

CHEVRAH TORAH...LT, 5780

Discovering the Other—Understanding Ourselves

Being a student of Elie Wiesel means being yourself and cultivating your humanity, your sensitivity to others...It means knowing you do not have to choose between your particular identity and your concern for all people...that the particular and the universal can be mutually reinforcing.” [Witness Ariel Burger, pgs. 253-254]

VaYishlach

Genesis 33:1-17

Key KOSHI:

HOW is Jacob’s long-awaited meeting of Esau a model for treating the Other?

WHAT does the Jacob-Esau encounter teach us about making God’s Presence manifest?

P’SCHAT...The Story that Unearths THE Question: WHAT Are We to Become

33:1] Looking up, Jacob saw Esau coming, accompanied by four hundred men. He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids 2] putting the maids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. 3] He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother. 4] Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept. 5] Looking about, he saw the women and the children. “Who,” he asked, “are these with you?” He answered, “The children with whom God has favored your servant.” 6] Then the maids, with their children, came forward and bowed low; 7] next Leah, with her children, came forward and bowed low; and last, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed low; 8] And he asked, “What do you mean by all this company which I have met?” He answered, “To gain my lord’s favor.” 9] Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours.” 10] But Jacob said, “No I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God and you have received me favorably. 11] Please

1 וַיֵּשָׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹשֹׂו בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיִּחַץ אֶת־הַיְלָדִים עַל־לֵאָה וְעַל־רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשִּׁפּוֹת : 2 וַיֵּשֶׂם אֶת־הַשִּׁפּוֹת וְאֶת־יְלָדֵיהֶן רִאשֹׁנָה וְאֶת־לֵאָה וַיְלָדֶיהָ אַחֲרָנִים וְאֶת־רָחֵל וְאֶת־יוֹסֵף אַחֲרָנִים : 3 וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֹׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד־גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד־אָחִיו : 4 וַיָּרַץ עֹשֹׂו לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיִּחַבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְאָרוֹ [צְוֹאָרוֹ] וַיִּשְׁקֵהוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ : 5 וַיֵּשָׂא אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַיְלָדִים וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵלֶּה לָךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר־תָּנִן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ : [רַב־יָעִין] 6 וַתִּגָּשׁוּן הַשִּׁפּוֹת הַנֶּהָה וַיְלָדֵיהֶן וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ : 7 וַתִּגָּשׁ גַּם־לֵאָה וַיְלָדֶיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ וְאַחֲרָיִם יוֹסֵף וְרָחֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ : 8 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָךְ כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגַשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַצְאֵתִי בְּעֵינַי אֲדַנִּי : 9 וַיֹּאמֶר עֹשֹׂו יִשְׁלֵי רֵב אֲחִי יְהִי לָךְ אֲשֶׁר־לָךְ : 10 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֵלֶּינָא אִם־נָא מַצְאֵתִי חֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְלִקְחַת מִנְחָתִי מִיָּדִי כִּי עַל־פְּנֵי רַאֲיִתִּי פָּנֶיךָ כְּרָאֵת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְצַנִּי : 11 קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּרַכְתִּי

accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty.” And when he urged him, he accepted.
 12] And [Esau] said, “Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace.” 13] But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. 14] Let my lord go on ahead of his servant while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”
 15] Then Esau said, “Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me.” But he said, “Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!” 16] So Esau started back that day on his way to Seir. 17] But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth.”

אֲשֶׁר הֵבֵאתָ לָךְ כִּי־חֲנִנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֵשׁ־
 לִי כֹל וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ וַיִּקַּח : 12 וַיֹּאמֶר נִסְעָה
 וְנִלְכָה וְאֵלֶכָה לְנֶגְדְךָ : 13 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
 אֲדֹנָי יִדְעֵ כִּי־הִילָדִים רַכִּים וְהֵצֵאן
 וְהִבְקֵר עָלוֹת עָלַי וּדְפְקוּם יוֹם אֶחָד
 וּמָתוּ כָל־הֵצֵאן : 14 יַעֲבֹר־נָא אֲדֹנָי לְפָנַי
 עֲבָדוֹ וְאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאִטִּי לְרֶגֶל
 הַמְלֶאכָה אֲשֶׁר־לְפָנַי וּלְרֶגֶל הִילָדִים עַד
 אֲשֶׁר־אָבֵא אֶל־אֲדֹנָי שְׁעִירָה : 15 וַיֹּאמֶר
 עֲשׂוּ אֲצִיגֶה־נָּא עִמָּךְ מִן־הָעַם אֲשֶׁר אֵתִי
 וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינַי אֲדֹנָי :
 16 וְנָשֹׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֲשׂוּ לְדַרְכּוֹ שְׁעִירָה :
 17 וַיַּעֲקֹב נָסַע סֹכְתָה וַיִּבֶן לּוֹ בַּיִת
 וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סֹכֶת עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁם־
 הַמָּקוֹם סֹכּוֹת :

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוֵּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ...An Interchange of Truths: The More Jewish—The More Human

v.4 *Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him, and they wept.*

RASHI... “*Va Yishakeyhu*” There are dots atop the word, and our rabbis disagree. In a Baraita, [SIFREI, B’Halotecha] they interpret that he did not kiss him with all of his heart. But R’ Shimon bar Yochai said, ‘It is known that Esau hates Jacob, yet his mercy was so aroused at seeing his brother that he kissed him wholeheartedly.

B’REISHIT RABBAH... R’ Yannai taught, ‘He came not to kiss him—*Nash’ko*, but to bite him—*Nosh’ko*! Whereupon Jacob’s neck turned to marble and set Esau’s teeth on edge!

ZOHAR... “*they wept*”—Jacob, for fear he might not escape; Esau, that his brother was in his arms again.

HaEMEK DAVAR... Both brothers wept! So it is in every age, whenever the seed of Esau is moved to acknowledge the Seed of Israel, so are we moved to embrace Esau—our brother.

v.9 *Esau said: I have enough my brother; let what you have remain yours.*

RADAK... “*I have enough*” You are my brother; I have no need of any gifts or offerings from you!

ALTER... “*I have much my brother...*” Esau has become a kind of prince, despite his loss of birthright and blessing, and can speak to Jacob in princely generosity. It is striking that he addresses Jacob as “*my brother*”—the familiar first person... a form of affectionate address—while Jacob continues to call him “*my lord*,” never swerving from deferential terms

B’REISHIT RABBAH... R’ Abihu said: Jacob’s hold on the blessing was weak, and how was it strengthened?

“*Let what you have remain yours.*” As R’ Eliezer taught: The validity of a document is established by its signatories

BRETTLER... The Hebrew “*RAV*” may echo the prophecy “*Rav ya’avod tsa’er—The older shall serve the younger.*” [25:23] Esau, confronted with his brother’s conspicuous obeisance, renounces any claim to his younger brother’s property.

v.10 *But Jacob said, “No, I beg you; if you could do me this favor, accept from me this gift, for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably.*

SARNA... “*minchati*” The Hebrew ‘MiNCHa’ may mean a gift in expression of friendship and respect and also a tribute in recognition of the donor’s subordinate status. The ambiguity in its repeated use here is intentional; Esau being free to interpret as he wishes.

MUNK... “*to see your face is like seeing the face of an angel...*” From this Resh Lakish deduces that one is allowed to flatter the wicked in this world. But he is contradicted by R’ Levi, who explains Jacob’s words with a comparison: a guest is invited by his neighbor to a meal, but realizes his host is out to kill him. So he declares, “This meal is as tasty as the one I had at the king’s table.” The other concludes, he knows the king and so does him no harm. Why reference the angel?

So Esau would know, he has seen angels and knows The King. I will be powerless against him. [BT, Sotah 41b]

ETZ HAYIM... “*Seeing your face is like seeing the face of God*”... I have seen the face of God, and, as a result, am not the same person I was years ago... I have learned to see you not as an intimidating rival, but as a person fashioned in God’s Image.

RAMBAN... “*Va Tirtseyni*” You were pleased with me, indicated by your accepting my gift, just as God “*rotzeh*” takes pleasure in those that fear Him by accepting their offerings.

RASHI... “*Va Tirtseyni*” It is fitting for you to accept this gift as a sign that you have forgiven my misconduct.

v.11 *Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have everything. And he urged him, so he took it.*

ALTER... “*Birchati—my blessing*” The term chosen brilliantly echoes a phrase Jacob could not actually have heard, which Esau pronounced to their father two decades earlier: “*He’s taken my blessing.*” In offering this tribute, Jacob is making restitution for his primal theft...

RASHI... “*Birchati—my homage*” Any form of the term “*bracha*” in Scriptures which is used in reference to seeing another’s face indicates a blessing of peace. It is used in the French in the sense of *mon salut—my salutation*.

ALSHECH... “*I have it all*”... Generous as I am to you, my wealth will not be diminished, for God’s blessing will make me rich.

KLI YAKAR... The righteous are happy with whatever they have while the wicked always desire more. In saying “*I have alot*,” Esau was insinuating he wasn’t content, much as he had, because he did not have it all. Jacob knew whatever God gave was “*all*.”

DRASH...A Dialogue of Celebrating Difference: Listening for the Light

Rabbi NORMAN COHEN...

...It was a changed Jacob that saw his brother approaching...He uncharacteristically stepped out in front of his wives and children and exposed himself to greater danger. But this new Jacob was ready to assume full responsibility...He bowed low seven times. This made him even more vulnerable. A more mature, wiser Jacob understood that if he and Esau were to overcome their old struggle, then he had to find a way to give him the respect that he deserved...

As Esau heard Jacob's words and looked into his eyes, he saw a different person from the one he remembered twenty years before. The Jacob who limped toward him, who embraced him, and pleaded with him to take back the blessing he had stolen bore little resemblance to the trickster he had once known. Witnessing a transformed Jacob, Esau saw someone he liked and could easily identify with; someone more like himself. Without thinking, he suggested they travel together to Seir and live together in new-found harmony. But Jacob, to his credit, realized that though their moment of reconciliation had freed them from their youthful power struggle, it would be better for both of them to live at some distance...Even if they had been close all these years, they would have needed the space... [Voices from Genesis, pgs 125-127]

Prof. ELIE WIESEL...

...When the two brothers meet again, after Peniel, Esau forgot the iniquities and scandals he had suffered at the hand of Jacob, showing himself magnanimous and human; he kissed his brother and wept...It is Esau who emerges to better advantage, truly grateful. The Midrash sensed this and tried its best to see that Esau remained the villain...Yet in the biblical text it is Esau, after all...who is strong but kind, wounded, yet tolerant. Not one to hold a grudge, never mean...ever truthful, more so than his younger brother...

...Why does Jacob humble himself so before Esau? His self-punishment is all the more disconcerting because it took place after the struggle with the angel. We must deduce that the struggle did not change him completely. Something of Jacob must have remained in Israel...And a few short hours later he was trembling again as he faced Esau...His victory over angels had not solved his problems with man. ...As far as Esau was concerned, Jacob continued to be Jacob, not Israel.

But there is something else...Jacob has just come to understand a fundamental truth: God is in man, even in suffering, even in misfortune, even in evil. God is everywhere. In every being... God does not wait for man at the end of the road, the termination of exile; God accompanies him there. More than that: God is the road. He is the exile. God is present in every extremity...He is part of Jacob as He is part of Esau. And when Jacob knelt before Esau it was not only to plead for mercy but also to discern God's will in Esau's... [Messengers of God—Biblical Portraits & Legends, pgs 115- 117]

SOD...Courage & Vulnerability: The Open Questioning that Leads to Love **Rabbi ARIEL BURGER...**

...In New England...we often celebrate connection, speaking of what unites us as being greater than our differences. This is good, but it can lead to a subtle tyranny of sameness, to people living in echo chambers in which they surround themselves with those who think like them...In order to fight this tendency, Wiesel emphasized difference.

“It is the otherness of The Other that fascinates me...What can I learn from him? What does she see that I cannot?...”

...We each have blind spots. Just as every candle casts its own shadow, only when you place a second candle next to the first do the shadows disappear—illuminated by the other’s light. The beginning of dialogue is the knowledge that we can do this for one another.”

...Tammy, who grew up in the southern US and has talked about the endemic racism in her family asks, “But how can we tolerate someone whose beliefs are fundamentally opposed to ours?” Prof. Wiesel says, “I don’t like the word tolerate. Who am I to tolerate you? I prefer the word respect. I must respect you even if I do not agree with you. In fact, my disagreement may be an expression of my respect for you. If I truly respect you, don’t I owe you my honesty?...”

“I hope you encounter the other here...those who hold different beliefs, values, worldviews than you do. For when you do, you are faced with a choice...To listen, or not. I hope you listen, really listen, not to find the other’s weakness but to find his strength...”

“Of course, we must find what unites us,” says Prof Wiesel, “But we must not allow that search to collapse the distinctions between us...For rather than collapse the distance between our worldviews and opinions, we need to sustain the gap. In this way, we serve as *“ezer k’neg’do—helpers over against,”* friendly antagonists, partners in clarifying our thoughts and our hearts. Many of us spend so much moral energy on promoting connection that we sometimes forget to truly celebrate difference...”

...If I truly respect you, that means I can learn from you, that you have some wisdom or insight or sensitivity that I lack...I always teach with an open heart. Not just for moral reasons, but for pragmatic ones—a teacher’s open heart makes it possible for students to open their hearts as well.”

[WITNESS...Lessons from Elie Wiesel’s Classroom, Ch 2: The Other]

Rabbi BRADLEY SHAVIT ARTSON

...Jacob presents his brother with a series of gifts and then says to Esau, “To see your face is like seeing the face of God...” What a remarkable comment! Jacob compares greeting his brother with the theophany itself, as if exchanging words with his once-estranged brother is nothing less than revelation! So problematic was Jacob’s linking of his brother and the Face of God” that generations of scholars backed away from his bold claim. In 10th century Babylon, Sa’adia Ga’on interpreted Jacob’s remark as comparing Esau to “the face of the prominent.” In 12th century Spain, R’ Abraham Ibn-Ezra argued that Jacob didn’t really mean God; he meant an angel.

What can we do with Jacob’s shocking comparison? A starting point is to note that Jacob compares Esau to God in two ways. He says that seeing one is like seeing the other, a reminder that even Esau is made in God’s Image. And, second, he demonstrates that one serves both in the

same way. As the Ramban notes, just as Jacob brought offerings to his aggrieved sibling, so one brings gifts and sacrifices to worship God.

Perhaps what Torah and the Ramban are pointing out is that we communicate best not by relying on superficial devices...but rather by allowing our deepest selves to respond to the presence of the other. Because encountering another person is like seeing the Face of God, we approach that person with reverence and warmth. Like an offering to the Divine, we show openness to her concerns...In so doing, we affirm the unique marvel of each individual.

Just as God asks not to be approached empty-handed, so, too, we must approach the other with offerings of respect, affection and wonder. And then, like Jacob, we may feel ourselves encountering God in everyone we meet.

[[The Bedside Torah](#), pgs 58-59]