

CHABAD
DED
RESEARCH UNIT

הב

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 30 November 2012 - 16 Kislev 5773
Sedra Vayishlach

THE MEANING OF THE DOTS

THE HANDWRITTEN TEXT OF THE TORAH SCROLL DOES NOT HAVE VOWELS. BUT IT SOMETIMES does have some feature in addition to the words. For example, a passage in the Sedra¹ tells us about the reunion between Jacob and Esau after many years of absence. Long ago, Esau had promised himself that he would kill Jacob. Now Esau was accompanied by a sizeable army. In comparison, Jacob was unarmed. Yet when they met, Esau kissed Jacob and wept. Unusually, the word telling us that Esau kissed Jacob has a dot on top of each letter.

What do the dots mean? Some of our Sages suggest they are a hint that Esau was not sincere. By contrast, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that we know that, in general, Esau hates Jacob. But this time his positive feeling for Jacob was aroused and his kiss was sincere². The dots suggest that this was an exception to the rule.

An intriguing element in the meeting between the two brothers is the way the Sages explain a message which Jacob sent Esau before they met. The message reads 'I dwelled – *garty* - with Laban'. The Hebrew word '*garty*', like *Taryag*, has the numerical value 613, and implies 'I dwelled with Laban, but at the same time, kept the 613 Mitzvot'³. Why should Jacob mention this to his brother, who had no respect for Mitzvot?



In Memory of ARYEH (LOUIS) LITTMAN vung who passed away on 16th Kislev 5748 (1987). Dedicated by his wife and family and family, with love

More understandable is the fact that Jacob also sent lavish gifts to his brother. He also prepared for war, if that would be necessary.

The ambiguous and dangerous relationship between Jacob and Esau continued through the millennia. The Sages see the power of ancient Rome as the extension of Esau. This eventually became the force of the West. For us as Jews today, and for Israel, we are at the fault line between the West and the East, between Esau and Ishmael.

Let us look again at the personality of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who made the comment cited above. He lived about 1,800 years ago during the time of the Roman occupation of Israel. Due to his outspoken criticism of the Roman government, he had to go into hiding for several years⁴. However, when the Jewish leaders were trying to get an anti-Jewish decree repealed, Rabbi Simon was chosen to be sent to Rome to argue the case of the Jews. The Sages felt he had a miraculous power, and indeed he was successful⁵.

Do we Jews have a miraculous power? Yes! This is the key to Jacob's meeting with Esau, and to our relationship with later forms of Esau through the ages. This explains why, according to the Sages, in Jacob's message to Esau he hinted to him that, despite his long stay with the idolater Laban, he was still following the teachings of their father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. The fact of keeping the teachings of the Torah, and of being proud of this, was the key element in the stance of Jacob towards Esau.

As a result, when the two brothers finally met, Esau embraced him and wept. Despite his enmity and hostility - which were to be seen many times in the future, including close to our own time - at that moment his feelings of kindness and mercy were aroused⁶.

This is the key in the relationship of the Jew towards the world. Dedication to the Torah and its teachings is the route to the most positive relationship with the descendants of Esau, and indeed, with those of Ishmael. We may need to use Jacob's other strategies as well, careful diplomacy, and even, as a last resort, actual war, but the basis is our bond as Jews with our sacred Torah. This gives us the spiritual power to advance towards the future.

1. Genesis 32:4-36:43. 2. See Rashi to 33:4. 3. See Rashi to Gen.32:5. The Sages understand the Patriarchs as keeping the Torah before it was given. 4. Shabbat 33b. 5. Me'ilah 17a. 6. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 20, p.152-3.

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53

SEDRA VAYISHLACH

HUMILITY

"In this week's Sedra we see the difference a good way of speaking and a bad way of speaking", Mr Gold explained to his Year 7 Sedra class. "Can anyone think of how these might be different?"

A few hands shot up. "Yes, Nathan?"

"Well, a good way of speaking is to be polite and say 'please' or 'thank you'. A bad way of speaking is the opposite."

"That's excellent, Nathan, and very true! Anything else?"

"A bad way of speaking is to be boastful and proud, to show off to other people," Dan pointed out.

"Yes, showing how great you are. A good way is to be humble!" Jeremy added.

"That's right, boys. And this is what we see in the Sedra this week. When Jacob came to greet Esau, he brought loads of gifts for Esau and he asked Esau to accept his gift. But Esau said 'No I will not, because I have an enormous amount myself!' He sounded boastful and greedy. But Jacob was satisfied with his lot and was humble. He said to his brother 'Please take my gift, because I have everything I need'. From that we can learn that we should carefully choose our words. They should be like Jacob's speech – humble."

Soon the bell rang, signalling home time. Jeremy was first out of the door and rushed home excitedly. His father was arriving

today from his business trip in America! Jeremy missed his father and looked forward to seeing him.

Sure enough, Mr Walder was home. Jeremy and his sisters were excited to see him. "And now...for the presents!" Mr Walder said, winking as the children crowded around him. He handed to the two younger girls a pretty jewellery-making kit. Then he pulled out a box. "This is for you, Jeremy! It's a remote control helicopter."

"Oh wow, thank you Daddy!" Jeremy exclaimed. It was amazing, just what he wanted... He played with it all evening. It was wonderful.

The next day, Jeremy decided he would take his new helicopter to show his friends. He carefully packed it in his school bag and made his way early to school. As soon as he got to the playground he exclaimed "Guys, my father brought back the best present from America for me! I'll show you how it flies! No touching, though. It was expensive!" The boys crowded around him to see. As Jeremy pulled out the helicopter from his bag, he noted that some of the boys looked really jealous. He hid a smile as he thought to himself, *only my father brings me back presents. I bet they never get presents like this!*

Suddenly, he froze. His teacher's voice echoed in his mind. "...we can learn that we should carefully choose our words. They should be like Jacobs speech – humble..." Oh no! He was about to act like Esau and boastfully show off his present to his friends, but not let them touch it. That's terrible, he thought.

"Here you go, guys" he said decisively. "How about you each have a turn making it fly?" He saw the boys faces light up with excitement.

This was the way to go, he thought to himself happily. Like Jacob.

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