

Food for Thought

a collaboration between
*Temple Shaaray Tefila (NYC) &
Leo Baeck Temple (Los Angeles)*



Session 1 || Abundance and Abandonment

Check-in Question: Are there foods/dishes which have taken on different meanings at different times in your life, foods that have evolved with you as your life has changed? What did they once symbolize, and what do they symbolize now?

Frame

While food is a basic human need, it holds layers of complexity: survival or decadence, traditional practice or irreverence, joy or trauma. Families are equally complex. In the book of Genesis we encounter the entanglement of food and family. Isaac and Rebecca's two boys, Esau and Jacob, come into tension around a bowl of lentils, called "the stuff" in this verse.

While some foods may spark jubilant recollections, others may trigger hardships and painful memories, drawing us close to people or moments that we prefer to keep at a safe distance. Food can also be a sensitive subject for those of us who have battled, or have loved ones who have battled eating disorders or other illnesses related to food.

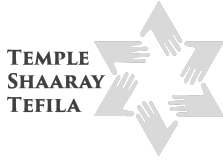
We encourage everyone to care for themselves. To share when you are called, and to refrain when that is best for you. We hope the Brit/Guidelines serve as a grounding to support all to participate at their fullest and care for each other.

Text #1: Genesis 25:27-34

"When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob became a mild man, raising livestock. Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebecca favored Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished. And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished"—which is why he was named Edom. Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright." And Esau said, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?"

But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright." (Genesis 25:27-34)



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Text #2: M. F. K. Fisher, brilliant feminist food writer

I am more modest now, but I still think that one of the pleasantest of all emotions is to know that I, I with my brain and my hands, have nourished my beloved few, that I have concocted a stew or a story, a rarity or a plain dish, to sustain them truly against the hungers of the world.

Text #3: Michael Pollan, food writer

Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well.

Guiding Questions

- a) Esau's "taste for game" defined who he was, and made him the favored son of his dad, Isaac. How does what we eat define who we are and draw us close to some, and push us away from others?
- b) Jacob, in a not very "love thy brother" fashion, extorts Esau, offering a bowl of lentils in exchange for Esau's birthright when Esau is clearly starving. How have you seen food play a complicated, even problematic, role in your family? How does food play a complicated role in our city?
- c) Fisher finds wonder and power in using her hands and mind to nourish her beloveds. In a way, she is speaking about the deep satisfaction of feeding others (maybe even on the spiritual plain, in the unstable emotional landscape of our world). What role does food play in nourishing you on a deeper level, and how do you nourish others through food?

Siyyum/Closing/Gratitude (5 min)

What are the images or ideas you are carrying with you from our conversation today? Maybe it is something you heard another say, or from one of the texts we encountered.

Nibbles to go: (something to think about between this meeting and the next)

You are invited to notice, maybe with an increased awareness coming out of our first session, the role food plays in your life and our world. How is it elevated, commodified, manipulated, spiritualized and redeemed? Is there something new you are noticing as you bring MFK Fisher's gaze to the "hungers of the world" which surround us at all times? How are you meeting this hunger?