

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Vayishlach

In the beginning of this week's Parsha the tension builds as Yaakov returns to the Land of Israel and prepares to face the same enemy he had fled 34 years earlier: his very own brother, the unforgiving and merciless Eisav. Yaakov manages to peacefully defuse a potentially deadly confrontation with his three prong strategy; an escape plan, prayer, and appeasement. We know that the lives of the *Avot* are not merely a story of the past; they are also the blueprint of our future. The account of the conflict between Yaakov and Eisav in this week's Parsha serves both as a foreshadowing of the history of the Jews and as a model for the correct approach in future dealings with our enemies (*Ramban*).

In his prayer, Yaakov asks G-d to rescue him "from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav" (32: 12). Does G-d not know who Eisav is that Yaakov has to inform Him that they are brothers? Besides, what is the relevance of their relationship in this prayer? What is Yaakov trying to say here?

Forgive me if I reveal a dark family secret. There are actually two Eisavs. Our brother Eisav is plagued by schizophrenia. One Eisav we are very aware of, the other is less known. There is the murderous Eisav and there is also the sweet brother Eisav who puts his arm around us and wants to be our friend. One destroys the body, the other, the soul. Yaakov prays to G-d to save him from the hands of both (*Bais Halevi*).

The night before Yaakov is to face Eisav, Yaakov does battle with the angel of Eisav, the incarnation of evil, the Satan himself. This night long struggle symbolizes the struggle with evil the Jewish people will endure through the long night of national and personal *galut*. Like Yaakov, we will persevere and emerge victorious. This battle is described by the Torah with one unusual word, "*vayaiavaik*" (32: 25). Rashi has two interpretations of this word. Either it comes from the root "*avak*" which means dust; when people fight they kick up a cloud of dust. Alternatively, it has the Aramaic root "*avik*" which means a knot; when two people wrestle they hold onto each other and their limbs intertwine. The *Chatam Sofer* understands these two interpretations to be reflecting the two types of interactions Eisav has with Yaakov. One is a violent attack that kicks up dust. The other is when Eisav hugs us.



JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

continued ...

When Eisav finally sees Yaakov he runs to him, gives him a hug and kisses him. They both begin to cry (33:4). Why was Yaakov crying? He should be relieved, not moved. I would posit that Eisav's hug was extremely disturbing to Yaakov. Yaakov knew that this meant that there would come a time when Eisav would hug Jews again, and maybe some of them would return the hug. At this vision our father Yaakov broke down and cried.

Yaakov knew what he was doing when he prayed to G-d, "Please rescue me from the hand of my brother, the hand of Eisav". Indeed, both Eisavs were active that day. First, the aggressive Eisav approaches with an armed force of four hundred to destroy Yaakov and his family. Then, as soon as Yaakov manages to escape that danger, Eisav his "brother" appears. He extends to Yaakov a warm invitation, "Let's get going and move on, I will travel alongside you" (33:12). Brother Eisav wants to bond. Yaakov respectfully declines the offer and avoids that danger as well.

The implications here for us are well put by Rabbi Moshe M. Eisemann, "It stands to reason that the last scene in the drama, the interaction which takes place just before the final parting of ways, would hint at what is to happen at the point at which our *galut* is about to wind down and enter its final throes." In other words, in the end Eisav will embrace the Jewish people and lovingly welcome them to his melting pot. Following the guidance of Yaakov we must respectfully decline and maintain our identity, pure from the seductive influences of Eisav. This is the challenge of our times.

Shabbat Shalom

JSN Parsha Team

3626 El Camino Real
(650) 493-5764



Palo Alto, CA 94306
www.jsn.info