

<p>(יד) וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֵּלֶח מִן־הַבָּא בְּכֵדוֹ מִנְחָה לְעֵשָׂו אָחִיו: (טו) עֲזִים מְאֹתִים וַחֲזִישִׁים עֶשְׂרִים רְחִלִּים מְאֹתִים וְאֵילִים עֶשְׂרִים: (טז) גְּמָלִים מִיְּנִיקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשִׁים פָּרוֹת אַרְבָּעִים וּפָרִים עֶשְׂרֵה אַתְנַת עֶשְׂרִים וְעִרְסִים עֶשְׂרֵה:</p>	<p>(14) <i>He spent the night there that night, and took a gift from what was at hand, for Esav his brother:</i> (15) <i>she-goats, two hundred, and kids, twenty, ewes, two hundred, and rams, twenty,</i> (16) <i>nursing camels and their young, thirty, cows, forty, and bulls, ten, she-asses, twenty, and colts, ten;</i></p>
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Upon his return to Canaan, Jacob is terrified of his brother. He sends him a gift. French anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) observed that in gift-giving, there is a disjunction between what seems to be going on, and what is actually going on, between appearance and reality.

Gift-giving is something that is **apparently** enacted out of pure generosity. We give gifts as if we are acting freely. But in reality, what is going on in gift-giving is a "strict accounting system" that involves an "intricate mingling of symmetrical and contrary rights and duties." In other words, there is something going on here in Jacob's gift that needs to be decoded. Perhaps he wants to compensate Esau for the loss of the birthright and the blessing. That's plausible, except how can we measure the value of those items? Both are abstract. What would have been the material damage to Esau? The emotional damage? What would a judge or jury award Esau in damages? Who knows. What about the ratios of female to male? 10:1 she-goats to he-goats; 10:1 ewes to rams; 4:1 cows to bulls; 2:1 she-asses to colts. We don't know the mother/calves ratio. The ratios are a hint to masculine virility, and there may be a subtle suggestion to Esau that he, like this gift, is a kingly presence with a harem of women. But it's likely that there is another message. These are quite significant gifts. 550 animals in total. This is a "starter" flock. The female animals are more valuable than the males because they will produce lots of offspring. This will create large flocks for Esau and eventually, he will become the mirror image of Jacob. These gifts are intended to placate, but they convey another message: you can be like me. You can become a family. You can become a people. You can transform from being a gang-leader of 400 men, to a family man with the nucleus of a nation. And that is indeed what happens to Esau.

When we examine Jacob's strategy, it's evident that he wants to make a strong impression on Esau. First, he has servants. Second, he has flocks. Third, he is placing a gap between *herd and herd*. It's a kind of parade. What's the concealed message here? Well, just a cursory exploration of the culture of hunting will reveal that hunters, upon the completion of their kills, will parade their animals. Evidently, some of the earliest depictions of hunting reveal this kind of celebratory parade. It continues to this day, and you can find ample examples on YouTube of hunters proudly parading their dead quarries. This *parade* is the inversion of that kind of *parade*. Here the animals are alive; there they are dead. Here they are domesticated; there they are wild. Here there is potential for abundance; there, there is only the immediate gratification of the feast.

<p>(יז) וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־עֲבָדָיו עֶדֶר עֶדֶר לְבָדוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדָיו עֲבְרוּ לִפְנֵי וַיִּרְחוּ תְּשִׁימוּ בֵּין עֶדֶר וּבֵין עֶדֶר:</p>	<p>(17) <i>he handed them over to his servants, herd by herd separately, and said to his servants: Cross on ahead of me, and leave room between herd and herd.</i></p>
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<p>(יח) וַיְבִי אֶת־הָרִאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר כִּי יִפְגַּשְׁךָ עֵשָׂו אָחִי וּשְׂאֵלְךָ לֵאמֹר לְמִי־אַתָּה וְאֵנָה תֵּלֵךְ וּלְמִי אַתָּה לִפְנֵיךָ:</p>	<p>(18) <i>He charged the first group, saying: When Esav my brother meets you and asks you, saying: To whom do you belong, where are you going, and to whom do these ahead of you belong?</i></p>
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Jacob gives specific instructions to the servants. If we read closely, he primes the servants to pay attention to the fact that Esau is his brother. But in anticipating the three-fold questioning, he is also priming them to the fact that there is something unusual in the way that Esau speaks. We've already seen an example of it in the previous parasha. It is as

if Jacob is telling his servants that his brother has a manner of speaking that reflects a bearing that is inconsistent with his wildness and gruff manner. This will be reflected in his speaking style. He speaks loftily. He speaks with a cadence and a rhythm. He speaks, perhaps almost in epigrams. Samson speaks like that. The Giant in *Jack-in-the-Beanstalk*. Fezzik in *The Princess Bride*. Shrek. There might be an archetype in folklore of the ogre who presents himself as civilized. This is worth checking out.

<p>(יט) וְאָמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵיעֲקֹב מִנְחָה הוּא שְׁלוּחָה לְאֵדְנִי לְעֵשָׂו וְהִנֵּה גַם־הוּא אַחֲרָיָנִי:</p>	<p>(19) <i>Then say: —to your servant, to Yaakov, it is a gift sent to my lord, to Esav, and here, he himself is also behind us.</i></p>
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<p>(כ) ויִצְוֶה גַם אֶת־הַשְּׂנִי גַם אֶת־הַשְּׁלִישִׁי גַם אֶת־כָּל־הַלְּכִים אַחֲרָי הַעֲדָרִים לֵאמֹר כַּדְּבַר הַזֶּה תִּדְבְּרוּן אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּמִצְאָכֶם אֹתוֹ: (כא) וְאָמַרְתֶּם זֶם הִנֵּה עֹבֵדְךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָּנָיו בַּמִּנְחָה הַהִלְכֵת לְפָנָיו וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֲרֹאֶה פָּנָיו אוּלַי יִשָּׂא פָּנָיו:</p>	<p>(20) Thus he charged the second, and thus the third, and thus all that were walking behind the herds, saying: <i>According to this word shall you speak to Esau when you come upon him:</i> (21) you shall say: <i>Also—here, your servant Yaakov is behind us. For he said:</i> <i>I will wipe [the anger from] his face with the gift that goes ahead of my face; afterward, when I see his face, perhaps he will lift up my face!*</i></p>
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Of course Jacob is being deferential to Esau here, but there is just a hint of overkill. It's a little too...servile. Obsequious. Unctuous. And this line in v. 21. It's a little much, no? Where else do we see this kind of language? It's very uncommon. There are hints of this

language in the Psalms when the worshiper speaks to God: *בְּתוֹדָה פָּנָיו נִקְדָּמָה—let us come before his face in thankfulness.* (Psalm 95:2) In other words, this is lofty language. Are the messengers supposed to tell Esau what Yaakov is thinking? Yes. In those exact words. The whole intention is to ask for some kind of *kapparah-atonement* and *see each other's faces* which is another way of saying, to be reacquainted. And then, to have Esau, *lift up my face* which is a way of asking to be relieved of the burden of his guilt, the guilt that he has been carrying all these years. But there is something unusual about all of this. Jacob's character is still present. Of course there has been a transformation in his life. Of course he feels not worthy of what he has received, and of course there is humility. But he has not lost his cunning and his canniness. Esau is a man drawn to word puzzles and riddles. By giving him this message, Jacob is drawing him in by a puzzle, a riddle. He's getting Esau to try and decode this message, which is a way of signaling to him respect for his mind. But it is also, ironically, a way of condescending to him at the same time. There is diffidence and honor, mockery and condescension. It's all there. And Esau takes the bait, hook, line and sinker.

<p>וְהוּא עָבַר לְפָנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶרְצָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד־גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד־אָחָיו: <i>And he passed before them and bowed low to the earth seven times. until he had come close to him, to his brother.</i> Gen. 33:3</p>
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In a beloved folktale, *Life and Death is in the Power of the Tongue* a miracle potion is procured from the milk of a lioness to heal a princess. In order to get this milk, the wise healer has to approach the lioness. Not a simple task. He takes seven goats. On the first day, he stands from afar and sends the first goat to the lioness, who eats it wildly. On the second day, he steps closer and offers the second goat. On the third, he is closer still until finally, on the seventh day, he is right up next to the lioness, has tamed her and is now able to procure

the milk for the magical healing potion. Whatever the folk motif underlying this scene, it's hard not to get the impression that Jacob is trying to tame the wild brother.

<p>וַיָּרַץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרֹאתוֹ <i>And Esau ran to greet him.</i> Gen. 33:4</p>
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But the reunion doesn't proceed along the lines of that folktale. If that were the case, Esau would have remained stationary and let Yaakov come right up to him, then they would have hugged. Esau's behavior is consistent with impulsivity and wildness. Up until the second of embrace we have the hint of danger, until they hug and weep. Note that Jacob is not running towards him. The reunion is successful in the sense that no one gets killed. But we are left to wonder whether Jacob is being authentic or whether he has succeeded, once again, to best Esau and manipulate him.

Listen to Esau's questions. Listen to the way he asks them. This is the lofty language that Jacob anticipated. Normally, one would say, *Who's this? Who are these people?* But the emphasis on *to you* suggests Esau recognizes that there is meaning here. That that everyone here is a family. They all belong to him. In the moment of encounter, the gang-leader with his minions and the clan leader with his children, we have a hint of envy. The envy of the satisfaction of home, domesticity, the tumult and joy of children and family. But here's

<p>מִי־אֵלֶּה לָּךְ <i>Who are these to you?</i> מִי לָּךְ כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגַשְׁתִּי <i>Who to you is all this camp I have met?</i> Gen. 33:5, 8</p>

<p>(ו) וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת־נְשָׁיו וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בָּנֹתָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־בְּהֵמָתוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־קִינֵינּוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם יַעֲקֹב אָחָיו: <i>Esau took his wives, his sons and his daughters, and all the persons in his household, as well as his acquired-livestock, all his animals, and all his acquisitions that he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to [another] land, away from Yaakov his brother... (36:6)</i></p>

how the story ends: Esau does become a family. By the end of the story, Esau has become the mirror image of Jacob. He too has a nation and a land. Shabbat Shalom!

