

A Shabbat message from Rabbi Rick Rheins  
*Shabbat Vayishlach* 5781

## **A Kiss is Still a Kiss**

In this prolonged pandemic, a period of separation, isolation and loneliness only intermittently interrupted by Zoom and the good ol' phone call, it is embarrassing to recall the time we have sometimes wasted in the past on petty squabbles. True, those disagreements didn't seem so petty at the time. We were down right angry and justifiably so. Well, at least that's what we thought then. Now, it might even take us a moment or two or three to recall what it was, exactly, that all the fuss was about. Given extra alone time, the pandemic's punishing time-out, we may remember the grievance. We most certainly should remember what we've missed. As time goes by.

This week's Torah portion, *Vayishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), begins with Jacob's return home from Haran in Mesopotamia. He left home as a young man with dreams of adventure and spiritual discovery. He left home to flee from his furious brother Esav and to avoid the unpleasant aftermath of the deception he played against his father Isaac. Years later, as a loving husband and devoted father, Jacob knew that it was time to go back home to reestablish his role as the future patriarch of the family. Of course, first he would have to reconcile with his brother. He sent angelic emissaries to

Esav, who immediately set out to greet Jacob with a retinue of 400 armed men. Praying for the best but preparing for the worst, Jacob divided his family into camps in order to insure that at least half would survive. Then he sent servants who shepherded flocks and herds to Esav as gifts to soften his brother's heart. Finally, Jacob prayed to God for protection of his beloved family. The night before Jacob was going to meet Esav was a fitful one; all alone he wrestled. With an angel? With a stranger? It's not clear. But it was a transformative experience and from it Jacob earned a new identity. No longer would he only be Jacob, *Yaakov*, the clever and ambitious trickster. From now on, he would also be Israel, *Yisrael*, the one who wrestled with the Divine and with doubt and found faith and meaning. On the fateful day, as Jacob approached his brother, it is written in the Torah:

וַיֵּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרַאתוֹ וַיַּחְבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צַוְאָרוֹ וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ וַיִּבְכּוּ׃

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

Yes, they embraced and kissed . . . but what do those unusual dots over the word kiss (וישקהו) mean? Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105 France) taught:

**וישקה** *AND HE KISSED HIM* — Dots are placed above the letters of this word, and a difference of opinion is expressed in the Baraita of Sifré as to what these dots are intended to suggest. Some explain the dotting as meaning that Esav did not kiss Jacob with his whole heart, whereas Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai said: ‘Is it not well-known that Esav hated Jacob? But at that moment his pity was really aroused and he kissed him with his whole heart.’

There are even commentators who maintained that Esav actually tried to bite, not kiss, Jacob. Perhaps that interpretation reflects the uncertainty we face when trying to heal old wounds by reaching out to those with whom we have had a falling out. We look for signs that cue us to the possibility of forgiveness and renewal. Like Jacob, we send messages. We prepare for the worst but hope for the best. We send goodwill gestures and we pray for a blessed response. Until the last moment Jacob was not sure what would happen. And then they embraced, kissed and cried.

After nine long months of political strife, economic stress, and social distancing, it is time for us to begin planning long overdue reunions, reconciliations and renewal. Time will come when once again we can embrace each other with hugs, handshakes, and kisses. Indeed, every expression of love and friendship contains redemptive qualities. Yes, one might say that it is too early to make healing overtures to those from whom

we are estranged. Some may feel that too much time has gone by. One may think that reaching out to former loved ones and friends is too risky or deemed not worth the anxiety. Every situation is different and it goes without saying that these decisions are not easy. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the power of a kiss.

You must remember this  
A kiss is still a kiss, a sigh is just a sigh  
The fundamental things apply  
As time goes by  
And when two lovers woo  
They still say, "I love you"  
On that you can rely  
No matter what the future brings  
As time goes by

*Shabbat Shalom,*

*Rick*

Rabbi Rick Rheins