

# The Parsha Discussion

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

## Toldot. Living for Today; or for Tomorrow?

In 2018, a UK Office of National Statistics report showed that 53% of young people – meaning those between the ages of 22 and 29 – have no savings at all.

One reason, they explained was that amongst participants in the poll, “There was general agreement that young people should be spending their money on enjoying themselves while they were still young. This meant that **they prioritised spending now over saving for the future.**”

Should we be living for now, or for the long term?

One scene in our parsha relates to this fundamental dilemma, and it shows a vast divide between the two protagonists of the parsha, Yaakov and Esau:

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished. <sup>30</sup>And Esau said to Jacob, “Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished”—which is why he was named Edom. <sup>31</sup>Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” <sup>32</sup>And Esau said, “I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?” <sup>33</sup>But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So, he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup>Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; **he ate, he drank, he rose, he left. Esau spurned the birthright.** (25:29-34)

- Why did Jacob want the birthright so badly?
- Why did Esau “spurn” the birthright? Why didn’t he value it?

Commentaries point to the way Esau acts: “He ate, he drank, he rose, he left”; seeing the essence of this scene as a clash between two sensibilities, two mindsets, exemplifying the difference between Jacob and Esau:

“The fool (meaning those who do not live a principled life) wants only to eat, to drink and to indulge their pleasures in the here and now; not to live with a concern for the future.”

Nahmanides explains that Esau spurned the birthright because it was only of value in the distant future, after his father’s death. Esau valued only the present, only what he could eat and enjoy in the moment. In contrast, Jacob was very much concerned with the future leadership of the family, with the covenant, and that was primary in his mind.

### Please Discuss:

- How do you see Esau’s behaviour in this scene?
- Did Jacob take advantage of Esau? Was Esau really “at the point of death” or is that just a turn of phrase?
  
- What do you think about the issue of enjoyment now, versus investment for the future?
- What is the balance in YOUR life between current pleasures, and investments in your future? Do you ever feel a tension between the two?
  
- Should our focus be on ourselves, or on the future of the Jewish people?

Shabbat Shalom