

This Week In Torah *Vayishlach*

How do we change for the better?

Examine the torah portion. The scene is set—brothers reunited after decades apart. The last time Jacob saw Esau, he was fleeing from his parents' tent after securing his father's blessing. Looking over his shoulder, Jacob [dressed in Esau's clothing with fur glued on him] heard his brother's screams: "Is there no blessing for me?" Not sure what awaits him when he sees Esau, Jacob separates from his family and possessions and remains alone on the other side of the Jabok River. That night, he wrestles with an "*ish*"—perhaps a man, maybe an angel, or maybe an internal conflict—that leaves him transformed and wounded. He hobbles but has a new name – *Yisrael*!

The text reads that prior to meeting, Jacob sends word to Esau: "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now...'" That, according to some Rabbis, gives Esau the reassurance that he needs to see Jacob! Jacob has changed; developed some humility or perhaps lessened his hubris.

RaSHI believes that the key verb in that sentence is *GARTI*, I lived... meaning that Jacob lived as a foreigner in Laban's house, never a part of things and always an outlier [just as Esau has felt thru-out the last 25 years]. Also RaSHI points out that the numerical value of *GARTI* is 613, corresponding to the number of *mitzvot* in the Torah which implies that he didn't succumb to trickery or dishonesty during his time with Laban, rather with integrity and honesty as he formed the various *mitzvot*. According to the 18th century Chasid known as the *Toldot Ya'akov Yosef*, Jacob learned to balance the *yetzer haRah* [the bad inclination] and assert his *yetzer haTov* [his good inclination]. According to this sage, Jacob was not the same soul who tricked his brother twice—acquiring his birthright for a bowl of soup and his father's blessing while disguised as his older brother. Jacob was himself... *shlemut*... whole; and thus could truly embrace Esau as an equal and no longer one clutching onto Esau's heel.

Time does heal old wounds, if given the opportunity. Thru active pursuit of learning about one's self, a person can mature and evolve to a new sense of being. In Jacob's case, that humility of limping forward and having a divided camp [although numerous] as

well as not having an army with him, gives Esau an understanding of his brother's integrity. Thus, the embrace... with love and respect.

One can even project that the night before that meeting, Jacob was tormented and that wrestling match was an internal struggle with himself on the type of person he wanted to project to his brother or a dream of wrestling with Esau that transforms him without declaring victory. Thus, the embrace.... with love and respect.

For us, this perspective gives us a model for reconciliation. First and foremost—a sacred pause... distance and time to reflect. Second, the reflection is an introspection as Jacob looked inward and dealt with new settings, he gained a better sense of “self.” Torah does not mention Jacob's thoughts about Esau until his return. The focus was on himself and not blaming Esau for his circumstance. Third is humility in the embrace; there is no hubris or blame found in our narrative. Fourth is sincerity in the reunion. This model can be emulated by us!

Transformations can take many different forms. But sincere change comes with *Anavah*, humility—rooted in honest reflection of who we are and what we want to be.