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Soul-Wisdom, Aligned Choices

I had just started off on a bike ride, only half a block after leaving my driveway, when a voice came through so clearly...it was both inside me and surrounding me. Not a loud, booming voice, but a clear, steadfast voice. It said, "You can't stay."

The second I heard its truth, tears began streaming down my face. It was my soul's voice, and it held the wisdom prompting me to make a challenging and important next step. My soul invited me into a new chapter, calling me to leave the beloved synagogue I'd served for 8+ years in Washington State and take a giant leap to move across the country.

Listening to this Indwelling Divine Presence was scary~it meant disappointing people, it meant leaving behind communities I loved and helped build, it meant some hard conversations with my Dad who thought I was totally bonkers, AND... it was also unwaveringly true. My heart and spirit knew it was time to broaden my rabbinic reach. I had a deep intuitive sense to dive into creative ritual, widen the spiritual inclusivity I could offer professionally, and nestle myself in the Rockies.

I think about moments when we make decisions that change the trajectory of our lives or others' lives forever. How do we know when the fear surrounding our decision is because doing the right thing can be scary OR because there's a deep part of us warning that we're making a mistake? How do we know when we feel true intuition versus a reactionary fear?

I think of our matriarch Rebekah who in this week's Torah portion makes a decision that changes the course of our Jewish story forever.

Rebekah receives a prophecy during her pregnancy.¹

“Two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.”

Jacob, the younger twin, is Rebekah's favorite. And years later as her husband Isaac is dying, Rebekah decides Jacob must steal the deathbed blessings intended for his brother Esau. These blessings ensure Jacob will be the father of the Jewish nation.

¹ Gen. 25:23

We can envision the scene, Rebekah hovers anxiously outside Isaac's chambers. She has been dreading this day for years knowing that her favorite son's empowerment rests on receiving Jacob's blessing. Breathing rapidly, she presses her ear to the thick tapestry across the doorway. A maidservant catches her eye inquisitively. Rebekah glares, terrified to be found out and shoos the confused woman away frantically.

"Don't let my worst fear be realized," she repeats silently again and again.

These fervent thoughts prove no use. Isaac's aged voice rumbles softly as he sends Esau off to the hunt foreshadowing forthcoming blessings.

Now, fear fills each cell of Rebekah's being. Her panic screams that deceit is the only way to ensure justice.

Rebekah takes a breath and plunges into forthright action.

The rest is history. An elaborate scheme cooked up by our matriarch leads to Jacob manipulating Isaac's blindness to steal his brother's blessing.

Esau is replaced by Jacob.

Jacob then rises to become a patriarch and Esau is cast as little-known foil.

The rabbis, our commentators, do little to chastise Rebekah for her act, but there is something in me that cannot let her betrayal go.

I wonder why Jacob is Rebekah's favorite? Is there fear wrapped up in her selective love? After all, she is Laban's sister and comes from a family permeated with master trickery.

Did the oracle's prophecy influence her negatively? What was it in that initial prophecy that scared Rebekah? Did it trigger a long-held childhood wound between her and her brother Laban; an injustice she had been clutching for decades? What if she had listened to her own intuition and not an outside source? Might she have been a little less fearful and frantic during the bestowal of her sons' blessings?

I came across a fascinating take in the *Women's Torah Commentary*.

Diane M. Sharon asks, what if Rebekah misinterprets the prophecy?² What if ambiguity is part of the Divine purpose?

Perhaps Rebekah was given a prophecy that was intended to offer her a lesson of discernment...an invitation to check in with her intuition?

²Diane M. Sharon, *Women's Torah Commentary*, Eds. Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Rabbi Andrea L. Weiss, Ph.D. URJ Press: New York: 2008. p. 150.

Life offers many instances when we're prompted to act: for protection, for security, for truth-seeking. How do we know when we are acting from wisdom or coming from fear? How do we know when we are aligned with the greater good or reacting from distress?

Personally, I return to the wisdom and discernment our bodies offer. Can you feel in your body the difference between an agitated response or an expansive one? Can you feel the weight of a socially conditioned response vs. an aligned one. Can you feel the comfort of deep trust versus panicked reaction?

We might feel constriction in our throats, or stomachs when a choice is mis-aligned.

On the other hand, there is a rightness, almost a resounding bass note, that comes with the solidity of honoring a deep truth. It doesn't necessarily mean follow through will be easy. But it does mean the truth sits right in our heart, or in our *kishkes*, our guts. There is no doubting the sense of knowing in our body. That is soul-wisdom.

We will never know what Rebekah was thinking as she hastily prepared food for Isaac and covered Jacob's arms in animal skins to deceive her husband. But I wonder, what if she allowed herself to break free from the pedigree of deceit she inherited? What if she allowed herself to honor her own inner wisdom? What if she affirmed an altruistic maternal response that offered a path for both sons to thrive? What if there was a way for both brothers to lead blessed lives? Rebekah could have shifted generations of ancestral trauma.

When I knew I needed to leave Seattle and move across the country, the knowing of this truth within filled me with courage to take a challenging step. And I also deliberately spent many months sitting with this knowing to make sure its truth remained steady in my guts and in my heart.

May this Torah portion invite us to trust our own deep knowing, our own soul-wisdom. May Rebekah prompt our growth--to honor courage and wisdom; to choose a path of deep affirmation within our hearts and every fiber of our being.

Ken Y'hi Ratzon, So May It Be.