

Things have been moving at a fast pace. Last week's Torah portion informed us about Jacob's time with his uncle, and now father-in-law, Laban. While there he married Laban's two daughters, Rachel and Leah.

This week's Torah portion, *Vayishlach*, opens with the description of Jacob preparing for the re-encounter with his brother Esau. In the opening verses, we learn about Jacob's instructions to his messengers. Jacob says, tell my brother the following: "Thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now." (Genesis 32:5)

Rashi, the medieval biblical interpreter, is intrigued by the use of the term 'stayed' (*garti*).

Rashi explains: "I have become neither a prince nor other person of importance, but merely a simple sojourner (*ger*). Alternatively, Rashi offers a second explanation: "I observed the 613 commandments [of the Torah]," as the letters in *garti* amount to 613 in Gematria (a Kabbalistic method of interpreting the Hebrew scriptures by computing the numerical value of words, based on their constituent letters).

In Rashi's explanation, we can see a flash of humility in Jacob's way of announcing his arrival to his brother. Jacob is not coming to Esau as the successful brother who was abroad for twenty years, getting trained and becoming rich, for him not to come home and rule over his brother; quite the opposite. No matter which one or Rashi's two explanations we go with, Jacob is describing himself in very humble terms, 'I am a sojourner,' or 'I am someone who follows God's ways.'

Jacob is looking to establish a peaceful coexistence with his brother, and in doing so, he presents himself quite differently than what his father Isaac had anticipated for him through the blessing that he had offered him ("Be master over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow to you." Genesis 27:29)

Showing how much he has matured throughout all these years, Jacob is planning on re-joining his brother not from a place of power, but from a place of humility. He already had his father's blessing. He didn't need to rub salt into his brother's wound. He knows who he is and he only wants to coexist peacefully with his brother.

Therefore, with this clear goal in mind, Jacob adopts his strategy. He succeeds.

This simple narrative, enlightened by Rashi's interpretation, helps us learn a very powerful and helpful lesson. When we have a certain goal in mind, what is the path that will bring us more effectively to where we want to be? Is the answer through power and authority over the other, or through tenderness, sensitivity and compassion?

Jacob's choice of humility is the one that brought him exactly where he needed and wanted to be.

Shabbat Shalom!

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