

In our two upcoming Torah portions, *VaYishlach* and *VaYeishev*, we see two very different approaches to siblings attempting to coexist peacefully.

In *Parashat VaYishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), Jacob prepares to reconcile with his brother Esau. After years of estrangement, Jacob having run away from home and from his brother's wrath, the two prepare to meet. They are adults now with families of their own. But their boyhood conflicts still linger in their hearts. Even so, it seems, Jacob wants to reconcile. He sends messengers ahead of him to alert his brother to his noble intentions, and to calm his brother's residual jealousies.

Jacob commands his messengers to tell Esau, "Your servant, Jacob says, I lived as a stranger with Lavan, and was delayed until now. I acquired oxen, donkeys, sheep, servants and maidservants. I have sent [these messengers] to tell this to my master, to find favour in your eyes." (Gen. 32:5, 6)

We must wonder why Jacob tells Esau about all of his success and possessions. Would this not make Esau even more jealous than he already is? Isn't this adding fuel to the fire? Rashi explains Jacob's words like this: 'I lived as a stranger,' means I have not become an officer or anyone of importance, but merely a transient guest. It is not worthy of you to hate me on account of your father's blessings. He blessed me, 'Be master over your brother,' for it has not been fulfilled in me.

Indeed, Rashi teaches, all of Jacob's words seek to show Esau that their father's blessing did not come to fruition. He tells Esau that he has acquired oxen and donkeys. Since their father, Isaac, had said, 'May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the land,' this shows that the blessing did not come true since cattle, oxen and servants are neither from the heavens nor from the earth.

Jacob tries to diminish his own status in order to reach out to his brother.

In *Parashat VaYeishev* (Genesis 37:1-40:23), however, we find a very different approach to sibling relationships. The Torah tells us that Joseph, at the age of 17, would play with his brothers and bring back negative reports of them to their father, Jacob. Joseph had dreams that indicated his superiority over his brothers; he recounts them and incurs their wrath. Rather than recognise his brothers' jealousies over his position in the family (their father favoured him because he was son of the beloved wife, Rachel) and take measures to appease them, Joseph does just the opposite. He builds himself up even higher and increases their jealousies with his words.

Joseph misses out on learning from his father's interactions with his own brother. Instead of trying to see himself from his brothers' position, he behaves immaturely and acts purely for the sake of his own ego. In the end, he endures rejection and hardship at the hand of his brothers. Jacob, on the other hand, is able to diminish his ego and have a reconciliation of sorts with Esau. He is then able to move on with his life.

These tales of sibling relationships and family strife remind us to take a close look at our own families and the way that we treat one another. Let us strive to keep our own egos healthy while keeping our families healthy and whole as well.