

Vayishlach - Rabbi Lerner - November 25, 2012

The Meeting of Esav and Yaacov

This scene follows Yaacov's apparently failed attempt in appeasing Esav with his gifts. But instead of attacking, Esav greets his brother warmly. What changes Esav's behavior?

33:1-5: *Yaacov raised his eyes and saw - behold Esav was coming, and with him were 400 men - so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two handmaids. He put the handmaids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. (He puts the most precious further back - Achron Achron Chaviv). Then he himself went on ahead of them and bowed down earthward seven times until he reached his brother. Esav ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; then they wept. He raised his eyes and saw the women and children, and he asked "Who are these to you?" He answered, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant."*

Yaacov answers that these are the children he was blessed with - but why does he not say that these women are his wives - why just mention the children if Esav asked about all of them? **Ramban:** Esav asked about the women too, yet Yaacov only answered about the children for a reason. It was an answer given with Mussar - Yaacov was not interested in bringing up the topic of his wives; Esav on his own realized who they are, but Yaacov doesn't want to mention them out of modesty. **Abarbanel:** Yaacov only responded about the children because he was humiliated that he had four wives; he did not want Esav to ridicule him and say to him 'you are supposed to be the frum person, filled with Yiras Shamayim, and you didn't have enough faith with just one or two wives? I only have three and I am satisfied with that.' It would have made Yaacov look like a hypocrite. So he did not mention the wives and that might have led Esav into thinking that some of these women were not wives, but wet nurses, helping nurse the many children.

33:6-7: *Then the handmaids came forward, they and their children, and they bowed down. Leah, too, came forward with her children and they bowed down; and afterwards, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed down. Rashi:* Rachel was very beautiful; Yaacov and Yosef were concerned that Esav might try to take her; therefore, Yosef stood in front of her to block Esav's view so he would not see her.

33:8: And he asked, "What did you intend by that whole camp that I met?" **Ramban:** we don't know if the agents with the gifts actually arrived and gave them to Esav; all we know is that they returned with the message that Esav was coming with an army. One possibility: The servants went on their mission and brought the gifts to transfer, but they were unable to get past Esav's men to see him. Or, perhaps he allowed them in to his camp, but he refused to speak to them or ask who they were from - they might never have had a chance to meet him and explain the nature of the gift. Esav might not have known what the whole delegation was all about and he now asks Yaacov. It is also possible that Esav figured out that they were Yaacov's, but did not understand their connection to him. Yaacov then had to inform him that it was a gift for Esav. Or, he might have gotten the message from the emissaries, and this question was only rhetorical.

33:9: *Esav said "I have plenty. My brother, let that what you have remain yours."*

33:10-11: *But Yaacov said, "No, I beg of you! If I have now found favor in your eyes, then accept my tribute (**Minchah**) from me, because as I have seen your face which is like seeing the face of a Divine being, and you were appeased by me. Please accept my gift (**Birchasi**) which*

was brought to you in as much as God has been gracious to me and inasmuch as I have everything." He urged him and he accepted.

Ramban: the language of Minchah is a gift from what you have; the recipient will show favor by accepting the minchah, just as Hashem accepts the korban Minchah as a gift presented to Him. By accepting the gift you show that you are happy with the donor. It is a way of showing gratitude. That is why in 33:11 he asks to please accept the gift because he has been blessed by God, and he wants to show his thankfulness to Hashem by sharing his wealth and gifts with others, just as we do when we give tzedakah. This is why Shachris and Arvis are named for the time of day, but instead of calling it "Tzohorayim", it is called Minchah - when we break away from the middle of our work to daven to Hashem - it is the most important of the daily davening because it takes the most dedication during the day to break away from what we are doing and to thank God - we acknowledge that our work and sustenance is blessed by God - we acknowledge that all of our success is from God - we learn all that from this pasuk.

33:12-3: *And he said "Travel on and let us go - I will proceed alongside you." But he said to him, "My lord knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and cattle are upon me; if they will be driven hard for a single day, then all the flocks will die."* **Ramban:** why is he worried about the sheep dying and not the children? He did not want to bring the words to his lips that the children might die - doesn't even want to mention the possibility. And if the sheep die, certainly the larger cattle who require more water will die.

33:14: *Let my lord go ahead of his servant...until I come to my lord in Seir.* **Ramban:** the road they were on was close to Seir; Esav wanted to invite Yaacov to his home, to entertain Yaacov, but he declined and he never went there. It is a reference to the future when Hashem will come and judge Seir for their wickedness.

33:4: Why does Esav change his manner towards Yaacov - or does he? In this pasuk it says they kissed and they cried, with several dots over the word *Vayishakeyhu*, *they kissed*. **Rashi:** His mercy was kindled when he saw Yaacov; after Yaacov showed his humility and bowed down to him, showing him so much respect, it brought back his brotherly love. The dots over the word they kissed reflects a big machlokes quoted in the Midrash: some say that when he kissed him it was not a genuine kiss, it was not a kiss of love. On the other hand, Rav Shimon bar Yochai says that we know that Esav hates Yaacov, but at that point, he was overwhelmed with compassion about his brother and kissed him with all his heart. **Rabbeinu Bachya:** whenever there are dots in Tanach, it makes you investigate the matter carefully; here it teaches that the kiss was not with all his heart; it was not truly heartfelt; it was almost like a kiss of anger. The **Midrash Rabah** says it is Rav Shimon Ben Elazar who says that he kissed him with all his heart after his compassion overtook him; it was 100% real. Rav Yanai asks then why are there dots? On the contrary, he did not kiss him with his heart - he came to bite him on the neck - God turned Yaacov's neck into marble, and Esav's teeth were broken - one (Yaacov) cried with tears of joy, the other in pain over his painful, lost teeth.

Rav Hirsch: purely humane feelings overcame Yaacov; the fact that it says *Vayivku*, *they cried* - tells us that. While kisses can be phony, crying reveals deep emotion - tears come from one's innermost soul; this showed that Esav was truly a grandson of Avraham, and there was more to him than just being a wild hunter, a beast - otherwise his descendants, the Romans, could not possibly have dominated all mankind as they did - they had to have wisdom, compassion and morals. The principle of acting humane overcame him - he, the strong one, put down the sword

when he leaned on the neck of the weak - here he became the loving older brother, with genuine tears coming from the soul; there was genuine rehabilitation of Esav.

Rabbeinu Bachya: it was a phone kiss of anger, Esav never changes his colors. In Mishlei 27:6 it says "*Venataros Neshikos Sonay* - superfluous are the kisses of a foe" - their kisses are just for show - these are Esav's tears. In Amos 1:11 it says "for three sins of Edom Hashem would hold back punishment, but not for the fourth sin because he pursued his brother with the sword, he corrupted any sense of mercy and pity, he will continue to devour forever with his anger, and he guards his hatred for all eternity." Esav is incorrigible. He always has a motive to hurt us.

Beis Halevi: After Yaacov sent out men and they returned with the news of the approaching army, he divided his camp into two and he then davened to Hashem - in 32:12 he says "*Hatzilayni Naw Miyad Achi, Miyad Esav*" - save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav. Why spell out Esav - we know who his brother is? And why say the word Miyad twice? It means there are two hands that are stretched out and threatening to destroy the Jew. The obvious one is the one stretched out with the sword to kill us. But there is also the hand of the brother who tries to destroy the Jew with kisses and love - through the agency of assimilation. When Esav approaches us as a brother in a friendly way, it is to subvert us into becoming one happy family - his family - its purpose is for us to leave Judaism. That is the meaning of the dots above the word *Vayishakeyhu* - they are meant to harm us. That is the graver of the two dangers - when an enemy comes at, you to attack you physically, openly, you can prepare; but the more subtle approach is the bigger danger - *Miyad Achi* is the bigger threat - when we feel we are being more accepted and become comfortable with the society we must be more vigilant against the threat of assimilation.