

While Supplies Last

What happens when something is in short supply? Economists suggest that demand increases. And in today's consumer culture, lessons of supply and demand are endless. From sports tickets to the latest iProduct to even Passover food on the grocery store shelves, the lesson of buying early is one quickly learned. And then of course we have to ask ourselves what does our "scarcity" mean next to the short supply of food and resources we see in so many other parts of the world?

This week we will read *parshat Toldot*, which illuminates the intricacies of the relationships between Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Esau. The *parshah* begins with the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob. Right off the bat, we learn that Isaac and Rebekah had difficulty conceiving, and when the children in her womb argued, she wondered "If this is so, why do I exist?" From the outset, we know there will be trouble, quarrelling, questioning. At their birth they are named based on their characteristics: Esau emerged red, and covered in hair, while Jacob emerged holding onto the heel of his brother. The description of the birth of these twins is important because according to the *Torah*, the first born child receives a special blessing. In this case the first born, Esau, is supposed to receive the blessing from his father, a blessing for him to be the master over his brothers, and to be the blessed one.

The scarcity we see in *parshat Toldot* is the scarcity of blessings. Rebekah knows that Esau is supposed to receive the blessing of the first born, and in her mother's intuition sees that Jacob would be better suited for this role. Jacob spends his time trying to "win" the blessing from his brother, Esau. Isaac also can't imagine a world in which two children receive blessings, so he is stuck when Esau comes to him for his blessing after the blessing of the first born is already given away. He responds that there is no other blessing left to give. And not one of the three of them considers that there might be more than one blessing to go around. The blessing is seen as a limited resource.

It is actually Esau, who is not always portrayed in the best light, who seems to have the best perspective on the situation. While Esau may have been careless in trading his birthright so quickly, he seems to recognize that blessings are one of the few things that can come in abundance. When he hears that Jacob has received the blessing of the first born, Esau begs for another blessing. Esau believes that there must be more than one blessing to be given out.

Perhaps it's Esau who teaches us the lesson here. Blessing is what we make of it, so how can it be scarce? We may not necessarily have the best of everything, or get exactly what we want, but each of us has blessings to give and blessings to receive. We have a choice in how we view our world. *Parshat Toldot* imparts that from generation to generation the world might be bumpy and challenging, but there are always blessings, we just have to open our eyes to see them.

ללמוד **To Learn** ללמד **To Teach:** the *Talmud* teaches that we should strive to say 100 blessings every day. Even in the roughest of moments there is room for blessing. Instead of focusing on the negative, focus on the positive, what can be learned or taken away from every situation.

לשמור **To Keep:** לעשות **To Do:** Thanksgiving is a great time to focus on our blessings. Check out <http://freedomfeast.us/index.html> for some creative and meaningful ways to get the most out of the thanksgiving experience.