

## **Parshat Toldot: Unseen Threads – The Hidden Yearnings of Toldot** **Yali Szulanski, Class of '25**

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The story of Toldot weaves together the lives of Esav, Yitzchak, and Rivka—three figures whose experiences offer us distinct but interconnected insights into the complexities of human potential, identity, and vision. Esav's raw yearning for recognition, Yitzchak's quiet resilience in uncovering the hidden, and Rivka's courage to act on her vision of the future are threads that together form a tapestry of meaning. Each offers us a lens through which to better understand ourselves and the world around us.

Picture Esav returning from the field, exhausted and hungry. The Torah describes his entrance with vivid detail: "Esav came in from the field, and he was famished" (Bereishit 25:29). In his desperation, he trades his birthright for lentil stew—a choice so visceral that it is often dismissed as the impulsive act of a man who values the material over the eternal. Yet beneath this moment lies a deeper story: one of yearning, hidden potential, and the struggle to reconcile identity with destiny.

Esav is often portrayed as the quintessential hunter—earthy, compulsive, focused on the immediate. Yet his tears after Yaakov receives the blessing (Bereishit 27:34) reveal an ache that goes beyond material loss. His cry is raw and haunting, a window into his longing for connection and validation, emotions that have likely followed him his entire life. This complexity invites us to pause and consider how we perceive others. Are we too quick to reduce people to single-dimensional roles? What hidden yearnings and untapped potential might we overlook in those around us?

The Talmud (Bava Batra 16b) offers a nuanced view of Esav, suggesting that his world was not devoid of spirituality, but was often overwhelmed by passion and poorly-channeled desire. Esav emerges not as a villain, but as a tragic figure—someone whose immense potential was eclipsed by his inability to bridge the tension between his inner aspirations and outward actions.

From Esav's longing, we turn to Yitzchak's quiet persistence—a very different kind of journey. While Avraham's faith blazes and Yaakov's life unfolds in dramatic twists and turns, Yitzchak's narrative offers a quieter but equally profound lesson. His well-digging (Bereishit 26:18-22) is more than a practical act—it is a spiritual metaphor. Each well he reopens represents faith, patience, and an investment in the unseen.

Yitzchak's story teaches us that strength isn't always loud. It often lies in the persistence to uncover what is buried—the potential in a child, the possibilities in a strained relationship, or the hope in a fractured world. His wells remind us to look deeper, to search for what lies beneath the surface, and to trust in the possibility of growth even when the process is slow.

Finally, we come to Rivka, whose decisive role in Yaakov's blessing is as controversial as it is visionary. Her actions stem from a profound understanding of her children's destinies. Rivka

perceives truths that are not immediately visible: Yaakov's capacity for leadership and Esav's limitations. Her choices call us to grapple with the tension between what is and what could be. How often are we, like Rivka, called to act not based on the present reality but on a future we envision? Her courage reminds us that true leadership sometimes requires making difficult decisions rooted in hope and foresight.

The themes of Toldot resonate deeply in a world where identities are too often reduced to surface impressions. In an age of quick judgments and fleeting interactions, we risk overlooking the complexities that shape each person's story. Like Esav, many of us yearn to be truly seen—not for our mistakes or external roles, but for the deeper struggles, hopes, and intentions that define us. Esav's anguished cry reminds us how painful it is to feel unseen, a yearning that resonates universally.

Like Yitzchak, we are called to nurture hidden potential in ourselves and others. Uncovering what is buried takes patience, faith, and persistence. Often, the treasures we seek—within our own hearts or in those around us—require the slow, deliberate work of looking past the immediate and trusting in the possibility of growth.

And like Rivka, we are sometimes tasked with seeing a future that feels just beyond reach. Her actions, though controversial, are rooted in her vision of what could be. Whether as parents, leaders, or friends, we are called to hold space for others' potential, guiding them toward a destiny they may not yet see for themselves.

The legacy of Toldot reminds us that identity, growth, and vision are layered and dynamic, often obscured by the noise of the moment. The Torah invites us to explore these unseen threads, to look beyond the obvious, and to recognize the hidden yearnings that shape our relationships and our world.

In quiet moments of reflection, in the persistence to uncover potential, and in the courage to envision a better future, we carry the message of Toldot forward. Let us dig wells, honor hidden depths, and embrace the unseen possibilities in ourselves and others. For it is in these unseen threads that the fabric of our world is woven.

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