


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש

Friday 15 November 2013 - 12 Kislev 5774
Sedra Vayishlach

CRYSTALS

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT, AT THE MOLECULAR LEVEL, CRYSTAL STRUCTURES ARE GENERALLY IN A STATE of tension. It is relatively unusual to find an area where all is in harmony. Human beings are the same. On the narrow, personal plane, there are often serious conflicts. This is even more obvious on a wider communal level. As for the international arena, even a cursory glance shows horrific strife round the globe, much of which is directed against Jews.

The idea that the Jewish people have dangerous enemies goes back thousands of years, and in particular, to the events in our Sedra¹. Here Jacob, the ancestor and embodiment of the Jewish people, meets his violent and hostile brother Esau, after an absence of many years.

Esau was coming with an army of four hundred warriors; Jacob was at the head of his family, of whom the oldest child was a teenager of fourteen. Esau was armed to the teeth; in comparison, Jacob was defenceless.



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

There have been many similar confrontations for the Jewish people through the ages. In the key encounter in the Sedra, Jacob follows strategies which, at different times and locations, would be used by his descendants after him: he sent lavish gifts to Esau, he prayed earnestly to G-d and he prepared to defend his family in battle.

However, there was one further element which, according to the Lubavitcher Rebbe², was the real key to his success.

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 Abraham³. 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 our own time - at that moment his feelings of kindness and mercy were aroused.

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. We may need to use Jacob's other three strategies as well, but the basis of a sound relationship is our bond with the Torah.

Through *this*, despite the ever-present tensions, the crystalline structure holds firm. When will the tension relax? Only with the coming of the Messiah...

1. Genesis 32:4-36:43. 2. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 20, p.153. 3. In Gen.32:5 Jacob informs Esau that "I stayed (*garty*) with Laban". The Hebrew word 'garty', like 'Taryag', has the numerical value 613, and implies "I kept the 613 Mitzvot" (see Rashi on this verse).

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SEDRA VAYISHLACH

THE FOUR HUNDRED MEN

Miss Jacobson was telling Year 7 about the Sedra. Most girls were listening intently, except for Sandra Cohen, who was looking out of the window as usual.

“Our great-great grandfather Jacob had a problem. He knew that his violent brother Esau was angry with him. He also knew that Esau was coming towards him at the head of an army of four hundred fierce men.”

Four hundred fierce men... The phrase entered Sandra's head. Through the window she could see a busy main road. Suddenly she saw a large coach draw up in the street. People began streaming out of it. They were mostly men, maybe they were sportsmen of some kind. They all looked very strong. They filled the pavement. Then another coach stopped behind the first one, and more people poured out. Then a third coach.

Sandra watched with horror. Were these the four hundred men who were coming to attack?

Miss Jacobson, unaware of the events outside the window, continued with the Sedra: “What should Jacob do? He did not have an army, only his large family with many young children, who all needed protecting. How would he save them from Esau? First of all he decided to try and appease Esau by sending him gifts. Jacob could afford to send a generous gift to Esau.”

...send a generous gift...

Sandra heard these words very clearly, from a megaphone in the street. There were crowds and crowds, four hundred men

at least, or even more! But what gift could she possibly send? She began looking in her briefcase next to her desk.

“Sandra! Please stop fidgeting, and stop looking out of the window! Have you heard a single word I have been saying?”
“Yes, you were explaining about the four hundred men who are about to attack. They are outside now.”

“They are *what?*”

Sandra pointed to the window, her heart thumping. Miss Jacobson looked out of the window herself. It was quite true. Hundreds of people were milling about in the street. Many had large placards on sticks. It was a demonstration! But what was it about? She tried to read some of the placards. *FREE SHEILA CHARM! SHEILA IS INNOCENT!* The young teacher did not actually know who Sheila Charm was.

“What presents can we possibly give them, Miss Jacobson?” asked Sandra. “Yes,...”, said another girl, who had also been looking out of the window, but rather less intently. “Like Jacob sending presents to Esau and his four hundred men”. Now lots of girls began looking out of the windows. “Look at them!” screamed a very excitable girl named Devorah. Then Rachel, a thin and small girl, began crying.

Miss Jacobson walked back to her teacher’s desk. This clearly was a challenge. In teacher training they had told her about this kind of situation. “Listen girls,” she said softly. “The men outside are just a demonstration. *They are not attacking us.*”

She looked round at the frightened faces of the girls in the class. “It’s going to be alright”, she said loudly. “Esau gave up the idea of attacking Jacob. He went away to his own land, taking with him his four hundred men. He left Jacob alone”.

Through the window the demonstration was now an orderly column, marching away, waving banners and placards, towards the Town Hall. “See, it’s just a demonstration of people who are trying to help someone. They are going away. And G-d stopped Esau from harming Jacob as well.... “

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