

Rabbi's Column

After fleeing for his life from the wrath of his brother Esav, Yaakov is set to come home after an absence of decades. Not knowing how Esav will respond to him Yaakov sends the following message:

"To my lord Esau. Your humble servant Jacob says: I have been staying with Laban, and have delayed my return until now. I have acquired cattle, donkeys, sheep, slaves and slave-girls, and am now sending word to tell my lord, to gain favor in your eyes."

This seems to be the worst way to try and make peace. Esav was jealous that Yaakov had stolen father Yitzchak's blessing and now Yaakov boasts about his wealth. If Esav was angry before, in what way did Yaakov think that that this pronouncement would in any way mollify him? If anything, this would throw fuel on the flames.

Rashi quotes the Medrash's explanation: "Father said to me 'from the dew of heaven and the fat of the land' this is neither from heaven nor earth." Furthermore, עַם-לָבָן גֵּרְתִּי, I sojourned with Lavan- I was always a stranger and never became a prince or achieved status, therefore you have no reason to hate me.

On the surface, this attempt at reconciliation appears to be successful. In the description of their meeting we are told וַיֵּרָץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיַּחְבֵּקְהוּ, וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צַוְאָרוֹ וַיִּשָּׁקְהוּ; וַיִּבְכּוּ Esau ran to meet them. He hugged [Jacob], and throwing himself on his shoulders, kissed him. They [both] wept. However all is not "glatt". The word וַיִּשָּׁקְהוּ he kissed him, is written in the Torah with dots on each letter. The Torah is pointing out something out of the ordinary takes place with this "kiss". Some of the rabbis say this is to show that the kiss was insincere while others say that at this moment Esav's mercy was aroused and he kissed him in sincerity.

This dilemma constantly faces the Jewish State in relation to its neighbors. The jealousy is palatable. The enmity continues to brew and is constantly aroused. Costly gestures and overtures are made, but there remains the argument and the two opposing views; does this actually contribute to peace or does it merely show weakness? Is there a desire for peace or is there simply no way for Esav to live in peace knowing that Yaakov has been successful?

וְגִרְתִּי עִם-לָבָן גִּרְתִּי I sojourned with Lavan, Yaakov says גִּרְתִּי has the gematria, numerical values of 613, the number of mitzvot of the Torah. The Medrash says, I was with Lavan; I kept the 613 mitzvot and לֹא לִמַּדְתִּי מִמַּעֲשֵׂיוֹ הָרָעִים I didn't learn from his ways. Again, two explanations. I was not influenced by Lavan and didn't learn from his evil ways. On the other hand, I didn't learn from Lavan's zealousness. Just as the Lavans and

the Esavs of the world put all their energy for evil goals, so must we learn to put all our efforts into good. Unfortunately לא למדתי מממעשיו הרעים, we haven't learned that lesson well enough.

Shabbat Shalom
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