

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of the Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Toldot**  
**December 3, 2016**

**פרשת תולדות**  
**ג' בכסלו תשע"ז**

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* [Genesis] 25:19-28:9

In this *parasha*, Rivka gives birth to twins, Esav and Yaakov, who struggle with each other, engaging in bargaining and deception to obtain the birthright and Yitzchak's blessing.

Some modern psychologists think that they have homed in on the relatively new phenomenon of sibling rivalry, introduced as a concept by David Levy in 1941. But in fact it is literally the oldest psychological phenomenon in the world. It begins in *Parashat Bereshit* with Kayin [Cain] and Hevel's [Abel's] competition in their sacrifices to God, ending with Kayin's act of fratricide, and it continues with Yitzchak and Yishmael, though not as much with the brothers themselves as with their respective mothers.

Then we come to this week's *parasha*. Verse 25:28 reads: “ וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת-עֵשָׂו, כִּי-צִיד בָּפִיו; וְרִבְקָה, אֲהָבַת אֶת-יַעֲקֹב. – Now Yitzchak loved Esav, because he ate from [the products of] his hunting and Rivka loved Yaakov.”

“Ah,” you say, “There is the source of the sibling rivalry: It is parental favoritism of one child over the other.” However, if that is the case, how can one explain verse 22: “ וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקֶרְבָּהּ – And the children struggled together within her”? Surely there was no parental favoritism while Esav and Yaakov were still in utero!

Favoritism does play a huge part in the next part of *Bereshit*, however – the Yosef story. The text tells us (37:3-4): “ וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל, אֶהָב אֶת-יוֹסֵף מִכָּל-בָּנָיו--כִּי-בֶן-זָקֵנִים הוּא, לוֹ; וַעֲשָׂה לוֹ, כְּתֹנֶת פִּסִּים. וַיִּרְאוּ אֶחָיו, כִּי-אֲהָב אֶתוֹ אֲהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אֶחָיו--כִּי-אֲהָב אֶתוֹ אֲהָב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל-אֶחָיו. – Now Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a coat of many

colors. And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.”

Alfred Adler, a noted early 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Austrian psychotherapist, saw siblings as "striving for significance" within the family, and felt that birth order was an important aspect of personality development. In fact, psychologists and researchers today endorse the influence of birth order, as well as age and gender constellations, on sibling relationships. However, parents are also seen as capable of having an important influence on whether their children are competitive or not.

David Levy claimed that for an older sibling, “the aggressive response to the new baby is so typical that it is safe to say it is a common feature of family life.” Researchers today generally endorse this view, noting that parents can ameliorate this response by being vigilant to favoritism and by taking appropriate preventative steps.

But based on the verse of the children struggling within Rivka’s womb, it seems that sibling rivalry does indeed go beyond parental favoritism, and is at least in part intrinsic to the human experience. Can it ever be overcome?

Towards the end of the book of *Bereshit*, we find two brothers who exhibit no rivalry, competition or animosity despite one being “favored” over the other. Says the text (48:13):

And Yosef took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Yisrael's left hand, and Menashe in his left hand toward Yisrael's right hand, and brought them near to him. And Yisrael stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Menashe's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Menashe was the first-born. And he blessed Yosef, and said: “The God before whom my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak did walk, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long until this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named in them, and the name of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.” And when Yosef saw that his father was laying his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head onto Menashe's head. And Yosef said to his father,

“Not so, my father, for this is the first-born; put your right hand upon his head.” And his father refused, and said, “I know it, my son, I know it; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; however, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.” And he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Yisrael bless, saying, ‘God make you as Ephraim and as Menashe.’” And he set Ephraim before Menashe.

Despite this favoritism, there is an absence of rivalry between these two brothers throughout Jewish history. This is in contrast to the sustained rivalry between Yehuda and Yosef, beginning with who would be the leader of the tribes of Yaakov once they were all in Egypt, and continuing with the question of leadership in the wilderness and leadership of the kingdoms in the Land of Israel. But there is never any recorded animosity between Ephraim and Menashe or their descendants despite the fact that Ephraim ruled over Menashe in the wilderness and in the Land of Israel.

According to many sources, this lack of rivalry between these two sons of Yosef is the reason that the traditional Friday night blessing for sons is: “יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים וְכַמְנִשֶׁה כְּאֶפְרַיִם וּכְמְנַשֶּׁה – May Hashem make you like Ephraim and Menashe.” [Girls are given the blessing of “יְשִׁימְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּשָׂרָה, רַבֵּקָה, רָחֵל, וְלֵאָה – May Hashem make you like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah.”] We are of course beseeching God to shower our sons with the blessings bestowed by Yaakov upon his grandsons, and we are blessing them using the words of the Torah itself, but we are also asking for peace, tranquility, and harmony among all of the family children, as were displayed by Ephraim and Menashe.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you ever fight with your sibling(s)? What about? Is there a better way to handle the confrontations than fighting?
- If someone else were to attack your sibling, what would be your reaction? Would you come to their defense? Why or why not?
- Think of three nice things about each of your siblings, then turn to them and tell them the nice things you thought of.