

Dear Chavraya,

Whether in relation to our own siblings or to those of other families, we often find ourselves amazed, though we know we shouldn't be, at how different we are who grew up in the same home. Stepping back from our selves, there is something wondrous in watching how children emerge as very different personalities within the same family. From the same garden, such an array of color blossoms forth, each flower offering its own unique beauty to the world. As a sixth grade teacher in a Jewish day school, I railed against efforts to standardize, whether in the realm of tests or of expectations. At the same time, every child and every person needs love and encouragement, and perhaps most of all the sunshine of hope and faith to draw them toward the blossoming of self.

The common needs in the garden of life and learning are readily apparent, sunshine and warmth, love and caring. What about different needs, though? What about the plant that needs more water and the plant that needs less? What about the child who needs more guidance and the child who needs less? What of the flower that basks in sunshine and the flower that begs for shade? What of the child that stands forth before the public and the child that withdraws to the back row? What about the vine that crawls along the soil and revels in its warmth while another seeks the sky with the guiding hand of a trellis? What about the child who plods along at a pace all her own, turning each stone on the path of self-discovery while another seeks his way and what to do with the guiding hand of an adult? The needs of one can be the undoing of another.

In an unassuming phrase at the beginning of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Toldot/Generations*, the rabbis deduced this simple message, not of horticulture but of child rearing. After a difficult pregnancy Jacob and Essau are born to Isaac and Rebecca. The narrative jumps quickly and we are told, *vayigd'lu ha'n'arim/ and the boys grew up*. The rabbis point to the sudden jump as suggesting that little attention was given to the differences between the boys when they were young. Only after they had grown beyond childhood, beyond the easy reach of parent and teacher, were the differences between them noticed. Each had been taught and raised in the same way with the same expectations without regard for their essential difference of nature and temperament. Essau was the rugged outdoorsman and Jacob the student and homebody. Each of the children was raised as a Jacob type and Essau drifted away from the generations of his people.

The words of Proverbs (22:6) echo from the ancient classroom of these two brothers, *Train each child in accordance with his/her own way*. Of flowers and of children, and of our selves, the awareness so painful at times, each one's beauty is unique and as diverse as the image of God. As we strive to nurture each child and approach each person according to her or his own nature, so may none be lost to the generations of our people, or separated from the uniqueness of their own soul.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor