



Table Talk

Table Talk: Pekudei

Prepared by: Jonathan Eig

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In her new book, *My Name is Lucy Barton*, Elizabeth Strout writes: “It interests me how we find ways to feel superior to another person, another group of people. It happens everywhere, and all the time. Whatever we call it, I think it’s the lowest part of who we are, this need to find someone else to put down.”

What do we call it? Is it envy? The opposite of envy? Is it hatred? Insecurity? Resentment? All of the above?

In *parashat Pekudei*, God tells Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons as priests. The Torah says: “This Moses did; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.” The repetition seems to suggest that Moses passed a kind of test. He did it, without complaint, without jealousy, without reminding Aaron that he, Moses, had been God’s messenger, which, don’t forget, made him more important than any priest.

These brothers never became rivals. One never felt a need to put down the other. But for the rest of us, this can be a struggle. Strout, in her book, writes of parents who make their children feel they’ll never be good enough and children who make other children feel dirty and poor. Look around. Watch a presidential debate. Listen to sports talk radio. Pay attention at your next staff meeting. You’ll see such behavior everywhere, and almost always without justification.

At the Shabbat table this evening, ask hard questions.

1. To whom do you feel superior? Siblings? People who vote differently from you? Packers fans?
Seriously: How do you justify it?
2. Why do you think God told Moses to anoint Aaron and his sons as priests but not to anoint Moses’s sons?
3. Can you think of a time when you celebrated the good fortune of another person without jealousy?