



Torah Reflections on *Parashat Vayishlah*

Genesis 32:4 – 36:43

16 Kislev 5769

December 13, 2008

With this Torah portion we read of the meeting, after a long absence, between Esau and his brother Jacob. Jacob is anxious about this meeting. The last time he saw his brother it was under difficult family circumstances. He has colluded with his mother, against his father, to gain his father's favored blessing; the one reserved for the first born, Esau. Jacob does indeed receive the blessing intended for Esau, and you can imagine the tumult this causes in the family. No wonder Esau's re-appearance causes Jacob distress. In fact Jacob knows he was wrong, and so does Esau.

In his anxiousness as he prepares for his encounter with Esau, Jacob asks his servants to show up ahead of him with gifts. He hopes that this will placate Esau so that when Jacob himself shows up, after the gifts, Esau will be in a more receptive mood. Jacob assumes that Esau will be angry and even vengeful; perhaps because Jacob himself would be, were the positions reversed.

We read that the presents come and then Jacob follows. As it turns out, Esau is gracious. Jacob bewildered nearly begs Esau to accept the gifts. Esau graciously explains that he does not need them. Rather, it appears that Esau simply wants to be back in relationship with his brother. How interesting that when all is said and done, Esau, who has gone on with his life and become successful in his own right, does not need to be placated by material gifts. He wants the gift of relationship.

Often, an illness or a hospital stay gives us the gift of time. It is a gift that once opened typically yields reflection on one's own life. And this can lead to a reflection on how one has lived thus far. We all have places in our lives in which we were hurt and never got an apology. We all have places in our lives in which we need to remain vigilant to the gift of an apology. Both of these can bring distress; oftentimes in trying to find the right way to reconcile. Part of the wisdom of the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau is in the lesson that was Jacob's challenge to learn: that what Esau wanted was relationship--some time together. And there is wisdom also in Esau's graciousness. He responded to Jacob's anxiousness with understanding and guidance; he gave Jacob the cue that helped him move toward meeting Esau's need--to be brothers again.

May your time of reflection allow you to focus on the healing simplicity of saying “I’m sorry,” and the equally important graciousness with which to truly accept someone’s apology.

© Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, Rabbi Eric Weiss



This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Eric Weiss, Executive Director of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center. It is brought to you by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center (a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties), an affiliate of the Institute on Aging.



The Bay Area Jewish Healing Center provides Jewish spiritual care for people coping with illness, loss and dying, regardless of affiliation or ability to pay.

Our services include:

- Rabbinic care, chaplaincy, counseling and spiritual direction—at home or in hospitals, hospices, nursing homes or other care facilities
- Spiritual support groups for patients, caregivers, and the bereaved
- Healing and memorial services, and specialized rituals

Whether through prayer, study materials, or simply a listening presence, the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center is here to support you during difficult times.
