

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

GENESIS 33-34

CHAPTER 33 – The meeting of the brothers

Jacob is about to meet his brother Esau after an estrangement of twenty-two years. If our brother has anything against us, is of vital importance in our relationship with God, that we make peace with him - as we read in Matthew 5:23. God's desire is to see every dividing wall of hostility broken down (Eph. 2:14); We simply cannot love God and hate our brother (1 Jn. 4:20);

We have seen a build-up of suspense prior to this meeting: Jacob was afraid and distressed; he divided his camp into two so at least one may survive; he prayed; he sent his servants with gifts; he sent all his family and possessions across the Jabbock; and finally, he was left alone and wrestled with a "man", who told him his name would be changed to "Israel", and in whom Jacob saw "the face of God".

Chapter 33 begins: *Jacob raised his eyes and saw – and behold, Esau was coming with him were four hundred men – so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two handmaidens.*

The Jewish sages teach that whenever the Torah states "behold" it indicates a pre-existing condition that had not been previously perceived until that point in time. Jacob still perceived Esau approaching with 400¹ men, but there is nothing in Esau's behaviour that speaks of anger, revenge, or hatred.

33:4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.

Q. Did Esau have a change of heart? Or did Jacob's wrestling match make the difference? We attract what we fear (what we carry in our heart, e.g. Job 3:25), but Jacob's fear is now gone.

What is equally unexpected here is Jacob's behaviour. Why did he bow 7 times (v.3) and his entourage 3 times (v. 6-7) when he saw Esau coming toward him (all significant numbers as you will recall). We might think it was because he was still afraid, but no, He was bowing **because he had become "Israel"**. He no longer needed to prove himself; he no longer wanted or needed to compete with Esau on any level – he had found his true self, his true identity.

The following perspective comes from a renowned Jewish teacher & author:

It is equally clear what was transacted in the wrestling match the previous night. It was Jacob's inner battle with existential truth. Who was he? The man who longed to be Esau? Or the man called to a different destiny, "the road less travelled," the Abrahamic covenant? "I will not let you go until you bless me," he says to his adversary. The unnamed stranger responds in a way that defies expectation. He does not give Jacob a life free of conflict. The name *Jacob* signifies struggle; the name *Israel* also signifies

¹ The number 40/400 indicates a time of trial & testing, but it can also be viewed positively as the END of the time of trial or testing. E.g. Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness before crossing the Jordan; Jesus was tested by Satan for 40 days in the wilderness.

struggle. But the terms of the conflict have been reversed. It is as if the man said to him, "In the past, you struggled to be Esau. In the future you will struggle *not to be Esau*, but to be yourself. In the past you held on to Esau's heel. In the future you will hold on to God. You will not let go of Him; He will not let go of you. Now let go of Esau so that you can be free to hold on to God."²

V 8-10 *Then Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company which I met?" And he said, "These are to find favour in the sight of my lord." But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favour in your sight, then **receive my gift (Mincha)** from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of Elohim, and you were pleased with me. "Please, **take my blessing (bracha)** that is brought to you, because Elohim has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." So he urged him, and he took it.*

There are a few interesting details to bring out in these two verses:

➤ **"I have enough"** – Heb. *kol* "all" "whole" from a root meaning "perfected".

"To be complete we do not need Esau's blessings of wealth and power. Ours is another face, an alternative destiny, a different blessing. The face we bear is the image we see reflected in the face of God when we wrestle with Him and refuse to let go."³

DISCUSS with reference to following NT verses, and your own walk of faith.

James 1:4 *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

2 Cor. 12:9 *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."*

Before Jacob could be at peace with Esau he had to learn that he was not Esau but Israel – he who wrestles with God and never lets go.

➤ **Jacob calls Esau *adonai* "my Lord"** five times, and twice he calls himself Esau's servant.⁴

Discuss in relation to Jesus' teachings, especially Matthew 20:26: *It shall not be this way among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ...*

➤ **"Receive my gift ... please, take my blessing."**

We see a subtle change in the text. Jacob suddenly goes from asking Esau to accept his "present" (*mincha*)⁵ 'gift', mentioned 5 times in the story) —to asking him to take his "blessing" (*bracha*). This takes us back to chapter 27, when Jacob pretended to be Esau in order to receive his brother's blessing. (the term "bless" or "blessing" occurs 22 times in that chapter) It is no coincidence that here we see Jacob, in effect, returning the blessing to Esau. Was he returning the blessing because he now knew that all he needed was the Abrahamic blessing? Let's have another look at this blessing:

² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, p227.

³ Sacks, p225

⁴ He had previously used the same words when instructing his servants. Gen 32:4-7, 12, 14, 17-19, 21; 33:3, 5, 8, 13-15

⁵ *Mincha* usually speaks of a sacrificial offering (usually bloodless and voluntary).

"Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed. Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!"⁶

The herds and flocks Jacob sent to Esau represented wealth ("the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth"); the sevenfold bowing and calling himself "your servant" and Esau "my lord" represented power ("be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you"). Jacob no longer wanted or needed these things. "I have enough" he says – meaning, "I no longer need either wealth or power to be complete." He makes this explicit in the words: "Please take, not just my gift, but *my blessing*."

On a deeper level

On one level, this makes sense, but the blessing Jacob received contains more than these two components, and brings us back to a previous question: Would Esau have received the same blessing if Esau had been standing before him? My answer to this was 'No,' I don't believe he would have, because I believe that Isaac spoke the words God gave him for the one standing before him.

Let's look again at the blessing:⁷

- Try to understand what the "therefore" is there for;
- "Let peoples serve you and nations bow down to you." Does this fit Esau, either then or now?
- "Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you." This is clearly part of the Abrahamic Covenant blessing.

The profound ramifications of this story now come to a climax: the blessing that Jacob is now 'returning' to his brother (the man of the flesh) is a blessing far, far greater than the blessing Esau would have received if Jacob had not intervened— Esau is receiving his brother's 'gift' and 'blessing' – not from 'Jacob,' but from – filtered through – "Israel". Moreover, it is *because* Jacob saw his brother's face "as though I had seen the face of God".

➤ ***Because I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of Elohim*** – Here again, we see the word "face" featured – the repetition of this word is very significant, so let's dig deeper.

First, we will go back to chapter 32:20, where we read Jacob's words to his servants: "*and also say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.'*" For he said, "*I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.*"

What we don't see in English translations is the fact that the Hebrew word *panim* – "face" – appears four times in this verse alone. A literal translation of the Hebrew would read: "For he thought, 'I will wipe [the anger from] his *face* with the gift that goes ahead of my *face*; and afterward, when I see his *face* perhaps he will lift up my *face* ..."

We will also recall that Jacob says, in 32:30 "...I have seen God *face to face*, and my life is preserved."

These verses, together with verse 10: "*I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of Elohim,*" certainly seem to be creating a drama around "faces". What is going on here? Is it significant that, at the time he deceived his father into giving him his blessing, Isaac was blind, and therefore not able to see Jacob's face?

⁶ Gen. 27:27

⁷ I recommend you go back to the Genesis 27 study to familiarise yourself with the findings there

Q. What is implied by a face-to-face meeting?

*1Co 13:12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then **face to face**. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

Q. How might we apply the above verse to our story?

Despite Esau’s suggestion that they travel on together, Jacob knows that they must travel their own paths. The brothers part company amicably, Esau returning to Seir, and Jacob travelling to Sukkoth⁸, where he built himself a house and made shelters for his livestock.

33:18 And Jacob came in peace (shalem) to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram; and encamped before the city, bought a parcel of land there. . . .

And he erected an altar there and praised El-elohe-Israel = "the mighty God of Israel".

This is the first time God is referred to by this name. The wrestling match was the birth of “Israel”. Jacob learned that his “wealth” and “power” came, not from the earth, but from the One who transcends this earth. Jacob struggled and prevailed to gain this “truth”; in the same way, we also must strive to be “overcomers”. Jesus “overcame” the world, and through faith, we can follow in His footsteps.

For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

1 John 5:4

CHAPTER 34 - The Abduction of Dinah

When Jacob returned to Canaan and bought a parcel of land near the city of Shechem, he found himself amongst ungodly people who quickly sought to lure Israel into assimilation with themselves. Dinah soon caught the attention of Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, who saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.

God’s admonition not to take wives for themselves from amongst the various foreign tribes is an ongoing theme throughout the Torah. Indeed, it is a tool the enemy uses to break down the sanctity of the people of Israel and lure them into idolatry. (e.g. Num. 25)

“He (Jacob) had to experience a moral outrage upon its own flesh and blood right from its beginning. He had to undergo its ordeal so that the world could see in its swift and uncompromising reaction the sacred character of its purity, that it could not tolerate what other nations might consider to be commonplace.” (Rabbi Hirsch)

Simeon and Levi rose up in outrage when they heard the news of Dinah’s abduction.⁹ This act was seen as an outrage against Israel (v.7) – “such a thing may not be done.”

Q. READ v.8-10 - What do you see in Hamor’s words?

⁸ Sukkoth (the final Feast of Israel) marks “the time of our rejoicing”, and springs forth from the state of moral purity, Munk, *Call of Torah*. Jacob has effectively made the full redemption journey - from Passover to Sukkoth.

⁹ She was still a child, and her brothers were thought to be only 13-15 years old.

If they had succumbed to Hamor's 'generous' offer, they would soon have lost their unique identity as a people set apart for holiness unto God. Jacob himself remains silent and allows his sons to respond to Shechem and his father. (13-17)

Can you see the sons' response following the pattern of their father and also Laban?¹⁰ Was it natural for them to meet guile with guile? Do you think this is justified?

Surprisingly "their proposal seemed good in the sight of Hamor and his son Shechem" and Shechem did not delay in carrying out the request - citywide. Examine Hamor's words to his people:

²¹ *"These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us."*

It seems they will go to any length to have Israel assimilate with themselves.

Q. Why do you think this is? What can we, as Christians, learn from this?

The Word of God tells us: "be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers," and "come out from among them, and be separate" (II Corinthians 6:14-17).

The Brothers' Revenge – Read Genesis 34:25-31

As Christians we might well be disturbed by the vengeance taken by the brothers and the apparent acquiescence of Jacob (up to a point) and even the silence of God Himself.

Here is one Jewish response:

It wasn't the killing that upset Yaakov, but the plundering afterwards. By taking it that extra step, it seemed as if their motivation was not to mete out justice, but to enact revenge. Even the killing would now be seen as an act of vengeance. Rather than being examples of standing up for right and wrong, they were seen as warriors.¹¹

Q. How would you respond to this?

When Simeon and Levi defended their actions, Jacob did not respond. Yet we know from his deathbed blessings that Yaakov did not accept their excuse – Genesis 49:5-7:

*"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.
⁶ Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company.
For in their anger they killed men, and in their wilfulness they hamstrung oxen.
⁷ Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."¹²*

¹⁰ They answered 'deceitfully'.

¹¹ <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/vayishlach.pdf>

¹² Levi had cities allotted to them in every tribe and Simeon was allotted territory within the inheritance of Judah. (Josh.19)