

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



VAYISHLACH

To Have It All

This week's Torah reading has one of the most dramatic encounters in our Tanach. After decades apart, Ya'akov is going to confront his brother, Eisav. When last seen, Eisav resolved to kill Ya'akov. He spoke the following words: When the mourning for my father is complete, I'll kill Ya'akov, my brother' (B'reishit 27:42). To whom were these diabolical words spoken? Apparently, to himself, B'LIBO ('in his heart'). But Rivka soon became aware of his violent intent. How? Maybe Divine communication; perhaps Eisav isn't shy about his resolve after making the decision (Chizkuni). In any case, Ya'akov has good reason to be afraid of his big bad brother.

Fear is palpable. The verses report it (32:8), and he includes it in his prayer for help (v. 12). But Ya'akov is determined to confront Eisav, and expends great effort to flatter and appease Eisav with a great show of respect and tribute. The gift (or bribe) is massive. Eisav demurs, claiming that he has RAV (a lot). But Ya'akov insists, because he has KOL, 'everything'. It's this cryptic statement that I will try to elucidate.

On the P'SHAT or literal level, it appears that Ya'akov is modestly explaining that he has everything he needs. Rashi adds, 'As opposed to Eisav who spoke haughtily; "I have abundance (RAV), much more than my needs!"'

Rav Dovid Rosenthal expands this one word into a thesis about the different world views of Ya'akov and Eisav:

What is the difference between 'much' and 'all'? It reflected their different attitudes towards money. Eisav was a man of violence. Capturing booty and accumulating wealth were ends for him. He lived to hoard. He didn't view his possessions as serving a purpose. His possessions were the purpose. Eisav claimed he had 'much': more than he required. Whatever he got he wanted - just for the sake of having it.

On the other hand, Ya'akov declares KOL:

Yaakov was the antithesis of this. He was a man of belief. Anything he acquired, was his to serve a purpose. If God gave them to him, he must need them. Everything he had was part of 'all': precisely what he needed. His wealth was not an end but a means to fulfill his purpose in life.

Rav Rosenthal adds a very sweet addendum. Ya'akov did exclaim RAV! But that was when he found out that

Yosef was alive in Egypt (45:28). Because that news wasn't about need, but about HAPPINESS. Ya'akov the aged Patriarch believed God granted him something special, beyond 'need', and he felt (perhaps, for the first time in his life) that he had amazing abundance, RAV.

Rabbi Sacks z"l, on the other hand, makes a much bolder claim:

What happened at that meeting is incomprehensible unless we understand that Ya'akov was giving back to Eisav the blessings he had wrongly taken. The massive gift of livestock represented 'heaven's dew and earth's richness' (27:28). When Yaakov bowed down seven times to Eisav it fulfilled, 'May the sons of your mother bow down to you' (verse 29), Yaakov gave the blessing back. Indeed he said so to Eisav: Please, accept BIRKATI ('my blessing') for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.

Wow! This removes the threat of assassination, because Ya'akov restores the 'injustice' which caused the enmity. I'm often impressed by Rabbi Sack's vision, and here he places the whole story on a different tack. No appeasement; recompense. He concludes that Ya'akov and Rivka erred ('an honest mistake'), because Yitzchak wasn't bestowing BIRKAT AVRAHAM (the Abrahamic legacy), just vast wealth and power. Clearly, a mere trifle.

Boy, would I love to interview Rivka on this point! It's bold and brave, but I'm not sure that I'm ready to sign on.

But, as fascinating as the attempts to explain the P'SHAT of our verse are, much of the Torah world sees our verse in a different light. This verse and its declaration of KOL must be seen as a continuation of previous promises, when Avraham is described as blessed BAKOL (24:1) and Yitzchak MIKOL (27:33). This trio leads to the famous line in BIRKAT HaMAZON: As our Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov were blessed: BAKOL, MIKOL, KOL.

What's going on here, exactly? The Ohr HaChayim states that these are expressions of sanctity and connection to God, Who created the Cosmos as KOL, and then 'saw that the KOL which He had made was, indeed, very good!' (1:30). This KOL was granted to the Patriarchs, and we, their progeny, get to benefit from it.

The Kedushat Levi sees this as the difference between regular people and the righteous. The real blessing of KOL is the mind set of never feeling any lack. He claims that it comes from the vantage point of generosity to endow others with whatever they have.

We seem to see that this idea of KOL meaning 'everything' is embedded in many Rabbinic ideas. I believe that when our Sages wanted to describe

or measure 'everything' the idea of KOL was in their minds. How do the Sages describe any totality? They use the number 50! There are 50 measures or gates of BINA (understanding), TUMA'A (impurity), CHOCHMA (wisdom), KEDUSHA (sanctity). I know that this idea is connected to the 49 days of the Counting the Omer, with Shavuot and receiving the Torah on the fiftieth, but I can't help but think that the GEMATRIYA of KOL which is also 50 contributed mightily to these ideas.

Our Patriarchs, and Ya'akov in particular, are setting an example for us, their heirs, of how to make our lives meaningful and the concept of KOL is crucial to that endeavor. After all, it's wonderful to feel that 'Now I have everything... and besides having everything, I know what everything's for!' It's to help us get close to God! 