* (yad) *are the hands of Esau.”*

* Genesis 27:22

On a symbolic level, this is like when we encounter difficult, *Gevurah-*like people and situations. In such cases, the best path forward may be to display strength or sternness. But the spiritual task is to know that it is only a “costume.” In the above passage, this is hinted by “voice” and hand.”

“Voice” is קוֹל *kol,* composed of the letters *koof, vav* and *lamed.*

*Koof* ק represents *kedushah,* holiness, meaning the essence of things.

*Vav* ו is the prefix “and,” hinting that our essence is able to co-exist with our “mask” of the moment, beneath the surface of a sometimes contradictory external appearance.

 *Lamed* ל means “learn,” hinting that our ability to respond wisely to the need of the moment is a process of personal growth, a learning that happens over time.

This is another feature that distinguishes *Tiferet* from *Hokhmah.* Becoming present (*Hokhmah*) is something we can do almost instantaneously, once we understand how. Being kind (*Hesed*) and being strict or getting angry (*Gevurah*) are also inherent parts of our experience; we don’t have to “learn” them. But knowing how to wisely respond to the moment with the right balance of inner forces (*Tiferet*) is something that is learned by trying, failing, and getting up and trying again. It is something that needs to be developed.

“Hand” is יָּד *Yad,* composed of the letters *yod* and *dalet.*

*Yod* י actually means “hand,” and represents simple presence in action, or external expression in the world.

*Dalet* ד means“door,” hinting that whatever we perceive in the world of form, that is, the outer expressions of things that we perceive with the senses, is really a “doorway” to their inner essence, to the inner *kedushah* or “being-ness” behind everything. And this is the task of *Tiferet –* to consciously act in the world in a way that is rooted in our essence (*kol,* voice) but channels whatever quality is needed in the moment (*yad,* hand).

In the larger sense, the Tree of Life itself is a symbol that depicts the flow and balance between opposing forces, with its *sefirot* on the right and left and central pillars. In this way, it is a picture of the microcosmic human experience, which is seen as an embodiment of Divine qualities – that is, qualities inherent in the macrocosmic reality:

וַיֹּ֣אמֶר אֱלֹהִ֔ים נַֽעֲשֶׂ֥ה אָדָ֛ם בְּצַלְמֵ֖נוּ כִּדְמוּתֵ֑נוּ

*Vayomer Elohim, “Na’aseh Adam b’tzalmeinu, kidmuteinu.”*

*And Elohim said, “Let us make Human in Our Image and Likeness.”*

* Genesis 1:26

According to the Zohar, the *sefirot* on the Tree are the plurality of *Elohim;* they are referred to by “Let us make…”

The idea is that when *Tiferet* is operating within us and we are operating according to the Truth of the moment, according to the needs of the actual situation within which we find ourselves, that is when we best express the Divine Image, our nature as being *b’tzelem Elohim*.

Accordingly, the *mitzvah* of the *Aseret Hadibrot* associated with *Tiferet* is the ninth of the Ten Commandments:

לֹֽא־תַעֲנֶ֥ה בְרֵעֲךָ֖ עֵ֥ד שָֽׁקֶר

*Lo ta’aneh v’rei’akha ed shaker*

*Don’t be a lying witness against your neighbor*

* Exodus 20:13

The plain meaning of this precept is to tell the truth in a court of law. But on an inner level, it means: don’t do what is “false” for the situation; instead, “bear witness” to the Truth of the moment by responding wisely.

How do we cultivate this *Tiferet* quality of acting in a way that is true to the situation?

Generally speaking, it is the function of all the *mitzvot* to help us cultivate this sensitivity, but of all the *mitzvot,* there is perhaps one that embodies this principle most strongly:

לֹֽא־תְבַשֵּׁ֥ל גְּדִ֖י בַּחֲלֵ֥ב אִמּֽוֹ

*Lo t’vashel g’di b’halev imo.*

*Do not cook a kid in the milk of its mother.*

* Exodus 23:19, 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21

This is the source for the practice in *kashrut* of not mixing meat and milk. The image is striking, and the wrongness of cooking a young animal in the milk of its mother resonates on a heart and gut level. Who would do such a thing?

And yet, in practice, we tend to almost completely desensitized to the reality of eating meat. This is especially true today, but even two thousand years ago, the rabbis saw the need to institute practices to re-sensitize ourselves to reality; in this spirit, they expanded on this precept by interpreting it to mean the prohibition against mixing meat and milk in general.

In this way, every time we eat animal products, we are invited to realize: there is a place for an animal being nourished by its mother, and there is a place for slaughtering animals for meat; *these two places are not the same.* To mix them would be to be insensitive to what is appropriate in the moment; the *Hesed* of milk and the *Gevurah* of meat have their own domains in which they are appropriate, and the practice of not mixing them is a ritual aid to developing this inner sense of *Tiferet.*

In a more general sense, we can develop the *middot* of balance and appropriateness by simply taking the space to ask ourselves: what is needed now? What is being ignored? Are things in balance? What can I do to restore balance?

This line of inquiry is a wonderful contemplation practice to manifest *Tiferet* and bring harmony, balance, truth and beauty into your life…

***More on Toldot...***

[**Altar of Earth – Parshat Toldot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/november-26th-2019)11/26/2019 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/november-26th-2019#comments)

A friend once brought me to a Baptist church to hear a wonderful preacher. He was amazing – this preacher was a master at moving the congregation. His words had such soulfulness and spontaneity, instigating a lively interplay between himself and the congregation, as people constantly responded to his words with “amen” and “preach it” and “u-huh.” Besides his preaching, the prayers were also largely spontaneous, springing from the hearts and mouths of those who prayed, with very little pre-scripted text.

I reflected how completely opposite this was to most Jewish services, in which prayer consists almost entirely of reading texts from a book, and “preaching” usually looks more like a scholarly lecture. And yet, the early Hassidim seem to have been more like a Yiddish version of the Baptists than today’s typical synagogue. There’s a teaching by Rabbi Yisrael of Rizhyn on the following verses that implies this was the case:

מִזְבַּ֣ח אֲדָמָה֮ תַּעֲשֶׂה־לִּי֒ ... בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר אַזְכִּ֣יר אֶת־שְׁמִ֔י אָב֥וֹא אֵלֶ֖יךָ וּבֵרַכְתִּֽיךָ׃
Make for Me an altar of earth … in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.

וְאִם־מִזְבַּ֤ח אֲבָנִים֙ תַּֽעֲשֶׂה־לִּ֔י לֹֽא־תִבְנֶ֥ה אֶתְהֶ֖ן גָּזִ֑ית כִּ֧י חַרְבְּךָ֛ הֵנַ֥פְתָּ עָלֶ֖יהָ וַתְּחַֽלְלֶֽהָ׃
And if you make for Me an altar of stones, do not build it of hewn stones; for by wielding your tool upon them you have profaned them.
(Exodus 20:21, 22)

Rabbi Yisrael expounded, “The altar of earth is the altar of silence, which is most precious to Hashem. But if you do make an altar of words, don’t hew and chisel them, for such artifice would be profanity.”

Rabbi Yisrael seems to be advocating a kind of spontaneous prayer from the heart, rather than the recitation of texts. But he also says something even more remarkable – that silence is the most precious form of service! From this teaching, you might think that if you walked into Reb Yisrael’s House of Prayer, you would see mostly of silent meditation, interrupted only occasionally by spontaneous outbursts of improvised prayer.

But in another teaching of the Rabbi of Rizhyn, he seems to say the exact opposite; he says that our supreme task is “to shape matter into form, to work on matter until the light penetrates the darkness, so that the darkness itself shines and there is no longer any division between the two. As is says, וַֽיְהִי־עֶ֥רֶב וַֽיְהִי־בֹ֖קֶר י֥וֹם אֶחָֽד – It was evening and it was morning, one day.” (Genesis 1:5)

The meaning here is a little mysterious, but to “shape matter into form” sounds like we’re back to “hewing the stones” – meaning working on ourselves, cultivating our words and behaviors, as opposed to being spontaneous.

These two descriptions of spiritual practice, silence and spontaneity on one hand, and cultivated, prescribed words and behaviors on the other, are really two aspects of one process. We can understand this process through the metaphor of digging a well:

    …וַיָּ֨שָׁב יִצְחָ֜ק וַיַּחְפֹּ֣ר ׀ אֶת־בְּאֵרֹ֣ת הַמַּ֗יִם אֲשֶׁ֤ר חָֽפְרוּ֙ בִּימֵי֙ אַבְרָהָ֣ם אָבִ֔יו וַיְסַתְּמ֣וּם פְּלִשְׁתִּ֔ים
Isaac dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up…
(Genesis 26:18)

In Parshat Toldot, Isaac spends most of his time digging wells, during which he encounters many obstacles. First, he has to re-dig the wells of his father Abraham which were stopped up by the Philistines. Then, as he digs new wells, he is challenged by the herdsman of Gerar who claim that the wells belong to them. He keeps moving and digging more and more new wells, and the herdsman keep bothering him. Finally, he digs a well far enough away so that they leave him alone. He calls this well רְחֹב֔וֹת – r’khovot, which comes from a Hebrew root that means “wide” or “expansive,” because now he finally has ample space.

Digging a well is a wonderful metaphor for spiritual practice for a few reasons. For one, when you begin digging, you don’t see water right away; you have to first get through a lot of earth before you reach the water. This experience of having to continue digging, even though you have no immediate experience of the water, takes some faith and discipline; it takes a willingness to persevere even when the outcome is uncertain.

Similarly, when one begins a spiritual practice, there is usually not enough immediate experience of the benefit to keep you motivated. There should be at least some experience of benefit, but it’s usually not enough to keep you going; you still need plenty of faith and discipline, just as in digging a well.

But, at some point, you hit water.

There is a point in spiritual practice when the “waters” gush forth from within. At that point, there is no need for any faith or discipline at all, because the experience of the “water” is enough to sustain your practice.

What is the water?

Just as there is physical thirst for water, so too there is a psychospiritual thirst for Wholeness, for Completeness. That thirst is behind all our ego-based motivations: our desire to be heard, to be validated, to have status, wealth, love, identity – in short, to arrive. Like physical thirst, our spiritual thirst is only temporarily quenched through achieving things and experiences; every gratification leads back to more thirst, because it’s the nature of ego to be thirsty.

But, our awareness beneath the ordinary, ego-based personality already has that quality of Completeness, only it is hidden by the “dirt” of the ego; we have to spend some time digging before the “waters” our own deepest being become visible to us. And, even when we do find the “water,” there are many inner and outer distractions that can still interfere with our being able to consistently access it. That’s why Isaac has to dig so many wells before his final one. He calls that final well רְחֹב֔וֹת – r’khovot, because when you establish a stable connection with your inner “waters,” life takes on a much more spacious, unbounded quality.

Another reason that digging a well is a wonderful metaphor for spiritual practice is that the two stages of first digging and only later reaching the water corresponds to the two aspects of practice mentioned in Rabbi Yisrael’s teachings earlier: working on and refining ourselves, on one hand, and silence and spontaneity, on the other.

In the “digging” phase, the discipline and commitment we need to persevere has the quality of work, of doing a job. That’s why Isaac, who in Kabbalah represents the quality of Gevurah, of strength and discipline, is the archetypal well-digger. At this stage, texts and rituals are helpful – they are the tools with which we dig. This is tefilah – traditional Jewish Prayer, in which we dig away the “dirt” by focusing our mind and heart on the chanting of pre-scripted words.

(In our practice, we also use tefilot, sacred Hebrew words and Divine Names to do this inner “digging,” such as the Atah Hu chant.)

But then, at some point, all that well digging pays off. And that’s why, after Isaac digs his final well and enjoys rest from his opponents, it says:

וַיֵּרָ֨א אֵלָ֤יו יְהוָה֙ בַּלַּ֣יְלָה הַה֔וּא
The Divine appeared to him that night…

The flow of water and the appearance of the Divine are really the same thing. In this next phase, when we reach the inner “water” of the Divine in an experiential way, our task is different; we need to relax and drink, we can’t remain fixated on the work of chanting words. This is the “altar of earth” and the “altar of un-hewn stones” – silence and spontaneous words from the heart:

וַיִּ֧בֶן שָׁ֣ם מִזְבֵּ֗חַ וַיִּקְרָא֙ בְּשֵׁ֣ם יְהוָ֔ה
He built an altar there and invoked the Name of the Divine…

In this phase, there is a shift from that sense of “me doing the practice” into a sense of the Divine unfolding everywhere, in everything, all arising in the Completeness which is the miracle of this moment, all arising within the consciousness that we are, and our actions and words take on this quality of stillness and gratitude; our bodies become like an “altar of the earth.”

But then, what does Isaac do next?

וַיֶּט־שָׁ֖ם אָהֳל֑וֹ וַיִּכְרוּ־שָׁ֥ם עַבְדֵי־יִצְחָ֖ק בְּאֵֽר
He pitched his tent there and the servants of Isaac dug another well…

This two-part process is not linear, but circular; once we reach the waters of the Divine within and drink in the silence, we must also circle back and start digging again. This is how we access the blessing of a dedicated spiritual practice – through alternating between chanting and silence, between immersing in the Oneness of Being, and expressing that Oneness in ordinary life…

בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר אַזְכִּ֣יר אֶת־שְׁמִ֔י אָב֥וֹא אֵלֶ֖יךָ וּבֵרַכְתִּֽיךָ
In every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you!

ATAH HU!

[**Who Will You Elect? Parshat Toldot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/who-will-you-elect-parshat-toldot)
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The political climate nowadays is polarized into two opposing and extremely passionate camps. The positive side of this is the high level of engagement. The turnout for the midterm elections of few days ago was greater than ever. With dramatic anticipation, the country watched the news coverage of the election results as they came in.

But there’s another election going on right now as well – can you watch it with the same enthusiasm? It is the race between two different versions of yourself.

Candidate Number One is from the Ego Party. For most of us, this candidate usually wins in landslide victories, over and over. And, rightly so. The Ego candidate has the most experience, with the advantage of being constructed over a lifetime, not to mention having the constant support of the Thinking Mind.

Candidate Number Two is from the Awareness Party. This candidate usually doesn’t win because people don’t even see her on the ballot. They can’t see her because she is the seeing itself; it may never occur to them that she is even running. Furthermore, even though Awareness is far more ancient than the Thinking Mind, she never really ages. She is always seeing this moment anew, so she seems young and naïve. She must, we tend to think, need the Ego and his Thinking Mind to run the show.

The basic approach of the Ego is struggle:

וַיִּתְרֹֽצֲצ֤וּ הַבָּנִים֙ בְּקִרְבָּ֔הּ וַתֹּ֣אמֶר אִם־כֵּ֔ן לָ֥מָּה זֶּ֖ה אָנֹ֑כִי וַתֵּ֖לֶךְ לִדְר֥שׁ אֶת־יְהֹוָֽה
The children struggled within her, and she said, “If it be so, why am I like this?”

But there comes a time when a person is ready to give up the struggle. Have you reached this point? Do you want to go beyond Ego? Are you ready to inquire of Reality and find another way?

וַתֵּ֖לֶךְ לִדְר֥שׁ אֶת־יְהֹוָֽה
She went to inquire of the Divine…

If you’re ready, listen: a message vibrates from the Silence:

וַיֹּ֨אמֶר יְהֹוָ֜ה לָ֗הּ שְׁנֵ֤י גוֹיִם֙ בְּבִטְנֵ֔ךְ וּשְׁנֵ֣י לְאֻמִּ֔ים מִמֵּעַ֖יִךְ יִפָּרֵ֑דוּ וּלְאֹם֙ מִלְאֹ֣ם יֶֽאֱמָ֔ץ וְרַ֖ב יַֽעֲבֹ֥ד צָעִֽיר
The Divine said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will separate from within you, and one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the older will serve the younger.”

Two nations are in your womb – there are two of you – the Ego is not all there is!

Two peoples will separate from within you – be aware of the distinction between the ordinary me, the Ego, and the awareness behind and beyond the Ego…

And one kingdom will become mightier than the other kingdom, and the older will serve the younger – the Ego, the conditioned me, is old; it is based on experience from the past. But, there is a deeper I that never grows old; it is always fresh, alive and new, The Ego likes to be in charge, but it is destined to serve Awareness. Then, there will be a great Silence far more profound than any thought. That Silence is your nakhalah, your birthright, if you would but awaken to it.

How to awaken to It?

וַיְהִ֣י עֵשָׂ֗ו אִ֛ישׁ יֹדֵ֥עַ צַ֖יִד אִ֣ישׁ שָׂדֶ֑ה וְיַֽעֲקֹב֙ אִ֣ישׁ תָּ֔ם ישֵׁ֖ב אֹֽהָלִֽים
Esau was a man who knew hunting... but Jacob was a simple man, dwelling in tents.

Give up your "hunting," give up your seeking for control. Come into the “tent” of your heart, into this moment as it is, and dwell here in simplicity…

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[**Timeless- Parshat Toldot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/timeless-parshat-toldot)
11/17/2017  [1 Comment](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/timeless-parshat-toldot#comments)
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We’re looking at the very rich Parshat Toldot, the Parshah of Generations. It says, “V’eileh toldot Yitzhak ben Avraham – these are the generations or the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham – Avraham holid et Yitzhak – Abraham begot Isaac. So right away, we have a strange construction: it says that Isaac, or Yitzhak, is the son of Abraham, Avraham, then it says, Avraham begot Yitzhak. Well, obviously if Yitzhak is the son of Avraham, then of course Avraham begot Yitzhak. It seems redundant, right? So, we’ll come back to that question.

A little further down, it says that Yitzhak’s wife, Rivka, or Rebecca, became pregnant, and that “Vayitrotz’tzu habonim b’kirbah – the children were fighting inside her.” The children are the twins Yaakov and Esav, Jacob and Esau. Now, in many commentaries of the past, Yaakov and Esav represent some form of duality. Sometimes Esav is the body and Yaakov is the soul, sometimes Esav is earthiness and Yaakov is scholarliness, but most of the time, these dualities are framed as some form of bad and good. And just as Esav and Yaakov are fighting within Rivka’s womb, so too there’s the idea of a battle going on in each one of us between the Yetzer HaTov, the drive toward good, and the Yetzer HaRa, the drive toward evil.

This concept, that within us there’s a yetzer hatov and a yetzer hara, a good urge and a bad urge, is a basic Jewish spiritual concept, but I want frame it a little differently.

Rather than the yetzer hara being the drive toward bad, I want to understand it as the drive toward dividing the world into good and bad. This is also pictured in another form at the beginning of the Torah, as the Eitz Daat Tov V’ra – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. So that’s the Yetzer Hara, dividing the world into good and bad. And then, rather than the yetzer hatov being the drive to do good, I want to understand it as the drive to see the goodness in everything. This, of course, is the Eitz Hayim – the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, because when you’re able to see the goodness in everything, which means the underlying goodness of Being Itself, not pretending that violence is really nice, or that sad is really happy, but just tapping into the underlying goodness of simply Being, then it’s really like eating from the Tree of Life. There’s a simple bliss and spaciousness of this moment.

When we understand it that way, then we can see that we always need both Esav and Yaakov; we need Esav, we need to differentiate between good and bad, between nourishing food and poison, between getting up with the alarm and sleeping late, and so on. That’s why Esav is the hunter- going out and taking what he needs from the world. But, if that’s all we’ve got, then we’re totally identified with the mind, with agendas and judgment, and the Tree of Life is hidden behind the fiery sword of thoughts and feelings. So we also need Yaakov; we need to simply open to this moment, to taste the bliss of Being, which is why we came into being in the first place. If life is just a tragic struggle leading nowhere, then what’s the point, right? The point is, there’s a Garden of Eden within; there’s a Tree of Life with fruit to taste right now, if you’re open. That’s why Yaakov eventually gets renamed Yisrael, Israel, and B’nai Yisrael, the Children of Israel, are characterized by freedom, by coming out of Egypt, out of slavery. Because in this moment, there is no agenda, there is no movement, there is no time. There is only the blessed space of Being within which everything is unfolding, and you are that blessed space.

So, on this Shabbat Toldot, the Sabbath of Generations, may we surrender ever more deeply into Reality as it unfolds in this moment, making Presence an ever new habit in this generation, and live from the open heart, responding to whatever is needed. Good Shabbos!!

[**The Mountains- Parshat Toldot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-mountains-parshat-toldot)
12/1/2016

“The children struggled within her, and she said: ‘Why am I like this?’ So, she went to inquire of the Divine. Hashem said to her, “Two nations are within your womb… and the elder shall serve the younger…”

-Bereisheet 25:22-23

Here in Tucson, the Catalina mountains rise majestically in the north of the city. When we first moved here, I would look up and think, “I wonder if those mountains will ever seem normal and unimpressive?”

As lovers of travel know, when you visit a new place where you have no history or baggage, there’s a brightness to everything- even dirty things are bright, vivid, and rich.

But after you’ve been somewhere a while, the nervous system tends to clump everything together. You look at the tree you’ve seen a million times in your backyard, and instead of seeing the miracle of the tree, you see your laundry, the bills, the broken sink, the broken relationships. All your past experiences of a place seems to soak into every particular piece of that place. You become conditioned.

Conditioning is not in itself a bad thing; it’s how we learn. But it’s vital to remember that there is always an aspect of your experience that is unconditioned. You can see and feel that unconditioned aliveness in children- their wonder, their innocent excitement about things.

And of course, along with that exquisitely innocent and unconditioned consciousness comes... stupidity!

That’s why we, the old and the conditioned, need to protect them from themselves. The older must serve the younger.

“V’rav ya’avod tza’ir- And the older shall serve the younger...”

And that’s as it should be- the experience of the old and the conditioned must preserve and protect the fragile, the bright, the unconditioned.

But this truth applies not only in the external realm of protecting children, but also in the inner realms of consciousness. For there is a level within your own being that is still completely unconditioned. Like the child, it is bright, alive, and curious.

You may think, “But I am old- my conditioning is too heavy, my trauma is too great, my life has been too difficult, or too easy, or whatever… how can I get rid of all the oldness to discover my inner youthfulness? How can I reach the unconditioned?”

The Good News is: You don’t have to “reach” it, and you don’t have to get rid of your conditioning. That which sees all your conditioning, is itself Unconditioned.

Instead of saying, “I am old”- instead of saying, “my conditioning”-  simply notice the feeling of oldness. Notice the impulse to think or judge things in a certain way. Notice the feeling that arises when you see the tree in your backyard.

The seeing itself- That is the Unconditioned.

If you practice staying in the seeing, in the noticing, without getting absorbed into the reaction, you will also begin to notice- there is an inner vastness that is untouched by the old thoughts and old feelings. That vastness is your Presence, your Awareness. You don’t need to find it, you are it- but you need to be with all that conditioning instead of being the conditioning. Then, you will see the mountain  anew, every day.

There is a story that the disciples of Rabbi Elimelekh came to him and asked: “In the Torah we read that Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Show a wonder to you.’ How are we to understand this? He should have said, ‘Show a wonder to me.’”

Rabbi Elimelekh explained: “Magicians know what they want to accomplish and how to accomplish it. It is not a wonder for them, but only for their beholders. But for those who are merely a vessel for the miracle that God accomplishes through them, their own wonder arises from their deeds and overwhelms them. And that’s what Pharaoh meant: ‘Don’t show me your conditioned expertise! Show me the wonder that arises out of your Unconditioned innocence…’

As we enter this Shabbat Toldot, The Sabbath of Generations, may we open and see the miraculous eons of conditioning that are creating our experience right now. May we know that the seeing and the opening is Itself Unconditioned- Hadeish yameinu kikedem- may our days be fresh and new as they were at the beginning, before the story began. And as we enter the month of Kislev and of Hanukah, the Holiday of Dedication, may we dedicate ourselves ever more deeply to a path of ever increasing Light of Presence.

Good Shabbos, Hodesh Tov!
b yosef

[**Adam- Parshat Toldot﻿**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/adam-parshat-toldot)
11/12/2015  [12 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/adam-parshat-toldot#comments)

 This d'var is dedicated to Adam Schachter- Hanan Yitzhak ben Moshe v'Merka z"l. d. 25 H​eshvan, 5776

Last Saturday, Adam passed away from this world. Adam was my half-brother, the son of my father Michael and Adam’s mother Marlene. He lived in New York.

The life and character of a person is infinitely complex. But there is also something fundamental about how a person moves through life, about what moves them, what makes them get out of bed in the morning.

On this fundamental level, Adam was a deeply compassionate person and an enjoyer of life. He wasn’t a complainer or a worrier. He was also deeply insightful and spiritual. I enjoyed the deep conversations we had over the years. Toward the end, we spent some time meditating together on the phone and Skype.

At the funeral, I saw how many considered Adam to be their best friend. From what they said, he seemed to me to be their counselor, regularly helping them through difficult and confusing times in their lives.

He was twenty-nine when he died from brain cancer.

When someone so young suffers and dies like this, it defies any sense of fairness or justice in the world. And we know, many suffer and die unfairly every day, God forbid.

Awareness of all this needless suffering can chip away at you. There is an urge to harden, to shut down. It can feel like there is a war going on inside- a war between your natural and innocent connection with life, on one hand, and a contracted, angry rejection of it, on the other.

How could this happen??

In this week’s reading, Rebecca experiences an inner war as well. After Isaac prays for a child, Rebecca becomes pregnant with twins who literally war inside her body. She cries out:

“Lama zeh anokhi-
Why am I like this?!”

At its core, spirituality is about radical acceptance, not about questioning why things are as they are.

But the truth is that questioning can be a great ally toward acceptance, if you go deep enough with your questioning. If you question into the nature of your own mind, into the nature of your own resistance, the questioning itself can become a path of surrender:

“Vatelekh lidrosh et Hashem-
She went and inquired of the Divine...”

How do you “inquire of the Divine”?

The Divine is Nothing but Reality- so to “inquire of the Divine” means to look deeply into what you are experiencing, in this moment. If you are feeling negativity, ask yourself: What is this resistance within me? What is this urge to complain, to judge, or to control things?

The first-born twin, Esau, represents this urge. Esau is called an “Ish Yodea Tzayid- a man who knows trapping”. He is your urge to go out and “trap” the world, to make it conform to your will.

But the other twin, Jacob, is an “Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim- a simple man, abiding in tents”. He is your deeper urge to return to the “tent” of your heart- the open heart that accepts what is with simplicity.

Accordingly, the word “tam” means not only simplicity, but also “taste”. So to be tam means to not seek control, but rather to simply taste this moment as it is- to drink the nectar that flows from intimacy with this moment- even when this moment is filled with pain.

Understandably, many of us spend most of our lives in the “Esau” state, running around doing things, as if to run away from this life. Perhaps if we run around and stay busy enough, we won’t have to feel the pain.

But in the end, all that running and outward seeking leaves Esau drained:

“Esau came in from the field, exhausted”.

Eventually, Esau gives up his seeking and returns to drink from Jacob’s nectar:

“Pour into me please some of this very red stuff!” he says to Jacob.

The word for “red” is “Adom”- a slight variation on the name of my brother, Adam. “Adam” means “human”, because according to legend, the first human was created from the “Adamah”- the red earth.

This Adom is the nourishment we all need- the life blood that flows within the tent of the heart- the nourishment that my brother Adam was connected to, and helped his fellow humans connect to as well.

How do you connect to it?

In order for Esau to receive the nourishment he lacks, he has to surrender his “birthright”. That is, to fully enter the tent of the heart, you have to surrender your sense of entitlement, your sense that the world owes you something, that things should be a certain way.

That’s the way Adam was. In all of my experience of him, he never complained about his situation. He enjoyed life as he was able, and helped others to do so as well.

After all, the world is not “fair”- at least not according to ordinary understanding. All our running will not make it conform to our sense of what is right. In fact, all that does is reinforce a sense of separateness, and this separateness blocks the true sustenance, the vital flow of life energy available within the tent of the heart.

But drink of this nectar and you will see- there is blessing everywhere, and bountiful opportunity to love, to spread the blessing. Drink of this nectar, but let the bitterness mix with the sweetness. This mixing produces Rakhamim- compassion for all the suffering of life. According to the Zohar, Rakhamim is the spiritual quality that Jacob embodies.

Then, from the place of Rakhamim, you can start running around again and getting things done. You can’t just stay in the tent forever.

In fact, Jacob is not complete until he gets outside his tent and starts working in the fields for old uncle Laban. Fearing that his brother Esau wants to murder him for taking his birthright and his blessing, he flees to his uncle Laban, where he works as a shepherd for fourteen years.

Only then, after years of being out in the field himself, is he able to finally make peace with his brother. Older and softened by years of suffering, Esau and Jacob reunite. They weep and kiss each other; true compassion is born.

This rhythm of alternating between the World of Doing and the World of Being is, of course, the wisdom of Shabbos, inviting us every week to enter the tent of the heart before going back out into the field.

But it is also the wisdom of the mourning process. We need time to be with pain- the world can wait. Only by fully feeling the pain of loss can we fully appreciate the gift of our present life with full awareness.

There is a story-

​In the late 1700s, in Belarus, Reb Shlomo of Karlin joyfully broke the fast with his hassidim at the close of Yom Kippur.

Reb Shlomo was known for his many miraculous talents. One such talent was the ability to know what each of his hassidim had prayed for, and what the Divine response would be to their prayers. At this festive gathering with their master, the hassidim begged him to perform this feat:

“Tell us, what did we pray for?” they implored.

Reb Shlomo turned to the first disciple: “You prayed that Hashem should make you healthy, so that you’ll be able to wholeheartedly serve God and study Torah without your poor health and thoughts of your mortality distracting you.”

“Bravo! You are right! But what is Hashem’s answer?” asked the disciple.

“Hashem doesn’t want your prayer or your Torah study. Hashem wants your broken heart that grieves because you are distracted by your mortality from fully praying and studying.”

As we enter this Shabbat Toldot, The Sabbath of Generations, and as we come to the end of MarHeshvan, the Bitter Month of Heshvan, may we not shrink from our suffering, but open to the bitter-sweet compassion that awakens through the mixing of the Adom- the inner life force of the Eternal Present- with the Adamah- the earth to which the bodies of every Adam will one day return.

Good Shabbos, Hodesh Tov,
brian yosef

[**The Tent is in the Field- Parshat Toldot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-tent-is-in-the-field-parshat-toldot)
11/20/2014 [0 Comments](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-tent-is-in-the-field-parshat-toldot#comments)

When psychological pain burns, it can feel like there is a war going on inside. The mind feels stuck and the emotions are seething. As Rivka (Rebecca) says in Parshat Toldot when the twins in her womb fought with one another: “lama zeh anokhi- why am I like this??”

In the throws of psychological suffering it is natural to question why we should have to feel thus, to question why circumstances are such, to complain bitterly against Reality. Ordinarily, such questioning is an expression of resistance and only creates more suffering. But if you go deeper with your questioning- questioning into the nature of your mind, into the nature of your resistance, you can find the path that leads to liberation. As it says of Rivka’s questioning: “Vatelekh lidrosh et Hashem- she went and inquired of the Divine.”

How do you “inquire of the Divine”? The Divine is Reality- so we have to look at what is really going on. Notice that there is this urge within to control- to bend the world to “my” will. This is the first-born twin- Esav (Esau) who is called “ish yodea tzayid- a man who knows trapping”. The mind seeks to know how it can “trap” the world into conforming to its will. But the other twin, Yaakov (Jacob), is an “ish tam”. “Tam” means both “simplicity” and “taste”; to be simple means to not seek control, but rather to “taste” this moment.

The Esav seeks externally, running out into the “field” to see what he can “trap”. The Yaakov dwells in the tent of the heart, cultivating the nectar of bliss that flows from intimate connection with the inner level of Being. But not to worry- all that outward seeking leaves the Esav drained, as it says- “Esav came in from the field, exhausted”. Eventually, Esav gives up his seeking and returns to drink of the true nourishment: “Pour into me some of that very red stuff!” he says to Yaakov. The word for “red” is “adom”- a slight variation on “adam” which means “human”. This is the nourishment that every human needs! In other words, we cannot live merely by manipulating the world, because no matter how much we are able to make the world conform to what we think we want, manipulation only reinforces a sense of separateness, and this separateness blocks the true sustenance, the vital flow of life energy that you can feel and connect with now, the moment that “now” becomes your aim. Not what you want now, but the “now” itself. But for Esav to receive this nourishment, he has to surrender his “birthright”; he has to give up on his self-image, his identity. To fully enter the present is to surrender the “me”- the time-based identity.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be effective in the world or that we shouldn’t have the intention to fulfill our will. That would be madness. In fact, Yaakov is not complete until he gets outside his tent and learns to work in the field as well. Only then, after enduring the hardships of working outside for many years, is he able to make peace with his brother. The inner and outer come into harmony, because the inward quality of the “tent” and the outer quality of the “field” are not really separate anyway. As it says in Pirkei Avot, “Torah is good together with an occupation because the exertion of both of them makes sin forgotten…”

This means not merely that one should spend some time on Torah and some time on earning a living, but rather that one should remain rooted in the Timeless while doing one’s work in time. Only then can your thoughts, words and actions flow from the Place of the Timeless, bringing true blessing into manifestation. May this Shabbat be a wellspring of nourishment from the Timeless tent of the heart! Good Shabbos!