Parshat Toldot

            Our Aliyah today is Toldot, Chapter 26, verses 6-12.  It is a very short self -contained vignette inserted into the midst of the family drama of Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob and Esau that makes up most of the Parsha. We read that Isaac and Rebecca journey to the land of the Philistines in a time of famine. Isaac passes Rebecca off as his sister. Avimelech, king of the Philistines, observes Isaac fondling Rebecca and suspects the truth. When he confronts him, Isaac admits the lie, and Avimelech says, “What is this thou hast done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife and thou wouldst have brought guiltiness upon us.”

            Those words stopped me in my tracks. I had never considered that lies have power to lead others astray, into guilt. I tried hard to think of a lie of I had told with this consequence; and drew a blank. Not because I can’t recall any lies, but simply because I don’t know. And perhaps that is the point. Once we speak our lies into the world, they take on a life on their own. They can have unintended and unanticipated consequences that we may never know of unless someone reports back to us. Avimelech’s words invite us to consider that our lies, however small or white they may be, have the potential to imp  act others adversely.

            Avimelech’s exchange with Isaac also opens a broader meaning to this story and its placement in the Parsha.  This small story gives perspective to the lies, deceit and betrayals of the bigger story that unfolds around it. Avimelech shines the light of Echad as he reminds us of our interconnectedness; his words are essential counterpoint to the rest of the Parsha, which can be read as a casebook study in the pitfalls of being out of alignment with that truth.

            Our false beliefs of separation lead us into fear and the machinations of the ego. Jealousy, greed, manipulation, betrayal, abuse, lies can all the laid at the doorstep of not being aligned with Echad consciousness, of believing ourselves to be diminished, impoverished when others have a bigger piece of the pie. It is what drives Jacob to refuse to share food with his hungry brother unless he sells him the birthright. It is what drives Rebecca to deceive and betray Isaac in order to secure for Jacob the blessing he intends for Esau. It is what drove Sarah before her to cast out Hagar and Ishmael.

            The antidote is to awaken to the abundance of our lives. We are each dealt a hand of cards at birth that are the specifics of our embodiment in this lifetime. There are cards of physical health and cards of illness and disability; cards of birth order; cards of welcoming, loving family and cards of familial abuse and neglect; cards of and material privilege and cards of poverty…. You get the idea.

            Our experience is determined by how we play the hand, not the cards we have been dealt. If we choose to believe that we are not more or less than anyone, simply a different, unique and necessary manifestation of the infinite Oneness, we find our rightful place at the table of Echad. There is room everyone at that table. There are no bad seats.

            We are wealthy beyond measure when we treasure our differences; when we know ourselves and others as sacred beings; when we occupy our unique place at the table with joy and gratitude for the portion we have been given.  When we do this, we have no need for the lies that can lead us and others astray. We are free to claim and manifest the sacred light of our souls that is our shared and inalienable birthright.

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