



Table Talk

Table Talk: Vayeshev

Prepared by: Jonathan Eig

December 3, 2015

21 Kislev 5776

All families are happy on Facebook, but when you read their texts, every family is a mess.

Tolstoy tweeted that the other day, and it got a lot of likes.

All families, even the seemingly ideal ones, have problems. There's jealousy, betrayal, bad finances, hurtful words, emotional neglect, long-simmering resentments... the list goes on. For a family to have a shot at happiness, it's got to learn to accept and deal with failure, anger, and, yes, unhappiness.

In *parashat* Vayeshev this week, we see a family as messy as any you'll find today on reality TV. Jacob, having lied to his father and cheated his brother, is home from exile after living for years with his scheming father-in-law. And his family troubles are about to get worse, as his favorite son, Joseph, is sold into slavery by his brothers.

What keeps them going? Faith, for one thing.

We don't get to choose our families. We can't control what people say and do. Bad things happen to good people all the time. Good people make bad decisions every day. Sometimes, all we can control is our response. Jacob, for all his mistakes and all his suffering, never gave up the struggle and never lost faith that his son was still alive. Joseph never stopped believing that God had a plan for him, and that even the terrible behavior of his brothers must have been part of that plan.

It's easy to get angry with the people we love, just as it's easy to get frustrated by the painful headlines that dominate the news these days. But it is one thing to get angry and another to lose faith. You may not have control over the events in your life, but you always have a choice about how to respond.

For now, try responding to these questions:

1. By giving Joseph his multi-colored coat, Jacob showed his favoritism for the son of his beloved Rachel. Do you think he knew the gift might worsen tension among the siblings? Have you ever continued certain behavior even though you knew it was harmful? Why?
2. If you were Joseph, would you have worn the jacket? What does his decision to wear the jacket say about him and his relationship with his brothers?
3. Joseph shows faith in God throughout his journey. Does that mean his actions were irrelevant? Was everything predetermined by God?