

## **Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah - Toldot**

Serendipity is a wonderful thing. I just spent a few days in my old home town, Las Vegas. I grew up there. I was brought back to teach in one of the high schools as a scholar in residence. Over the course of the visit, I was able to teach, renew ties with friends with whom I have not spoken or seen for decades, and I helped my mother buy and set up her new computer. It was productive. It was fun. It was financially and spiritually beneficial. One of the “neatest” pieces of the trip happened purely by accident on the first flight on the journey back home. I sat just behind someone I knew I recognized, and as I thought about it, the man was either the comedian Gallagher, or a “dead ringer” for him. As we deplaned in Chicago, we walked off together, and I asked if he was the man for whom I am a big fan. His classic grin affirmed my suspicion. O’Hare is a large airport. Over the course of the walk from one end of terminal one to the other, I benefited from a very personal one on one fifteen minute comedy show. It started when I thanked him for having inspired several sermons. Quizzically, he looked at me, wondering how his off-beat comedy could spawn religious thought. He then spontaneously went into a tirade against the way in which God designed the human body. Why do our hands not match? We like shaking hands with people for it is the only time that our hands actually fit. Why is it that we kiss with our mouths, but have to avoid the obstacles of our noses in order to do so? Why are there cracks between our teeth, when God knows that we have to eat with our teeth, thereby getting stuff stuck in the cracks? We prepared to part company, and I thanked him again – he was a great sport. He went to baggage claim, and I headed on the trek to the next terminal.

As I sat down to eat the sandwich mom packed for my breakfast, I started thinking about this week’s Torah portion, and came to realize that this gentleman had just written it for me. As he concluded talking about the errors (or practical jokes) that God committed in creating us, he started in on a piece about weddings and family vacations. The problem with weddings is that they have to take place in three venues. There is a place for the vows, a place for the party/reception, and then a place to sleep. If you had anything to drink at your own wedding then on your wedding night, just to get to the place where you consummate the vows you just took, you have to drive drunk. That’s a problem. He said that for weddings and family vacations we need to design new facilities that are square with forty rooms – ten on each wall. For weddings, it would keep the bride who is already worrying about being too big to fit in her dress from having to go through a kitchen or bathroom (bridal room) just to get to the ceremony – the party can take place in the middle – right after the vows and then its an easy walk to bed. For family vacations – one room has to be dedicated for grandma or a great aunt who has a bed big enough for all children for storytelling. Hotels put us all on different floors and make us risk losing little children every time the elevator doors open and close. As he went on, he continued to talk about how important it is that family weddings and vacations should facilitate responsible family time.

This week’s Torah portion is all about the creation and irresponsible maintenance of family. Isaac marries Rebecca, and after twenty years, she has twin sons, Jacob and Esau. The story will continue, as the struggles between brothers, between Isaac and Rebecca, and ultimately between the parents and their boys unfold. On the one vacation that Isaac and Rebecca take together, they get in trouble and he pretends that she is not his wife, but his sister, letting foreigners do as they wish with her to save his own skin. The brothers’ story begins with a struggle in the womb. The younger Jacob cheats his brother,

Esau, out of first the birthright and then the blessing. In this last deception, Rebecca helps deceive her blind husband, in gaining the blessing for her favorite son, having chosen one over the other.

As I pointed out last week, the long term rewards we reap for our behavior today is not completely unpredictable. Esau is the father of Rome. The ancient animosity between Israel and Rome is legendary. Where does it begin? The hatred these brother nations share stem directly from the hatred that these brothers shared. Maybe if they had vacationed with Sarah and could sit on her bed and listen to stories together, things might have been different. Hidden in Gallagher's humorous rant is a raw truth, where we do not take care of preserving the dignity of our family relationships the world around us collapses. For one comedian, it is the dysfunctionality that makes for a good comic monologue, but for the rest of us – well, most all of us have “family stories” that speak of the one cast out, the rift that never ended, or the battle that demands family members to choose between one member or the other. For the second week in a row, I am drawn to the difficult lessons that this patriarchy teaches us. Where we do not love intentionally, we lose. Where we hate intentionally, we lose even more grandly; even while we think we gain a temporary upper hand, we all suffer deeply in the long run. The good news in all of this? Well, perhaps it is very simple. Figuring out how to love and respect each other makes a whole lot more sense than all other answers ... even where my new acquaintance put it – it would be a whole lot easier to love each other if when we went to hug, our smelly armpits were further from each other's noses. Shabbat Shalom.