



Pardes | פַּרְדֵּס
Institute of Jewish Studies

Reconciling the Abrahamic Family

Unit 2 - Reconciling Jacob and Esau



**Pardes Center for Judaism and
Conflict Resolution
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2.1. Jacob and Esau – The Process of De/Humanizing the Other

2.1.1. The Biblical Story: From Birth to Birthright

Genesis chapter 25

19 And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begot Isaac. 20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean, of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. 21 And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD let Himself be entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said: 'If it be so, wherefore do I live?' And she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said unto her: Two nations are in thy womb, And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. 24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. 25 And the first came forth ruddy, all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau. 26 And after that came forth his brother, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called a Jacob. And Isaac was threescore years old when she bore them. 27 And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. 28 Now Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; and Rebekah loved Jacob. 29 And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came in from the field, and he was faint. 30 And Esau said to Jacob: 'Let me swallow, I pray thee, some of this

בראשית פרק כה

(יט) וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק: (כ) וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּקַחְתּוֹ אֶת רֵבֶקָה בַּת בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדַן אֲרָם אַחוֹת לְבֶן הָאֲרָמִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: (כא) וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ: וַיִּתְהַר רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: (כב) וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לִמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לִדְרֹשׁ אֶת יְהוָה: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לָהּ שְׁנֵי גֵימִים גּוֹיִם בְּבִטְנָהּ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֹאִם מִלְאִם יֵאָמֵץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צַעִיר: (כד) וַיִּמְלְאוּ יְמֶיהָ לִלְדוֹת וַהֲנִה תוֹמֵם בְּבִטְנָהּ: (כה) וַיֵּצֵא הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כָּלֹו כְּאֹדְרֵת שֶׁעַר וַיִּקְרְאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו: (כו) וְאַחֲרָי כֵּן יֵצֵא אַחִיו וַיְדוּ אֶחְזֵת בְּעֵקֶב עֵשָׂו וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּצְחָק בֶּן שָׁנָה בְּלִדְתָּ אֹתָם: (כז) וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד אִישׁ שֹׁדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יוֹשֵׁב אֹהֳלִים: (כח) וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו כִּי צִיד בְּפִיו וּרְבִקָּה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת יַעֲקֹב:

(כט) וַיִּזְדַּ וַיַּעֲקֹב נִזְיָד וַיֵּבֵא עֵשָׂו מִן הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עַיִף: (ל) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל יַעֲקֹב הֲלֵעִיטִנִּי נָא מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה כִּי עַיִף אֲנֹכִי עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אָדָם: (לא) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מְכַרָה כִּיּוֹם אֶת בְּכֹרְתְךָ לִי: (לב) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלָמָּה זֶה לִי בְּכֹרָה: (לג) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הַשְּׂבָעָה לִי כִּיּוֹם וַיִּשְׂבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹר אֶת בְּכֹרְתּוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב: (לד) וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וְנִזְיָד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׂתַּ וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה:



<p>red, red pottage; for I am faint.' Therefore was his name called a Edom. 31 And Jacob said: 'Sell me first thy birthright.' 32 And Esau said: 'Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?' 33 And Jacob said: 'Swear to me first'; and he swore unto him; and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So Esau despised his birthright.</p>	
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How are Jacob and Esau portrayed in these verses?

Why did Jacob want to buy the birthright and why did Esau want to sell it (v.29-33)?

In your opinion, was this a fair deal?

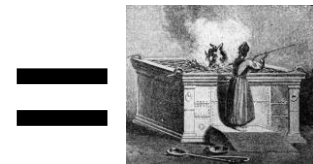
2.1.2. Rabbinic Literature

<p>Genesis Rabbah 63 (599 CE) AND JACOB SAID: SWEAR TO ME, etc. (XXV, 33). Why did Jacob display such eagerness for the birthright? Because we learned [Mishnah Zevachim 14:4]: "Before the Tabernacle was erected the high places were permitted,³ and the sacrificial service was performed by firstborn; after it was erected the high places were forbidden and the sacrificial service was performed by priests." Said [Jacob]: ' Shall this wicked man stand and offer the sacrifices!' Therefore he strove so ardently to obtain the birthright.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) פרשה סג [עמ' 697] (לג) ויאמר [יעקב] השבעה לי וגו' מה ראה יעקב אבינו ליתן נפשו על הבכורה, דתנינן "עד שלא הוקם המשכן היו הבמות מותרות ועבודה בבכורות משהוקם המשכן נאסרו הבמות ועבודה בכהנים" [משנה זבחים יד:ד]. אמר יהיה רשע זה עומד ומקריב לפיכך נתן נפשו על הבכורה.</p>
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<p>Rashi Genesis 25 (11th Century France) 22. <i>Vitrosasu</i>: And [the children] struggled: You must admit that this verse calls for a Midrashic interpretation since it leaves unexplained what this struggling was about and it states that she exclaimed "If it be so, wherefore did I desire this" (i.e. she asked whether this was the normal course of child-bearing, feeling that something extraordinary was happening). Our Rabbis explain that the word <i>vitrosasu</i> has the meaning of running, moving quickly; whenever she passed by the doors of the Torah (i.e. Shem and Eber) Jacob moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth, but whenever she passed by the gate of a pagan temple Esau moved convulsively in his efforts to come to birth (Gen. R. 63). Another explanation is: they struggled with one another and quarreled as to how they should divide the two worlds as their inheritance (Yalkut).</p>	<p>רש"י בראשית פרק כה (כב) ויתרוצצו - על כרחך המקרא הזה אומר דורשני, שסתם מה היא רציצה זו וכתב אם כן למה זה אנכי. רבותינו דרשוהו לשון ריצה, כשהיתה עוברת על פתחי תורה של שם ועבר יעקב רץ ומפרכס לצאת, עוברת על פתחי עבודה זרה עשו מפרכס לצאת. דבר אחר מתרוצצים זה עם זה ומריבים בנחלת שני עולמות:</p>
<p>23. Shall be parted from thy bowels:</p>	<p>כג. ממעיך יפרדו - מן המעים הם נפרדים, זה</p>

as soon as they leave thy body they will take each a different course one to his wicked ways, the other to his pure life.	לרשעו וזה לתומו: [והנה תומם - חסר, ובתמר תאומים מלא לפי ששניהם צדיקים, אבל כאן אחד צדיק ואחד רשע:]
25. <i>Red</i> : a sign that he would always be shedding blood (Gen. R. 63).	(כה) אדמוני - סימן הוא שיהא שופך דמים:
27. <i>And they grew... and Esau was</i> : So long as they were young they could not be distinguished by what they did and no-one paid much attention to their characters, but when they reached the age of thirteen, one went his way to the houses of learning and the other went his way to the idolatrous temples (Gen. R. 63).	(כז) ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו – כל זמן שהיו קטנים לא היו נכרים במעשיהם ואין אדם מדקדק בהם מה טיבם, כיון שנעשו בני שלש עשרה שנה זה פירש לבתי מדרשות וזה פירש לעבודה זרה:
<i>A Cunning Hunter</i> . understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, “Father how should salt and straw be tithed”? (Although he knew full well that these are not subject to the law of tithe). Consequently his father believed him to be very punctilious in observing the divine ordinances (Tanchuma).	יודע ציד - לצוד ולרמות את אביו בפיו, ושואלו אבא היאך מעשרין את המלח ואת התבן, כסבור אביו שהוא מדקדק במצות:
[<i>A Man of the field</i> – explain it literally (i.e. not in the Midrashic manner): a man without regular occupation, hunting beasts and birds with his bow.]	[איש שדה - כמשמעו אדם בטל וצודה בקשתו חיות ועופות:]
<i>A simple man</i> : not expert in all these things: as his heart was his mouth (his thoughts and his words tallied). One who is not ingenious in deceiving people is called plain, simple.	תם - אינו בקי בכל אלה, אלא כלבו כן פיו. מי שאינו חריף לרמות קרוי תם:
<i>Dwelling in tents</i> : the tent of Shem and the tent of Eber (Gen. R. 63).	ישב אהלים - אהלו של שם ואהלו של עבר:
[28. <i>There was hunting in his mouth</i> : Understand this as the Targum renders it: In Isaac’s mouth (i.e. Isaac ate the venison he brought home). But its Midrashic explanation is: there was hunting in Esau’s mouth, meaning that he used to entrap and deceive him by his words (Gen. R. 63).]	[כח) בפיו - כתרגומו בפיו של יצחק. ומדרשו בפיו של עשו שהיה צד אותו ומרמהו בדבריו:]
29. <i>And he was faint</i> . through murdering people, just as you mention faintness in connection with murder	(כט) והוא עיף - ברציחה, כמה דתימא (ירמיה ד לא) כי עיפה נפשי להורגים:

(Jer. 4:31).	
30. <i>Let me swallow</i> : I will open my mouth and you pour a lot in. The word is really used of feeding animals as we find the word in the Mishna (Sabb. 155b) "One may not fatten up a camel on the Sabbath but one may put food (מלעיטין) into its mouth."	(ל) הלעיטני - אפתח פי ושפוך הרבה לתוכה, כמו ששנינו אין אובסין את הגמל אבל מלעיטין אותו (ב' שבת קנה:):
31. <i>Thy birthright</i> - because the sacrificial service was then carried out by the first-born sons, Jacob said, "This wicked man is unworthy to sacrifice to the Holy One, blessed be He" (Gen. R. 63).	(לא) בכרתך - לפי שהעבודה בבכורות, אמר יעקב אין רשע זה כדאי שיקריב להקב"ה:
32. <i>Behold I am in peril to die</i> : Esau said: What is the nature of this Service? Jacob replied. "Many prohibitions and punishments and many acts involving even the punishment of death are associated with it- just as we read in the Mishna, (Sanh. 22b): The following priests are liable to death: those who carry both their duties after having drunk too much wine and those who officiate long-haired. He said: If I am going to die through it, why should I desire it.	(לב) הנה אנכי הולך למות - אמר עשו: מה טיבה של עבודה זו, אמר לו: כמה אזהרות ועונשין ומיתות תלויין בה, כאותה ששנינו אלו הן שבמיתה שתויי יין, ופרועי ראש. אמר אני הולך למות על ידה, אם כן מה חפץ לי בה:
34. <i>Thus Esau despised</i> : Scripture testifies to his wickedness; that he despised the Service of the Omnipresent!	(לד) ויבז עשו - העיד הכתוב על רשעו שביזה עבודתו של מקום:



<u>Rashbam Genesis 25 (12th Century, France, Rashi's grandson)</u>	<u>רשב"ם בראשית פרק כה</u>
22. <i>Vayyitrosesu</i> : is from the same root as ras, in the phrase (Jer. 51:31), " <i>ras leqrat ras</i> —runner to runner." Then ran and moved about inside her body as fetuses are wont to do.	(כב) ויתרוצצו - לשון רץ לקראת רץ, שהיו רצים ומתנענעים בתוך גופה כדרך עוברים.
23. <i>The older shall serve the younger</i> : That is why she loved Jacob (vs. 28), because G-d did. And it is further written (Mal. 1.2), "I have loved Jacob."	(כג) ורב יעבוד צעיר - ולכך אהבה את יעקב שאהבו הקב"ה וכדכת' ואהב את יעקב:
25. <i>Admoni</i> : Roux in the vernacular. (Rouge in Modern French).	(כה) אדמוני - רוש ב"ל:

<p>27. <i>A hunter knowing</i>: How “to hunt game to bring home.” (Gen. 27:5).</p>	<p>(כז) יודע ציד - לצוד ציד להביא:</p>
<p>27. <i>A tent dweller</i>. Who shepherded his father’s flocks, as I explained about the phrase (Gen. 4:20), “who dwell in tents and amidst herds.”</p>	<p>יושב אהלים - רועה צאן אביו, כמו שפירשתי אצל יושב אהל ומקנה:</p>
<p>[28. <i>Game was in his mouth</i>: the plain meaning of Scripture is the one offered by the Targum.]</p>	<p>[[כח) כי ציד בפיו - פשוטו כתרגו':]]</p>
<p>28. <i>Rebekah loved Jacob</i>: because she recognized his innocence and because of what G-d said (vs. 23), “The older shall serve the younger.” The text had to tell the reader beforehand about Isaac’s love of Esau and Rebekah’s love of Jacob to prepare the reader for what is written below (Gen. 27) that Isaac wanted to bless Esau but Rebekah acted with guile to see that Jacob would be blessed.</p>	<p>אוהבת את יעקב - שהיתה מכרת בתומתו וגם ממה שאמר הק' ורב יעבוד צעיר. והוצרך להקדים כאן אהבת יצחק לעשו ורבקה את יעקב להודיע מה שכת' לפנינו יצחק רצה לברך עשו ורבקה הערימה לברך את יעקב:</p>
<p>33. <i>He sold the birthright</i>: For money. Then, afterwards (vs. 34), Jacob gave Esau, as is the common custom, to confirm the transaction.</p>	<p>(לג) וימכור את בכורתו - בדמים. ואחר כן ויעקב נתן לעשו וגו' כמנהג בני אדם לקיום דבר:</p>
<p>34. <i>Esau spurned</i>: Since he would later regret his actions, as it is written (Gen. 27:36), ‘First he took away my birthright,’ accordingly the text informed the reader beforehand of Esau’s foolishness. At this point, when he was eating, he spurned the birthright, later however, he had regrets.</p>	<p>(לד) ויבז עשו - לפי שלסוף נתחרט על כך כדכת' את בכורתי לקח, לכן הקדים כאן להודיע שטותו. עתה בשעת אכילה ביזה את הבכורה, אבל לבסוף היה מתחרט:</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>

2.1.3. Early non-rabbinic Literature:

Philo Allegorical Interpretation, III (d. 50 CE)

(2) Now that the wicked man is destitute of a city and destitute of a home, Moses testifies in speaking of that hairy man who was also a man of varied wickedness, Esau, when he says, "But Esau was skilful in hunting, and a rude man." For it is not natural for vice which is inclined to be subservient to the passions to inhabit the city of virtue, inasmuch as it is devoted to the pursuit of rudeness and ignorance, with great folly. But Jacob, who is full of wisdom, is both a citizen and one who dwells in a house, that is to say, in virtue. Accordingly Moses says of him, "But Jacob is a man without guile, dwelling in a house."

Philo The Sacrifice of Cain and Abel

(4) And this will be more evidently shown by the oracle which was given to Perseverance, that is to Rebecca; {2}{#ge 25:24.} for she also, having conceived the two inconsistent natures of good and evil, and having considered each of them very deeply according to the injunctions of prudence, beholding them both exulting, and making a sort of skirmish as a prelude to the war which was to exist between them; she, I say, besought God to explain to her what this calamity meant, and what was the remedy for it. And he answered her inquiry, and told her, "Two nations are in thy womb." This calamity is the birth of good and evil. "But two peoples shall be divided in thy bowels." And the remedy is, for these two to be parted and separated from one another, and no longer to abide in the same place.

Philo, Question and Answers in Genesis 4

The literal meaning [of this story] shows the greed of the younger [brother] in wishing to deprive his elder brother of his rights. But the virtuous man [Jacob] is not greedy... [He] understands that a continuous and unlimited abundance of possessions will provide the wicked man [Esau] with the occasion for, and the cause of, sin... He considers it most necessary to remove [Esau] from evil... for the improvement of character. And this does no harm, but is a great benefit to him.



2.1.4. Modern Commentaries:

Vawter, B On Genesis: A New Reading. Garden City: Doubleday, 1977

p. 288

Hairiness or shagginess seems to have been a mark of incivility... Similarly, there was a prejudice against a ... redheaded person, which existed not only in the ancient Near Eastern world but well into the time of Western Christianity as well, Judas Iscariot was depicted in mediaeval art as a redhead!... In respect to Esau, therefore, the author's word –plays go beyond mere cleverness and insinuate a bias against him from the beginning.

Sarna JPS Commentary Genesis 25 p. 179-180

23. ...There is another aspect to the oracle. Its presence here actually suggests a moral judgment on Jacob's behavior, for it tacitly asserts that his claim to be heir to the divine promises rests solely upon G-d's predetermination. Thus, his election is thereby disengaged from the improper means he later employed to obtain his rights.

*25. *red.* Hebrew '*admoni* is also used-admiringly – of David in I Samuel 16:12 and 17:42. The term, therefore, is not likely to mean red headedness, which was popularly associated with the sinister and the dangerous. More likely, a ruddy complexion is intended. This may well be connected with the convention found in Egyptian and Cretan art, as well as in the Ugaritic texts, that equates red skin with heroic stature.

H. Gunkel Genesis chapter 25 p. 291

The legend asks how Esau's birthright was transferred to Jacob and responds, "Jacob bought it from Esau for a trifle."... Purchase and deceit are not so different to the old narrators. Whoever has a desire to trade has a desire to deceive. In order to make this unequal trade comprehensible, the legend employs as a motif the characteristic difference of two types- the hunter and the shepherd. The hunter lives from hand to mouth. He slays the animal he finds. He often returns home exhausted and without prey and must then go hungry. Today, however, he has something to eat, so he does not think of tomorrow... The Shepherd, however, is wiser: He does not slaughter animals, but raises them... Therefore, he always has something to eat... Therefore the shepherd Jacob is superior to the hunter Esau.

v. 30 portrays the hungry Esau with drastic humor. He wants to "gulp down" "the red stuff, the red stuff there"... Why does he not name the lentil soup by name?... 31. Jacob takes advantage of the situation. The narrator has no impression of ignobility or selfishness (Dillmann), but of cleverness and farsightedness. Jacob already thinks of the day when his father will die and is able to gain by skill the advantage nature denied him... 32. ... The element portrays Esau's imprudence. 33. But the cautious Jacob (who as a worldly man does not trust people) makes him swear first. The narrator, normally very sparing with words, adds explicitly that he sold Jacob the birthright. He wants to emphasize that with this the trade was concluded. Thus Esau forfeited the birthright once and for all. 34....The final

words, “he ate, stood up, went away, and did not think about the birthright again,” is supposed to portray Esau’s imprudence once again....

G. Wenham, Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis chapter 25 p. 177-178

29. “Jacob had made a stew”... The significant thing is that the strong hunter came in “exhausted” (רָעֵי). Exhaustion in the Near East more likely caused by exertion and thirst than by hunger (cf. Judg. 8:4, Isa 29:8, Job 22:7). So what Esau most needed was a drink and a rest. 30. Certainly his remarks, “Please let me swallow some of the red stuff, this red stuff, because I am exhausted,” do not suggest he is quite as weary as he professes. He does manage to say “please”, to use high-flown language (“swallow”), and then implicitly, if rather uncouthly, to praise the quality of the stew- “the red stew, this red stew.” Surely this description suggests a rich meaty stew such as a hunting man like Esau would relish.

31. Whereas Esau drools over the mouth-watering stew and babbles on, Jacob’s reply is brusque. “Sell at once your firstborn’s rights to me.” Note the omission of “please”, the use of “at once,” and the emphatic position of “to me.” The way Jacob states his demand suggests long premeditation and a ruthless exploitation of his brother’s moment of weakness.

33-34. Jacob’s curt three –word reply, “swear/to me/at once,” confirms that he is cold and calculating, determined to cash in on his brother’s folly.

The chiasmic structure of vv 33b-34a, “He sold to Jacob while Jacob gave to Esau,” highlights the two-sided nature of the deal and draws attention to the inequality of the arrangement, “Esau sold- but Jacob gave.” And what was it he gave? Not a rich meaty stew, that the word “red” back in v. 30 suggested, but only a dish of lentils. With this last-minute revelation we should be stunned. Fancy trading all those treasured rights of inheritance for a mere bowl of lentil soup. We are left to admire Jacob’s sharpness and wonder at Esau’s folly. The four verbs, “he ate, drank, stood up, and went away,” allow us a chance to reflect on his behavior. After his earlier loquaciousness, Esau’ silence is eerie. Does he really care about his birthright, or is bitterness already making it impossible to talk to his brother?

How were Jacob and Esau described differently by different commentaries?

Why did Jacob want to buy the birthright and why did Esau want to sell it? How are these two characters portrayed differently by the different commentaries?

2.1.5. The Contribution of the Parents to the Family Conflict

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary on Genesis chapter 25 (19th cent. Germany)

v. 27. *the lads grew up*: Our Sages never hesitate to point out to us the errors and shortcomings, both great and small, of our ancestors, thereby making their life stories all the more instructive for us....

In regard to this passage, too, our Sages make a comment which indicates that the sharp contrast between the two grandsons of Abraham may have originated not merely in their natural tendencies but may have been caused also by mistakes in their upbringing. As long as they were little, no attention was given to the latent differences between them. Both were given the same upbringing and education. The basic tenet of education, "Train each child in accordance with his own way"[Proverbs 22:6]...was forgotten.... To attempt to educate as Jacob and an Esau together in the same classroom, in the same manner, to raise both of them for, say, a life of study and contemplation, will inevitably mean to ruin one of the two....

Had Isaac and Rebekah studied Esau's nature and asked themselves at an early stage how even an Esau, with the strength, skills and courage latent within him, could be won for endeavors in the service of G-d, so that the future גבור [mighty man] would not become גיבור ציד ["a mighty hunter"] but truly a גבור לפני ד' ["mighty man before G-d"], then Jacob and Esau, despite the basic differences in their tendencies, could have remained twin brothers in spirit as well as in flesh. In that case the sword of Esau could have become wedded early on to the spirit of Jacob, and who knows what a different turn all of history would have taken. But as things happened, ויגדלו הנערים ["the lads grew up"] only after the lads had grown to manhood was everyone surprised to see that two brothers, from the same womb, who had enjoyed the same care, the same upbringing and the same schooling, should have grown into two such diametrical opposites [as did Jacob and Esau].

v. 28. Another factor which could not fail to have a pernicious effect was the difference in the feelings of the parents toward these two children. Harmony, between parents as regards the rearing of their offspring, their attitude toward, and love for, all their children, including those who are not as good as the rest...is the cornerstone of all successful child-rearing....

How may have Isaac and Rebecca contributed to the tensions between Esau and Jacob?

What could they have done differently?



Processing Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced a family conflict where at least one side demonized the other to the extent that the conflict was no longer over one particular issue or incident? What happened? What could have happened to help resolve the conflict in a more peaceful manner?

2. How may the various interpretations of Jacob and Esau's birth and birthright story impact and reflect the relationships between Jews and non Jews?

Do you think Esau would agree that he was -
Bad to the bone Bad to the bone B-B-B-Bad B-B-B-Bad B-B-B-Bad Bad to the bone
George Thorogood, "Bad to the Bone"

2.2. Jacob and Esau

The Challenge of Interpreting the Intentions of the Other

2.2.1. Why is Esau approaching Jacob with four hundred men?

<p>Genesis 32:4-8a (JPS)</p> <p>4 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom. 5 And he commanded them, saying: 'Thus shall ye say unto my lord Esau: Thus saith thy servant Jacob: I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now. 6 And I have oxen, and asses and flocks, and men-servants and maid-servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favour in thy sight.' 7 And the messengers p. 40 returned to Jacob, saying: 'We came to thy brother Esau, and moreover he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.' 8 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed.</p>	<p>בראשית פרשת ויצא - וישלח פרק לב</p> <p>(ד) וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר שָׂדֵה אֱדוֹם: (ה) וַיֵּצֵא אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם לִבִּי גָרַתִּי וְאַחַר עַד עָתָה: (ו) וַיְהִי לִי שׂוֹר וְחֲמוֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וְאֲשַׁלְּחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְאָח חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ: (ז) וַיָּשֻׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֵל אָחִיךָ אֶל עֵשָׂו וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לְקִרְאָתְךָ וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמוֹ: (ח) וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֵר לוֹ</p>
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Why, in your opinion, was Esau going to meet Yackov with four hundred men after not seeing each other for over twenty years?

2.2.2. Rabbinic Literature

<p>Ramban, Genesis 32:8 (13th Cen. Spain)</p> <p>"Then Jacob was greatly afraid." This was because they told him that Esau had gone froth from his city and was coming to meet Jacob, and moreover, that he took along many men- four hundred. He thus greatly feared for his life, for he said, "He has not taken all these men except for the purpose of waging war against me."</p> <p>It appears to me in this matter that Esau did not receive the messengers properly and paid them no head. Perhaps they did not even come before him for he did not at all give permission for them to come before him and speak to him for otherwise, Scripture would</p>	<p>רמב"ן בראשית פרק לב</p> <p>(ח) וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד - בַּעֲבוּר שֶׁאֵמְרוּ לוֹ כִּי יֵצֵא עֵשָׂו מֵעִירוֹ וְהוּא בָּא לְקִרְאָתוֹ יַעֲקֹב, וְעוֹד שֶׁלֶקַח עִמוֹ אֲנָשִׁים רַבִּים אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת, הִיא יֵרָא לְנַפְשׁוֹ מְאֹד כִּי אָמַר לֹא לֶקַח כָּל אֱלֹהֵי רֶק לְהִלָּחֵם בִּי: וְהִנְרָאָה בְּעֵינַי בַּעֲנִין הַזֶּה, כִּי עָשָׂו לֹא קִבֵּל הַשְּׁלוּחִים כְּהוֹגֵן וְלֹא הִשְׁגִּיחַ עֲלֵיהֶם, וְאוּלַי לֹא הָיוּ לְפָנָיו כִּי לֹא נָתַן רְשׁוּת שִׁיבֹאוּ לְפָנָיו וַיְדַבְּרוּ עִמוֹ כָּלֵל, כִּי הִיא הַכְּתוּב מִסְפָּר שֶׁשָּׂאֵל לֵהֵם מֵה שְׁלוֹם אָחִי וּמֵה עֵינָיו וְעֵינַי בֵּיתוֹ וּבְנָיו, וְקִרְאוּ לוֹ בְּשִׁלּוּמוֹ, וְאֵמְרוּ לוֹ כִּי אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ לְקִרְאָתוֹ לְרֵאוֹתוֹ, וְהֵם הָיוּ מְגִידִים כֵּן לְיַעֲקֹב, וְהַכְּתוּב לֹא סִפֵּר שִׁיאֵמְרוּ הַשְּׁלִיחִים דְּבַר בְּשֵׁם עֵשָׂו, אֲבָל עִבְרַתוֹ שְׁמוּרָה בְּלִבּוֹ, וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ רַעֲהָ הִיא הוֹלֵךְ בְּחֵיל הַזֶּה. וְהִנֵּה הַשְּׁלוּחִים חִקְרוּ בְּמַחֲנֵה וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי הוּא הוֹלֵךְ לְקִרְאָתוֹ יַעֲקֹב: וְזֶה טַעַם "וְגַם", כִּי אֵמְרוּ בָּאנוּ אֵל אָחִיךָ אֶל עֵשָׂו וְלֹא עָנָה אוֹתוֹנוּ דְּבַר וְלֹא שָׁלַח לָךְ דְּבַר שְׁלוֹם,</p>
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have related that Esau questioned them concerning his brother's welfare and about his circumstances and those of his household and children. [Scripture further would have told how Esau requested] that they convey greetings to Jacob and tell him that he is proceeding towards him to see him, and they would have told it thus to Jacob. Scripture, however, does not narrate that the messengers transmitted a word in Esau's name. Instead, he [Esau] kept his wrath in his heart, and he came with his army for the purpose of doing Jacob evil. Now the messengers had investigated the matter in the camp, and they knew that he was going to meet Jacob. This is the meaning of the word *vegam* (and moreover) [in the verse, *and moreover he goeth to meet thee*], for they said, "We came to your brother Esau", but he did not answer us a word, and he sent you no greeting, and *moreover, he goeth to meet thee* with might and an army. This is why he added fear to his fear, as Scripture says, *And Jacob was greatly afraid, and was distressed*. And so our Rabbis said that the messengers recognized hatred in him [Esau]. Thus they said: "We come to thy brother Esau" (Gen. R. 75:7). You behave towards him like a brother, but he behaves towards you like Esau." However, in the end, when Esau saw the great honor that Jacob bestowed upon him and how he prostrated himself before him, bowing to the ground seven times from the distance until he approached him, his mercy was aroused, and he thought that Jacob is recognizing his birthright and his pre-eminence, as I have explained (vs. 5). And with this he as comforted, for the hearts belong to G-d, Who turns them whither, He will. (Prov. 21,1).

וגם הולך לקראתך בזרוע וחיל, ולכך הוסיף לו פחד על פחדו, וירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו. וכך אמרו רבותינו (ב"ר עה ז) כי השלוחים הכירו בו שנאה, אמרו באנו אל אחיך אל עשו, אתה נוהג בו כאח והוא נוהג עמך כעשו. אבל בסוף כאשר ראה הכבוד הגדול שעשה לו יעקב ואשר השפיל עצמו לפניו שהשתחוה ארצה שבע פעמים מרחוק עד גשתו אליו, נכמרו רחמיו, וחשב כי הוא מודה בבכורתו ובגדולתו עליו כאשר פירשתי (לעיל בפסוק ה), והתנחם בזה, כי הלבבות לה' המה לכל אשר יחפוץ יטה אותם:



Iranian missile test

Abarbanel, Genesis 32 (15th-16th Cen. Spain)

'And he is coming toward you':
And it seems from the messengers, that they did not know Esau's hatred toward Yackov, and so when they went to him and spoke to him regarding their mission, he replied to them, 'behold he is coming toward you.' And they thought that he was coming toward him to honor him, and because of this they went back to Yackov and said to him, 'we came to your brother, to Esau', meaning 'why should you call him: "my master", and he is none other than your loving loyal brother, and behold he is also coming toward you, meaning it is not enough that he should receive your messengers, but he himself is going and coming toward to you, to receive you, and four hundred men are with him to honor you. But Yakov, that knew the truth, and the Esau's wickedness, himself, was not convinced of this matter, and was very afraid of his coming, and concerned of the four hundred men he was coming with, because he knew that he was coming for the purpose of war.

אברבנל בראשית לב

[בתשובה לשאלה ד'] '...וגם הולך לקראתך': והנראה מהשלוחים שלא היו יודעים משטמת עשו מיעקב ולכן כאשר הלכו לו ודברו אליו שליחותם הוא השיבם הנה הוא הולך לקראתו. וחשבו שהיה הולך לכבדו ומפני זה שבו אל יעקב ואמרו לו באנו אל אחיך אל עשו כלומר למה תקראהו 'אדוני' והוא אינו אלא כאח אוהב נאמן כי הנה גם הוא הולך לקראתך ר"ל לא די שיקבל שליחותיך אבל גם הוא בעצמו הולך ובא לקראתך לקבל אותך וארבע מאות איש עמו לכבדך. אבל יעקב שהיה יודע אמתת הדבר ורשעתו לבדו לא נתפתה בזה ויירא יעקב מאד מביאתו ויצר לו מד' מאות איש שהיה מביא עמו כי ידע כי למלחמה הוא בא.

Shadal, Genesis 32:7 (R. Shmuel David Luzzato. 1800- 1865, Italy)

"*And he is going toward you*": For they believed that Esau was only coming to honor and protect him on his way. And perhaps this really was Esau's intention, and perhaps they also understood from Esau's answer that he did not have in his heart any evil or hatred for his brother, and perhaps they also told Yackov all these things that he said to them, words of peace and brotherhood. c However, Yackov did not trust all of this, for he was afraid when he heard that he was coming with four hundred men, and Scripture

שד"ל בראשית לב:ז

וגם הולך לקראתך: כסבורים שאין עשו בא אלא לכבדו ולשמרו בדרך. ואולי כן היתה באמת כוונת עשו, ואולי ג"כ הבינו מתשובת עשו שלא היה בלבו רעה ושנאה על אחיו, ואולי ג"כ סיפרו ליעקב את כל הדברים אשר דיבר אליהם דברי שלום ואחווה. אמנם יעקב לא בטח בכל זה, כי פחד בשמעו שהוא בא אליו בת' איש, והכתוב לא רצה להאריך בדברי עשו והמלאכים, מאחר שלא הועילו כלום, כי לא בטח בהם יעקב.



Nuclear Power Plan, Arak Iran, 2006

did not want to expand upon the conversation of Esau and the messengers, since they did not have any benefit to him, because Yackov did not trust them.	
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<p>Bechor Shor (13th cent. France) Genesis 32:7 “And he is coming toward you, and four hundred men are with him”... And we did not know what was in his mind, if good or bad, because he did not respond to us anything, rather he said, ‘I will go to him and talk to him mouth to mouth, and since I will speak to him, what should I say to you?’</p>	<p>בכור שור בראשית לב:ז וגם הולך לקראתך וארבע מאות איש עמו: ... ולא ידענו מה בדעתו, אם טוב אם רע, כי לא השיבנו כלום, אלא אמר אני אלך אליו ואדבר עמו פה אל פה, וכיון שאדבר עמו, מה אומר לכם.</p>
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2.2.3. Modern Commentaries

<p>Word Biblical Commentary (1989) Genesis p. 290 The messengers’ return is eerie, for they bring no reply from Esau but simply report that he is on his way with four hundred men. The brevity makes for ambiguity. Is Esau coming to wage war or to receive his brother royally? If he is planning an attack, why allow the messengers to return unharmed, allowing Jacob to prepare himself? Or does Esau feel so superior that he is prolonging Jacob’s agony before striking the final blow? The suspense is heightened.</p>

<p>Prof. Moshe Winfield (Olam HaTanach, Genesis p. 189-190) Esau’s going out with four hundred men, had within it to teach that he had aggressive intentions, for four hundred men used to generally be an army unit (See Samuel I 22:2, 25:13).</p>	<p>עולם התנ"ך פרופ' משה ויינפלד עמ' 189-190 יציאת עשו עם ארבע מאות איש היה בה כדי ללמד על כוונותיו התוקפניות, שכן ארבע מאות איש היוו על-פי-רוב יחידה תוקפת (ראה שמואל א כב, ב; כה, יג)</p>
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Why was Esau coming with 400 men to meet Jacob?	The messenger’s interpretation of Esau’s intentions	Jacob’s interpretation of Esau’s intentions	Esau’s actual intentions
Your Opinion			
Your Chavruta’s Opinion			
Ramban			
Abarbanel			
Shadal			
Bachor Shor			
WBC			
Olam HaTanach			

2.2.4. The Challenge of Interpreting the Intentions of the Other:

When do we know to trust the intentions of our enemies?



Sadat in Tel Aviv 1977



Arafat and Rabin, Washington 1993



Chamberlain holds the paper signed by both Hitler and himself on his return from Munich

Case Studies: 2 Chronicles Chapter 35:20-24; 1 Maccabees chapter 12:39-49

Difficult Conversations (Harvard Negotiation Project, 1999), "Don't Assume They Mean it: Disentangle Intent from Impact", pp. 46.

While we care deeply about other people's intentions toward us, we don't actually know what their intentions are. We can't. Other people's intentions exist only in their hearts and minds. They are invisible to us. However real and right our assumptions about other people's intentions may seem to us, they are often incomplete or just plain wrong. Much of the first mistake can be traced to one basic error: we make an attribution about another person's intentions based on the impact of their actions on us. We feel hurt; therefore they intended to hurt us. We feel slighted; therefore they intended to slight us. Our thinking is so automatic that we aren't even aware that our conclusion is only an assumption. We are so taken in by our story about what they intended that we can't imagine how they could have intended anything else. The conclusions we draw about intentions based on the impact of others' actions on us are rarely charitable... When we've been hurt by someone else's behavior, we assume the worst.

Prof. N. Wheeler (2007). 'Putting ourselves in the Shoes of our Enemies.'

The security dilemma that faces governments with peaceful intent is whether to risk a trust building move in a world where there can be no guarantees about the current and future intentions of others. Trust is easier when there is a margin of safety, but trust only exists in conditions of uncertainty. Even if actors can enter into the counter-fear of others, they might be so fearful that acting on this will place them in a vulnerable position should their trust prove misplaced, that they feel unable to take such risky leaps of trust. This situation seems to characterize the nuclear stand-off on the Korean Peninsula.

Experts Disagree Over Iran's Nuclear Intentions : NPR

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=101354866> (March 2, 2009)

Less than two months into the new administration, the debate over Iran's nuclear activities is intensifying. Numerous statements from senior officials suggest that some in the Obama administration may have concluded Iran is on the cusp of building its first nuclear weapon. But some analysts argue that such a conclusion is based on a misreading of the intelligence.

2.2.5. How did Jacob prepare for meeting Esau?

<p>Pesikta deRav Kahana (6th cent.) And (Yackov) prepared for himself three things. For prayer, for gifts, and for war. For prayer as it says "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau (Gen. 32:12). For gifts, as it says, "So the present passed over before him (Gen. 32:22). For war- "And he said: 'If Esau come to the one camp, and smite it, [then the camp which is left shall escape.]" (Gen. 32:9.</p>	<p>פסיקתא דרב כהנא ג (עמ' 304) (6) והתקין עצמו לשלשה דברים: לתפילה ולדורון ולמלחמה. לתפילה "הצילני נא מיד אחי." "לדורון" – "ותעבר המנחה על פניו", 'למלחמה' - "ויאמר אם יבא עשו אל המחנה האחת והכהו."</p>
<p>Genesis Rabbah, 76:2 "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and was distressed" (Gen. 32:8) Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rabbi Ilai: Is not 'afraid' and 'distressed' the same? Rather, 'he was greatly afraid' – that he should not kill (Esau). 'was distressed' – that he (Jacob) should not be killed.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה ע"ו, ב' "וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֵר לוֹ" (בראשית לב:ח) אר"י בר' עילאי לא היא יראה לא היא צרה? אלא וירא - שלא יהרוג ויצר - לו שלא יהרג</p>

2.3. Jacob and Esau- Reconciliation?

2.3.1. In the Bible:

<p>Genesis 33, 1-4 1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. 2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. 3 And he himself passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept.</p>	<p>בראשית פרשת וישלח פרק לג (א) וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹשֹׂו בָא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיִּחַץ אֶת הַיְלָדִים עַל לֵאָה וְעַל רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשִּׁפְחוֹת: (ב) וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת הַשִּׁפְחוֹת וְאֶת יְלֵדֵיהֶן רִאשֹׁנָה וְאֶת לֵאָה וְיְלֵדֵיהָ אַחֲרָיִם וְאֶת רָחֵל וְאֶת יוֹסֵף אַחֲרָיִם: (ג) וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שֹׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד אַחִיו: (ד) וַיִּרֶץ עֹשֹׂו לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיִּחַבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל צוּאְרוֹ וַיִּשְׁקֵהוּ וַיִּבְכוּ:</p>
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Did Jacob and Esau really reconcile (in your opinion)?

2.3.2. In Rabbinic Literature:

<p>Sifre Bamidbar 69 (2nd C.E.) “And he kissed him” (Gen. 33:4) He did not kiss him with all his heart. R. Shimon b. Yochai said: Is it not known (printed ed. <i>Halachah</i>) that Esau hates Yackov? Rather (here), for this one moment he turned compassionate, and (Esau) kissed him (Yackov) with all his heart.</p>	<p>ספרי במדבר סט כ"י רומי (עמ' 65, הורוביץ) כיוצא בו "וישקהו" (בראשית לג:ד) שלא נשקו בכל לבו. ר' שמעון בן יוחאי או'. והלא (דפוס – הלכה) בידוע שעשו שונא ליעקב. אלא נהפכו רחמיו באותה שעה ונשקו בכל לבו.</p>
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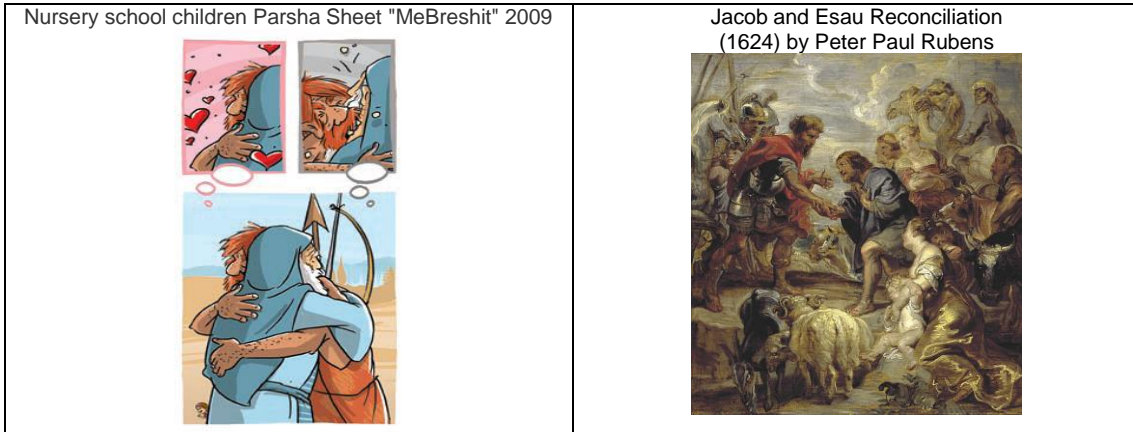
<p>Breshit Rabba 78:9 (6th Century CE) The word is dotted. R. Simeon b. Eleazar said:...hence it teaches that he kissed him with all his heart. ...Said R. Jannai to him: If so, why is the word dotted? It teaches, however, that he wished to bite him (but that the Patriarch Jacob's neck was turned to marble and that wicked man's teeth were blunted and loosened. Hence “and they both wept” one wept because of his neck and the other wept because of his teeth.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק עמ' 926-927) פרשה עח (ד) וירץ עשו לקראתו וגו' וישקהו נקוד עליו, אמר ר' שמעון בן אלעזר: בכל מקום שאת מוצא כתב רבה על הנקודה את דורש את הכתב, נקודה רבה על הכתב את דורש את הנקודה, כאן לא כתב רבה על הנקודה ולא נקודה רבה על הכתב, מלמד שנשקו מכל לבו, אמר ר' ינאי אם כן למה נקוד עליו? אלא מלמד שביקש לנשכו, "ויבכו"- זה בכה על צוארו וזה בכה על שיניו.</p>
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<p>Rashi Genesis 33:4 And he kissed him: Dots are placed above the letters of this word, and a difference of opinion is expressed in the Boraitha of <i>Sifre</i> as to what these dots are intended to suggest: some explain the dotting as meaning that he did not kiss him with his whole heart, whereas R. Simeon the son of Johai said: Is it not well known/<i>haloh</i> (printed ed. <i>Halachah</i>) that Esau hated Jacob? But at that moment his pity was really aroused and he kissed him with his whole heart.</p>	<p>רש"י בראשית פרק לג וישקהו - נקוד עליו, ויש חולקין בדבר הזה בברייתא דספרי (בהעלותך ט), יש שדרשו נקודה זו לומר שלא נשקו בכל לבו. אמר ר' שמעון בן יוחאי הלכה היא בידוע שעשו שונא ליעקב, אלא שנכמרו רחמיו באותה שעה ונשקו בכל לבו:</p>
<p>Ibn Ezra Genesis 33:4 The <i>derash</i> regarding the dots (above the word "and he kissed him") is good for children, because the simple reading is that Esau had not intention of doing anything bad to his brother, and the proof is, "And they cried", just as Joseph and his brother did. (Gen. 45:15).</p>	<p>אבן עזרא בראשית פרק לג (ד) הדרש על נקודות וישקהו טוב הוא לעתיקי משדים, כי על דרך הפשט לא חשב עשו לעשות רע לאחיו, והעד ויבכו, כאשר עשה יוסף עם אחיו:</p>

2.3.3 Modern Commentaries .

<p>WBC p. 298-299 "Jacob returns Esau's Blessing" (32:4-33:20) 3. ... Sevenfold bowing was the proper act of respect of a vassal to his overlord, as the Amarna letters show... The term "prostrate" occurs frequently in Genesis as the proper gesture toward high officials... But here it seems to echo Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:29), which Isaac meant for Esau. "May... nations bow down before you... may your mother's sons bow down before you." In bowing down before his brother, Jacob is doing more than acknowledging Esau's lordship; he is trying to undo the great act of deception whereby he cheated Esau of his blessing. Throughout this scene, he insists on making presents to Esau in an attempt to return to him the blessing (33:11) that should have been his. 4. And how warmly Esau responds. Now there is no hint of the murderous bitterness with which they parted (27:41-42). Instead, he greets Jacob with all the warmth of a long- lost brother. The terms used here, "running" (24:17; 29:12, 13), "embracing"(29:13; 48:10), falling "on the neck"(45:14), and "weeping" (29:11; 45:14, 15; 46:29), are the normal ways of greeting relatives in the Bible. But note here "and they wept." When Jacob joins in weeping with Esau, the ice is broken; the brothers are reconciled and verbal communication can begin.</p>

2.3.4. The 'Reconciliation' of Jacob and Esau in Art:



What is the symbolic picture of the meeting of Jacob and Esau in our cultural memory?



Processing Questions:

1. Can you think of a family argument that was based upon what one side intended in their actions towards another? What could have been done to help clarify the situation?

2. How good are we at suspending judgment on the intentions of those we consider our enemies? What is needed to build trust in their good intentions?

2.3.5. Write a 'Third Story Midrash':

A 'Third Story Midrash' combines the theory of the third story (see below) through incorporating the spectrum of commentaries on a Biblical conflict narrative:

Stone, Patton, Heen, "Difficult Conversations" Penguin. Harvard Negotiation Project. 1999. p. 150.

The Third Story:

In addition to your story and the other person's story, every difficult conversation in an invisible Third Story. The Third Story is the one a keen observer would tell, someone with no stake in your particular problem.... One of the most helpful tools a mediator has is the ability to identify the invisible Third Story. This means describing the problem between the parties in a way that rings true for both sides simultaneously. It's easy to describe a problem so that only one of the disputants would agree with it- in fact, that's what each of us does when we begin inside our own story. The trick is being able to get two people with different stories to sign on to the same description of what is going on.

The Following is an example of a "Third Story Midrash" written by a Pardes student, Ilene Prusher during designated class time:

Seir Café BY ILENE PRUSHER,

JUNE 16, 2009 [HTTP://WWW.JEWCY.COM/POST/SEIR_CAFE](http://www.jewcy.com/post/seir_cafe)

Ilene Prusher is Jerusalem Bureau chief for the Christian Science Monitor. She teaches creative writing at the Pardes Institute. This story comes from a larger series, titled Genesis Next.



1. Jake I look up again at the sign, and it seems this must be the right place. It says Seir Cafe, in bold letters, broken neon lights filling up the antique-looking script, and I think of my family, think of how they didn't even want me to come here to see you, and I'm thinking maybe I ought to turn around and get in my car and speed home. But then I see you sitting in the corner of the restaurant, and even though I haven't seen you in twenty years, I know it's you, because even though you've got gray in your hair now and you've gained weight, your face is still the same and your cheeks still glow with that ruddy complexion. And you see me and you bound over to me and you throw your arms around me, and in your bear hug I can feel how small I still am compared to you, and for a moment you hold me so tight I'm afraid you might suffocate me. And you ask me what I'm doing now, and I tell you that I became a rabbi with a large family, and you laugh a little and say that you might have expected that, and in your laugh I can feel a scoffing, a still-bitter brokenness just beneath your voice, but I know that it's only fair that you're still angry at me, and I'm glad when the waiter comes over to take our order, because you order a steak and I order the salad and we both laugh until we have tears in our eyes and I can see you can't be that angry with me any more and that we won't go to our graves as enemies.



2. Es I try to pretend I think you're funny but you really aren't, and I can see how relieved you are when the waiter comes because you want some diversion, something to distract ourselves from how surreal this all is, some way to avoid the fact that you came half way across the country to meet me near my home so you could patch things up with me because it pained you so much for us to have been estranged from each other for all these years. And I'm looking at you, at that head with a kippa on it like the ones we both wore when we were boys, only darker, at your black jacket and your graying beard, and I'm looking for things I once loved, but instead I watch your eyes, the way they look up when you talk instead of at me, and I see you're still the same smarmy, self-righteous little brother you always were. And when I tell you that I'm a well-paid lawyer for the defense industry you nod knowingly, and pretend to be impressed, and smile a disparaging smile like that's what you expected of me. And you tell me that Dad always said I was very clever with words, that I could trap a man with nothing more than my tongue, and I laugh and you laugh but you know that it's no compliment, and that no matter how successful I was at anything, Mom was on your side and made sure Dad was, too. And you reach into your pocket and take out your wallet, and show me pictures of your family as if to suggest they are your riches, like mine aren't good enough, and so I take out my pictures to show you my family and though you only smile and say *lovely* I can almost hear you shouting shiksa in your head and when you look at my children and their foreign faces I know you are never in a million years going to invite them over to play with yours.



3. Jake I'm looking at the beautiful Asian eyes of the nieces and nephews I'll never know and not knowing how to tell you how gorgeous they really are without saying something wrong, something that might sound racist, and then I remember how upset Mom and Dad were about you marrying out, and I decide to say nothing at all. And so I tell you why I came, why I tracked you down, and I explain to you that my life has been quite difficult these last years, how I've struggled to survive and got cheated in bad business deals, and that through all of my problems I realized that the only way I'd ever be at peace was to come back and reconcile with you. And I tell you that I've finally recovered from my financial misfortunes and I want to pay you back for what happened, but when I try to pass the envelope across the table you put your hand on mine and say, *don't, I don't need it now*, and I try to push it back and say, *use it for your kids, for college, for something for them*, and you say, *I don't need it*, and I can feel something turning over in my stomach, the part of you that remains forever inside of me, still wrestling with who I am. And so I try to explain why I did what I did, why I took Dad's will in to him while he was sick and made sure that I'd be the main beneficiary even though you probably should have had at least half. When you ask me I admit the truth, that it was Mom who told me to do it, and that I didn't want to disobey her and that I had no choice. I nod and I tell you that I

know it sounds bizarre now, but that Mom told me she had been having all kinds of dreams about us and told me it was the right thing to do, that it was what God would want. I know it will sound crazy to you. But what was I supposed to do? And I look at your bare head and your blue jeans and I tell you that now, all these years later, I realize it was unfair, but that it probably came down to the fact that I went to shul every day and you refused to go, that I was already planning on becoming a rabbi like Dad and you were running around eating traif and going out with shiksas on Shabbes and you acted like you had no interest at all in taking over the synagogue. That's the world they were raised in, Es. You're either in or your out. You're lucky Mom and Dad didn't sit shiva for you. Maybe it's not fair. It's just the way it is by us. But I can see you're not really listening to me and when the steak comes you slice off a piece like a butcher and devour it with no bracha and I feel as if you and I have been living on different planets.



4. Es So I start to eat the meal we've ordered just to make you happy, because after bothering to track down the only kosher restaurant in this part of town just to please you, I'm not going to pass up on a good rib steak. But I realize I have no appetite at all and this time around, you won't get off easily just by treating me to a meal. And frankly, this talk about how Mom talked you into it makes me feel a bit sick, because that's no excuse for making Dad sign a new will when he was too ill to think straight, and woe is me, Jake, all your sob stories about what Mom wanted and what Mom dreamed just aren't going to cut it. And yeah, I've had to go through therapy, too, Jake, spent hours trying to work out why I could never do right in Mom's eyes, but when I tell you this you cross your arms lean back in your chair as if to say it isn't true. But you know, Jake, you know it is. And I suddenly remember when you came to me that night, when I had just gotten back from being out late at the clubs, and you asked me to give up my place in the will, and I said *sure, what the hell*, well, I thought you were only kidding. And Dad wasn't exactly about to die anyway. How should I have known you were serious? It never seemed that Dad had that much money anyway, so what was the point? We lived in that tiny apartment all those years! I assumed we were poor because Mom and Dad only bought what they needed to survive. And I watch you pick at your salad and I can see you can't eat either, and I imagine you at home with all of those children and I wonder whether they ever ask about their uncle and their cousins. I roll my eyes over the edges of your worn suit, your old briefcase with some worn Hassidish book popping out the top, the red plastic droplet on your lapel showing that you gave blood, and I realize you have become just the man Mom and Dad had hoped you would be. And for me to be a secular man, a person who didn't need your God and your rituals to be become enlightened, that was always going to put me far below a good holy-roller like you. And when you explain yourself you shuckle a little with each point, that prayer-sway I haven't seen in decades because we don't even have your type around here, it almost feels like you're bowing just for me. Towards me. And for the edge of a moment I think I see the Jacob I once loved, the smart little boy

who helped Mom around the house, the handsome guy the girls all noticed, the student who had a sense of humility.



5. Jake And I can see now that you have changed some, Es, but you haven't changed all that much, and that you're still a materialist person, still calculating what you lost in numerical estimations instead of spiritual ones. And you go back to your steak and I poke my fork around my salad, and I imagine your life now, surrounded by a family so different from the one in which we grew up, no vestiges of the religion our parents taught us, closed off to the prayers that were a blessing to me and a burden to you. I remember that Dad said he also wanted you to be blessed, that he said he loved you no matter what. And I look down at the business card you push across the table towards me, and I see you have changed your last name, and when I ask you why, you shrug and tell me that you didn't feel the need to go through life with an annoyingly long Jewish last name that's like wearing a Star of David on your lapel. And I take the envelope again and hold it with trembling hands and I feel ashamed and my eyes fall and I tell you *I really wish you would take it so I could feel right your eyes again*, and when I look up again I can see in your eyes that you will never truly forgive me. But you reach across the table and upon my hand you lay yours, the dark hairs on it grown wiry with age, and you whisper *OK, I'll take it*, and the white flag of folded paper rises up and changes hands, and I am filled with relief and I remember that I had a brother who could also be kind and generous and I want to say so much more and nothing at all. And the final bill comes and we part, and I limp on my way and you don't even notice, and I know we are as at peace as we will ever be, and that we may be the world's only brothers who can love each other and love knowing that we will never, ever meet again.