

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach:*** **Genesis 33:1-17**
 Haftarah: **Obadiah 8-14**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Matthew 26:39**

Esav ran to meet him

[Genesis 33:4]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 59:9-13;

This Week's Featured Amidah prayer is Petition #5, *Rofei* [Healing].

This is the day, dear Reader. This is the day of the *great showdown*. Today, for the first time since Rivkah choreographed the infamous father's-blessing-hijacking escapade, Ya'akov and Esav will come face-to-face. The prototypical nemeses will finally meet again. Destinies – on both sides of the controversy – hang in the balance.

The opening line of the aliyah sets the stage for the dramatic confrontation:

Vayisa Ya'akov eynav vayar v'hineh Esav ba

Ya'akov lifted up his eyes and observed – and behold, Esau was coming

[Genesis 33:1(a)]

Twenty long years have elapsed since the dark night of intrigue and deception that led to the blessing of Yitzchak regarding the material things of this world being pronounced over the younger brother Ya'akov instead of the firstborn, Esav. A lot has happened in the intervening twenty years – to both men. But one thing that has not happened is *closure*. Both men bear open wounds concerning what happened on that dark night long ago. And closure of these wounds absolutely must occur for both of these men to move into the next stage of their respective destinies.

That Moment . . .

When The Darkest Event of One's Past Finally Catches Up With Him

The stage is set for an epic confrontation. Esav has made league with the sons of Yishma'el as well as the sons of Chet, and has brought 400 armed men – all hell-bent on mayhem - with him to the fray. Consider that Avram only took 318 men with him to rescue Lot and his family from the armies of the kingdoms of the North. **Genesis 14:14.**

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Who – and what - did Ya’akov have on his side to counter Esav’s impressive army? All he had was his eleven young sons - all of which were under 20 years of age – along with two wives, two concubines, a nursemaid, one daughter, a few herdsmen, and several species of domesticated animals.

The odds most definitely *do not look good* for Ya’akov and his little band of pilgrims. On paper Esav has the overwhelming advantage – in numbers, in armaments, in combat skills, and in emotional momentum. By all rights we should expect this to be a very *tough day* for Ya’akov.

But for those in Covenant with the Creator of Heaven and Earth things are not always as they seem to the naked eye and the unenlightened mind.

Ya'akov has Esav right where he wants him. Wait till you see this! The spiritual reality, you see, is that the one Esav is about to confront after all these years is not the *Ya’akov* he knew twenty years ago. The one about to meet Esav and his 400-man band of brothers is instead, as we learned yesterday, a new creation. Unbeknownst to Esav he is about to come face-to-face with a man named *Yisrael* – a man who *carries the weight of the Holy One’s glory*.

The man Esav is about to confront is not a trickster in a disguise – he is a man who wrestles with angels, with men, and even with the Creator of the Universe – and *prevails*. The man with whom Esav is about to come face to face is a transcender and overcomer. The man Esav is about to confront is a man on whom is the mark of the Master – a man who *walks with a limp* from a recent Divine encounter.

The man Esav is about to meet is therefore not a man with whom Esav – nor his puny little 400-man army – is prepared to *tangle*. Esav and his army *do not have a chance* against such a man. Oh they could *kill* the man if they wanted to. They could *torture* him. They could *inflict horrible pain* on him. But they could never, never *defeat* him – no, not in a million years. And if they touched so much as a hair on this man’s head, they will discover, the Creator of the Universe would avenge it upon them in ways that they cannot even imagine.

What occurs when this man and Esav meet face-to-face is therefore not going to be what *anyone* on earth – Ya’akov and Esav included – expected or planned for. But Heaven will nod with knowing approval. Here is how Torah tells us the confrontation unfolded:

V'hu avar lifneihem
[Ya'akov] then went ahead of them,

vayish'tachu ar'tzah sheva pe'amim ad-gishto ad-achiv
and he prostrated himself seven times as he approached his brother

Vayaratz Esav likrato v'yechabekehu
And Esau ran to meet him. And he embraced him [Ya'akov],

vayipol al-tzavarav vayishakehu vayivku
And threw himself on his shoulders and, kissed him. And they [both] wept.
[Genesis 33:3-4]

One unarmed man, walking with a limp, stepped out from behind all barriers of protection and approached 400 armed warriors with spears raised and swords at the ready. Seven times in the course of his approach the man stopped, and bowed to the ground to worship – and draw strength from - the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Seven times the man stood up, dusted himself off, and started walking again right toward his stunned adversary.

What a day! What a scene! What a way for old nemeses to meet, for old scores to be settled, and for old wounds to find closure.

The order to attack was right on Esav's lips – and then it wasn't. The rush of a triumphant ending to a long hunt had Esav's face flushed and his heart racing one minute – and the next minute it was gone.

Wonder of wonders. Miracle of miracles.

When Esav finally laid eyes upon the one he had hated since their wars in Rivkah's womb and whom he had so long ago sworn he would kill; when he saw the one he had considered his mortal enemy limping toward him in submission totally incapable of defending himself; well, instead of rushing forward with drawn sword to take his long-awaited vengeance, Esav was undone. Instead of the experiencing the powerful negative emotions we might have expected from him – he was overcome by a flood of human *compassion*. He ran to embrace Ya'akov/Yisrael. He “*fell upon his neck*”. A he . . . *kissed him*². Imagine that.

² In the Hebrew scrolls that have been found, the phrase *vayishakeihu* [and he kissed him] is written in a strange way, with dots over it, as if to suggest that something about this is not as it seems. Some commentators interpret the dots over the phrase to mean that Esav did not kiss him with wholehearted affection. Others suggest that his kiss was wholehearted in the passion of the moment, but did not effectuate or represent any change in the hatred and resentment he carried inside. Still others suggest that he did not kiss Ya'akov, but bit him.

Fast Forward to the Time of Y'shua

Do these actions of Esav sound like the actions of the most famous father in the world, from Y'shua's parable of the prodigal son, to anyone but me? Luke 15:20 says that the father of the prodigal:

***“. . . saw him and was moved with pity.
He ran and threw his arms around him and kissed him warmly.”***

This is of course only one half of the story of Y'shua's prodigal son parable. The other half of the story, as you will recall, is the attitude of the “older” brother - who bristles at the return of the prodigal and the father's excitement at seeing him again. Esav - a worldly man who has chosen life outside the covenant - puts this parabolic ‘older’ brother – a man who claims to be child of the covenant - to shame³. And that was precisely Y'shua's point in the parable. His opening words ***“A man had two sons . . .”*** spoken in the audience of Torah scholars (see Luke 15:1) would immediately have been recognized as a reference to the most famous “man with two sons” in Torah – the patriarch Yitzchak. The story of the younger son (representing Ya'akov) leaving home to live in pagan surroundings [i.e. Laban's world], and the elder (representing Esav) staying to care for his aged and almost blind father and mother and watch over the family estate would immediately cause the listeners to identify with Ya'akov/Israel - the prodigal of the story.

When Y'shua described the loving reaction of the Father in the prodigal story *in the exact same words as Torah described Esav's reaction to the return of Ya'akov/Israel*, He was sending a message to these Torah-teachers that rang loud and clear. When He went further, and described the elder brother of the parable story (whom they could but recognize as themselves, who had brought on this story by objecting to Y'shua's eating with sinners and tax-collectors) unfavorably with Esav (who, to Jewish people of that day meant Rome, the occupying empire), He “cut them to the quick”.

Esav/Rome more righteous and God-like than God's own people? Absurd! Unthinkable! But alas sometimes – at least for a moment here or there in a vast sea of time - *painfully true . . . on a very limited, very, very temporary basis, that is.*

The Heart in the Hand of the Holy One

But please understand, the point of today's aliyah is not to praise Esav or to judge between Ya'akov/Yisrael and Esav regarding who is “more righteous”. Do you

³ Note that just as Ya'akov became Yisrael, Esav was in a transition process as well. He was in the process of becoming *Edom*. See *infra*, at the section of this *shiur* under the heading ‘***The Esav/Edom Dual Personality***’.

want to know why Esav behaved as he did in today's aliyah? Because the Holy One supernaturally *turned Esav's heart within him* and imparted to him, in the instant he saw Ya'akov/Israel, *the overwhelming love of the Father*.

The message of the story is thus not that Esav is a great man, **but** that *the Holy One is a great God* - a doer of great deeds consistent with His covenant. Long ago, you see, the Holy One had promised Ya'akov that he would be with him and would watch over and protect him wherever he went, *and would bring him back safely into the land which He had promised him and his children as an inheritance*. The Holy One's turning of the heart of Esav was the "proof in the pudding". That is why when Ya'akov/Israel looked upon the face of Esav he did not see Esav's face at all - but *the Face of God*. **Bless His Name forever.**

If the Holy One can turn the heart of even a materialistic murderer like Esav to mush, filling it with tenderness and compassion Beloved, and can make the face of even such a man glow with His own Presence and Glory, then truly *nothing is impossible!* The Creator of the Universe can indeed work all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.

A Closer Look At What Happened – and What Did NOT Happen - When the Long Lost Brothers Met

Let us now consider the *substance* of the encounter between Ya'akov and Esav. From the outside what do we see? We see *a hug*. We see *a kiss*. We see *some tears*. We see Ya'akov's *gifts of restitution* accepted.

A superficial religious world would look at these outward signs and consider this an idyllic reconciliation. Confrontation avoided. Path of least resistance taken. Problem solved. Whew!

That is the way *people who only look on the surface of things* might see this meeting. Ah, but is that an accurate assessment of what happened? Was *the problem* between Esav/Edom and Ya'akov/Yisrael really solved by a hug, a kiss, a few tears, and a gift? Did these two estranged brothers, who had warred against each other since they shared Rivkah's womb, by reason of this sentimental encounter, become *fast friends, fellow-laborers, comrades, and confidantes?*

No, Dear Reader, that simply did not - *could* not – *will* not - happen. That is not the way *real life* works. When we read further, beyond the hugs, kisses, and tears, we see that when the hugging, the tears, and the kissing was done *notice carefully what happened*.

Esav/Edom was intent on going back *to Seir*, his chosen place of exile from his father, where he maintained his harem of Kena'ani and Yishmaeli wives and was building his own kingdom. Ya'akov on the other hand wanted no part of Esav's rebellious world. He waited until Esav and his army got well out of sight – then took off in *the other direction*.

After all, what fellowship can there really be between light and darkness?

Understanding the Esav/Edom Dual Personality

It is important to note however that just as Ya'akov has been shown to have within himself the capacity to become *Yisrael*, likewise Esav also has within himself the capacity to become someone else. Looking upon Esav as he is presented in today's aliyah we see a *gentle giant* - a 'big softie', weeping, and welcoming his brother home with a bear hug and a kiss. But do not be fooled, Dear Reader. Be continually aware that the Esav we are seeing as we read today's aliyah is in a *transition process* as much as is Ya'akov/Yisrael. Esav, you see, is in the process of becoming *Edom*.

Esav, though clearly unspiritual, was *sentimental*, and could at least entertain tender feelings toward the one he perceives as 'helpless Ya'akov'. Edom is the *darker side* of Esav. Edom would – will - always persecute the one he recognizes as 'powerful Yisrael'.

While this week's Torah presents the 'brighter' side of Esav, this week's haftarah deals with this darker aspect of Ya'akov's twin brother - Edom. The two faces of Esav/Edom have manifested themselves so frequently in history that we simply must teach our children to approach Esav cautiously - with Edom in mind.

In every generation of exile it seems *Esav* has invited Yisrael to come to live in his midst [as in today's aliyah he will invite Yisrael to Seir]. Then in a few years or generations Esav morphs into *Edom* and persecutes, expels, or tries to extinguish Yisrael. *Esav* can initially seem so friendly – but then *Edom* comes breathing fire. Esav, you see, quickly changes from the father figure of the prodigal son parable to the elder brother figure – and far, far beyond.

This is, of course, what happened in Egypt in the days of *Yosef* [Joseph], in Susa in the years prior to the events recorded in the Book of Esther, and was then repeated time and time again in England, in France, in Spain, in Portugal in Poland and Germany and Russia. Could it be that this is what is happening *today* in Western Europe? In America? In Canada? In South Africa?

***Ya'akov Makes His Excuses –
And Promises to Come to Esav in Seir On A Future Day***

Ya'akov politely turned down several offers from Esav. First Ya'akov turned down Esav's offer to let him take back the droves he had sent him as an appeasement. **Genesis 33:11.** The spiritual reality was that Ya'akov needed to *give* these gifts much, much more than Esav needed to *receive* them. Esav had plenty already. But like Zacchaeus of Yeshua's day Ya'akov needed for his own sake to make restitution in a manner behooving of a son of Avraham. **Luke 19:8-9.**

Secondly, Ya'akov turned down Esav's offer to *travel with him and be his and his family's protector.* Ya'akov used the reasoning that for the sake of his young children and nursing livestock he needed to travel at a pace far too slow for Esav and his men. Apparently the livestock Ya'akov had given to Esav as a gift of appeasement were all mature adults without young.

***Please let my lord go on ahead before his servant.
I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me,
and the children, are able to endure,
until I come to my lord in Seir.***

[Genesis 33:14]

Finally, Ya'akov turned down Esav's offer of a small contingent of guides and guardians from among his retinue. Ya'akov replied simply: "***Lamah zeh? Eitzachen b'eynei Adonai***" – *what is that for? I have found grace in the eyes of my Lord!*

But Ya'akov does a strange thing. He hints that one day ***ad asher-avo el-adoni Se'irah*** – *I will ultimately come to my lord in Seir.* Torah does not describe any such visit during the lifetime of Ya'akov and Esav. The only reference to any further reunion between these two progenitors themselves is in connection with Yitzchak's burial – and that took place at the grave of the patriarchs near Hebron, not anywhere near Seir. Generations down the road, however, Ya'akov - in the form of the nascent nation of Yisrael - would indeed visit Esav - in the form of the established nation of Edom. The story of that visit is told in Numbers 20:14 ff, as follows:

***Then Moshe sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom.
"Your brother Israel says: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us,
how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time,
and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers.
When we cried out to the Holy One He heard our voice
and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt;
now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border.***

*Please let us pass through your country.
We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells;
we will go along the King's Highway;
we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left
until we have passed through your territory.
Then Edom said to him,
"You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword."*

Holy Writ tells us another prophetic reunion at Seir will take place generations later, in the days of Amaziah, King of the Yehudim. See **II Chronicles 25:11-12**. At that time the war the King of Edom promised the sons of Ya'akov will occur – but it will not turn out well for Esav's descendants. And as far as the future goes, see Obadiah 1:18-21, where it is written that in the latter days:

*The house of Ya'akov will be a fire, and the house of Yosef a flame;
but the house of Esav will be stubble;
They will kindle them and will devour them,
and no survivor will remain of the house of Esav,"
For the Holy One has spoken.
The Negev will take over the mountains of Esav

and the captives of this host of the children of Yisrael
will possess the land of the Kena'ani as far as Tzarefat
The captives of Jerusalem who are in Sefarad
will possess the cities of the South.
Then moshia'im [i.e. anointed deliverers] will come to Mount Tziyon
to judge the mountains of Esav; and the kingdom shall be the Holy One's.*

As the Holy One prophesied to Rivkah long ago: *"Two nations are in your womb; two peoples will be separated from your body; One people will be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger."* Genesis 25:23.

Taking Our Leave – For Now!

Politely but immediately Ya'akov excused himself from the first of the prophetic reunion encounters the Holy One has planned for these two nemeses. After Esav and his 400 men rode off toward the South, Ya'akov intentionally set out in the other direction. Instead of following Esav along the East side of the Jordan Rift Valley to go to Seir Ya'akov mustered his little band of pilgrims and made a hard right turn toward Kena'an. Ya'akov was ready to retrace the steps his grandfather Avraham had taken to enter the land. He was ready to make his way back to his *father's house*. But first, he just needed to rest, catch his breath, and worship.

*Ya'akov traveled to Sukkot, built himself a house, and made shelters for his cattle.
Therefore the name of the place is called Sukkot.*

[Genesis 33:17(b)]

It is a gift of the Holy One to understand that *the kiss of Esav/Edom is ultimately the kiss of Judas*. Such a kiss is, of course, *pleasant for the moment*. I dare say it often proves *intoxicating*. Ask the Jews of Susa, fifth Century BCE, or of 15th Century Spain, or of 20th Century Poland – *if*, of course, you can find any survivors among them left to talk to.

But alas the wise man knows that Esav is *impulsive, unstable, and totally humanistic* - and that his alter ego Edom is just plain *dangerous*. Esav's embrace and his kiss are warm and the emotion behind them genuine, if totally humanistic. But he is extremely fickle, and his Edom-nature always inevitably wins out in the end.

Esav's tender embrace quickly turns into Edom's *death grip*. In an instant Esav's smile morphs into Edom's *sneer*. Esav's kiss becomes Edom's *betrayal*. Esav's tears quickly turn to Edom's *fits of rage*.

Nothing Esav/Edom says or does can be trusted. His embrace, his kiss, and his hospitality are *not* evidence of *true love* or *commitment*. They are *outward* – and *manipulative only*. They are *superficial* and *meaningless*. And every true son of Avraham – he upon whom the blessing rests – must come to *know them for what they are*.

Oh, and if you have any questions about what Esav's kiss really means just look at today's haftarah reading from the book of Ovadiyah. Ya'akov/Yisrael our ancestor was *extremely* wise to maintain his distance from Esav/Edom. And so are we, Dear Reader.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's begin our study with a few basic questions:

[A] As the sun rose after his encounter with the angel, what did Ya'akov/Israel see?

[B] What was Ya'akov/Israel's physical condition - was he able to engage in a physical fight?

[C] Imagine you were one of Ya'akov/Israel's children - *Yosef* [Joseph] if you are a male, Dinah if you are a female. Write that person's imaginary "diary" entry for the day of the confrontation, including as many details as possible and including how you felt as the events transpired.

[D] Why did Ya'akov/Yisrael and his family bow down before Esav but in the book of Esther Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman? Which was right? Why?

[E] Why did Ya'akov/Yisrael go on ahead of his children and wives?

[F] Ya'akov/Yisrael told Esav that seeing his face was like seeing the "Face of the Holy One". What do you think this statement meant to Ya'akov/Israel? What does it teach us about the Holy One?

2. In regard to the conversation of the two brothers upon their first meeting for 20 years, answer the following questions:

[A] Ya'akov/Yisrael told Esav in verse 14 that he would come to him in Seir (in Edom). Did Ya'akov go to Seir to resume "normal" relations with Esav? Do you think he intended to? Considering Obadiah verse 21 do you think Ya'akov/Yisrael was speaking prophetically of his descendants?

[B] What does the name "Sukkot" mean?

[C] Ya'akov/Yisrael built two things at the location that would later be called "Sukkot". What two things did he build?

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the words translated as "house" and "booths" in verse 17. Write the Hebrew words and their meanings.

[E] What did Ya'akov/Yisrael do at Sukkot that was unique - what did he introduce into *Eretz Yisrael* [the land of Israel]?

[F] According to the B'rit Chadasha, in what kind of a structure was Y'shua, son of Miryam [Mary], born?

3. In today's Haftarah the prophet OvadiYah speaks of the awesome "Day of the Holy One" which will come, how Edom will be affected, and why.

"Won't I in that day," says the Holy One, "destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mountain of Esav?"

***Your mighty men, Teman, will be dismayed,
to the end that everyone may be cut off
from the mountain of Esav by slaughter.***

***For the violence done to your brother Ya'akov,
shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever.***

***In the day that you stood on the other side,
in the day that strangers carried away his substance,
and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots for Y'rushalayim,
even you were like one of them.***

***But don't look down on your brother in the day of his disaster,
and don't rejoice over the children of Y'hudah in the day of their destruction.***

***Don't speak proudly in the day of distress.
Don't enter into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity.
Don't look down on their affliction in the day of their calamity,
neither seize their wealth on the day of their calamity.
Don't stand in the crossroads to cut off those of his who escape.***

Don't deliver up those of his who remain in the day of distress.

[A] List the things the prophet foretells will happen to the Edomites in the “Day of the Holy One”?

[B] List the things the prophet says the Edomites did to deserve the judgments prophesied in verses 8-10.

[C] How did the actions of the Edomites for which they were to be judged differ from the actions of Esav, their founder, in today’s Torah?

4. In today’s reading from the apostolic eyewitness account of Matthew Y’shua’s first Dark-Night-of-the-Soul prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is spoken.

*He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying,
"My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass away from me;
nevertheless, not what I desire, but what You desire."*

[A] Translated into English Y’shua’s prayer is addressed to “My Father”. How do you think Y’shua actually addressed His prayer in Hebrew?

[B] What physical position did Y’shua utilize to pray this prayer?

[C] What “cup” was Y’shua referring to?

[D] Y’shua suggests that His will could be different from the Holy One’s will. How could this be?

*May the Holy One accept you into His Presence,
And may you see His Countenance even in the face of your enemy.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 59:9-13

*Oh, my Strength, I stand/keep watch for you,
For God is my high tower/stronghold/refuge/defense.*

*My God will go before me with his lovingkindness.
God will let me look at my enemies in triumph.
Don't kill them, or my people may forget.
Scatter them by your power,
and bring them down, O Holy One our shield.*

*For the sin of their mouth, and the words of their lips,
Let them be caught in their pride,
For the curses and lies which they utter.
Consume them in wrath. Consume them, and they will be no more.
Let them know that God rules in Ya`akov,
To the ends of the eretz. Selah.*