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"THE WAYS OF ESAU"

At the beginning of this morning's Sidra, we find Jacob awaiting the fateful confrontation with his brother Esau. Jacob is apprehensive -- even terrified -- as he prepares for Esau who is advancing upon him with four hundred armed men, with vengeance and murder in his heart. At this point, Jacob decides to divide his retinue into two separate camps. His reason, according to the Torah, was that should Esau destroy one camp, at least the other would escape and survive.

Allow me to bring to your attention an additional reason for Jacob's strategy, one suggested by the eminent Hasidic master, the author of the Sefat Emet, in the name of his renowned grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. He bids us read a bit further, when Esau and Jacob finally do meet. Esau ran towards Jacob, embraced him, fell upon his neck -- va-yishakehu, and he kissed him. The word va-yishakehu is written with a series of dots on the top of it. This is rare in the Torah, and when it does occur, it indicates that there is a deeper meaning that must be searched out. That our Rabbis did, and Rabbi Yanai taught: melamed she-lo bikesh le'nashko ela le'nashkho -- Esau did not intend to kiss Jacob, to give him a neshikah or kiss. He did intend to give him a neshikhah -- a bite, a mortal wound. He embraced him, and then fell upon his neck in his characteristically wild, bestial manner in order to kill him. But, by a miracle, Jacob's neck turned hard as marble, and so Esau -- kissed him. It was a hypocritical kiss; a kiss not of love but of death, not of affection but of affliction.

These are the two ways Esau always tries to overcome Jacob: the ways of neshikah and neshikhah. Sometimes Esau acts directly and openly -- like a wolf. At other times he is devious and sly -- like a fox. At such times the neshikah hides the deadly neshikhah, and honey drips about the inner poison.

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Jacob, knowing of the two approaches by Esau, therefore divides his own camp into two, training each of them how to cope with one of the alternate strategies that Esau might be expected to use. He teaches one camp how to resist Esau's neshikhah, his bite or direct physical onslaught. He teaches the other how to oppose the neshikah or kiss of Esau, his inviting manner which intends only to throw Jacob off guard.

Therefore, the Kotzker concludes, Jacob prayed to G-d: hatzileni na mi-yad achi, mi-yad Esav, save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau. In other words, save me both from Esau when he appears undisguised, as Esau my sworn enemy who aims but to destroy me; and save me from Esau when he appears to me as a brother, in the guise of fraternal affection. Deliver me both from his bite and from his kiss.

In our own days we have suffered grievously from the bite of Esau. One third of our people were the victims of the vicious neshikhah. But we have begun to develop the capacity to resist it. From the ghetto resistance fighters to the Hagganah, from the Israel Defense Army to the various efficient agencies combatting anti-Semitism in America and abroad, we have learned how to withstand the noxious bite of the Esaus of our day.

The great, overwhelming problem of our day, however, is not the bite. It is the kiss of Esau. Where twenty centuries of Christianity have failed to budge us by sword or by stake, by exile or by persecution, the alternative policy of smiling sweetness, of the neshikah, has begun to show the first signs of success. No longer are we threatened with forced conversions. No longer do ex-Jewish priests challenge us to public debates and slander the Talmud as a pack of anti-Christian lies. Now the ex-Jew first praises the Talmud as a very fine book indeed -- but one that has been surpassed. Nowadays a missionary to the Jews first writes a book against anti-Semitism. Then he writes a book about "building

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bridges." Then he invites us into a "dialogue." And so on ...

Most recently we have witnessed the most incredible, embarrassing kind of situation where Jewish organizations have been competing for the honor of Esau's dubious kisses. It is something we Orthodox Jews must study deliberately and calmly, but that we must not dare overlook or neglect.

The press recently reported that Dr. Nahum Goldman, President of the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress, had been in contact with a very important Cardinal (a German) to arrange for a single Jewish delegation to attend the forthcoming Ecumenical Council at the Vatican. An Ecumenical Council is a world-wide assembly of high church officials, under the presidency of the Pope, convoked to discuss matters of Catholic Law and Doctrine. At this coming Council the main business will be an understanding with Protestantism and the ultimate merger of all Christian churches.

Reform Rabbis, at least certain prominent ones, have heartily endorsed the plan. In recent years, incidentally, there has been a pronounced tendency on their part to take a positive, affirmative, and even affectionate approach to the founder of Christianity. Reform preaching and writing in this direction has increased noticeably of late.

What should be the reaction of Orthodox Jew^s? The very first reaction is, I believe, that of speechlessness at the enormous audacity of self-appointed Jewish "leaders" who dare to speak on behalf of all Jewry on matters of such moment to our faith. There is really little that one can say, because there is so much that one should say. Twenty centuries of experience with Esau's bites are to be discarded as Jewish leaders vie for the kiss of the same Esau! They are so flattered by the affectionate attentions of Esau that, in their spiritual sycophancy and religious obsequiousness, they are willing to forget all that Jacob stands for.

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But speak we must, for to be silent in the face of such gross insult to the whole Jewish historic experience would be sinful. We must expose the massive folly of this unfortunate move.

First, they have shown a lack of self-respect and have delivered a heavy blow to Jewish dignity by not waiting for an invitation. They have invited themselves, and now stand hat in hand waiting breathlessly for the host's confirmation. A party-crasher is reprehensible whether the party is social or religious, private or international. One has the uncomfortable feeling that much of this has been said with an eye on the headlines, indicating once again how widespread is the poison secreted by the demon of public-relationism and the press release. Imagine the chagrin and embarrassment that all of us will suffer if, as rumor has already indicated, Rome rebuffs these Jewish leaders because it does not wish to offend the Arabs or the Catholic countries which are anti-Semitic.

Second, this represents an ungracious, distasteful, ignominious intervention in somebody else's religion. What business do Jews have in a Christian religious conference called to discuss Christian fellowship? How dare any Jew presume to tell Christians how to worship or what to believe! Of course, we agree that Christianity is the source of most of anti-Semitism. Some action should be taken to urge liberal Christians to recognize the source of so much human misery and do something constructive about it. But it is never to be done as part of "negotiations," as the Jewish politicians would have it; much less as a result of "dialogue" as the Reform would have it.

Third, who is the President of the World Jewish Congress to speak on behalf of religious Jewry? It is a sad commentary on American Jewry that only here would such a scandalous situation be tolerated, whereby an avowed secularist and political figure arrogates to himself the prerogative

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of representing one religious community vis-a-vis another! It is true that Dr. Goldman consulted Orthodox leaders -- but only after his ill-fated meeting with the German cardinal. This is not consultation. This is a salvage attempt. The difference is that between saving souls and saving face.

Fourth, we must acknowledge soberly and proclaim publicly that, despite all disclaimers, this conjures up the old, dreaded Hebrew word: shemad! Of course these Jewish leaders do not want to lead us into mass conversion! But they are the blind and unwitting tools of just that -- a campaign of shemad. The shemad Esau could not achieve by a couple of hundred centuries of biting, he now wants to achieve with a light kiss -- assisted by love-starved Jewish leaders!

This is the end result of a secularism which regards Judaism as only a cultural backdrop for a nation or people, and which regards Torah as only a vestige of such. This is the end result of a Reform which denies the uniqueness of the Jew and reduces our faith to a few well-intentioned liberal phrases in poor imitation of our non-Jewish environs.

And as if these deeds were not enough, one party to all this maneuvering had the ill grace, the temerity, and the spiritual obtuseness to suggest to Catholics that as a gesture to Jews they increase the number of their saints from amongst Old Testament heroes! What an ill-advised, vulgar, gross meddling with another's religion! And more important: are they so naive as not to realize that Catholics will ask a price for all this?

Orthodox Jews ask: what is the price we are expected to pay for this kiss of Esau? What, especially, is the price demanded of us by this German cardinal's French assistant who is openly using all this tumult to advance his missionary aims?

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What is Judaism that it can be so lightly dealt with? Is it the private domain of a few Reform leaders who can cut, shape, and form, add subtract, and divide it at will? Is it but a plastic lump of meaningless rituals?

What is Judaism to the Goldmans? Is it but another item that can be traded in negotiations at a conference table?

In addition to the usual meaning of Jacob's prayer, and the one given to it by the Kotzker Rebbe, I would interpret it directly: hatzileni na mi-yad achi! Almighty G-d, please -- help us from the hands of our own Jewish brothers! Our Jewish brethren can prove far more dangerous to us than mi-yad Esav. Deliver us from achi; then we shall not have to fear Esav.

We must warn these Jewish leaders to desist from their perilous plans lest they jeopardize what precious little unity we do have in American Jewry. We plead with them to remember that the survival of Judaism is more important than a momentary public relations triumph. Remember what the English philosopher George Santayana said: a man ignores the lessons of history at his own peril; he who disregards history is doomed to relive it. And two thousand years of Jewish history have proved to us that the main interest of Christians as Christians in Jews as Jews is nothing more or less than: shemad, conversion. We plead with both Jewish secularists and Reformers: do not sell us. Do not buy for us new heroes or new prophets. We have enough. Do not be taken in by sweet words and kisses.

We want to live in peace with all our non-Jewish neighbors, even as Jacob was willing to go to all lengths to pacify and appease Esau. But, again like Jacob, we are not willing to sell our souls for it. The price is too high.

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Remember what Judaism really is: As David put it, Torat ha-Shem temimah, the Torah of the Lord is complete, pure, uncorrupted. It is not a relativistic document that changes in every generation and climate. No one has a warrant to toss it about like a football. No one has the mandate to lay his hands on it -- especially if they are spiritually soiled hands. Torat ha-Shem temimah.

Almighty G-d! We face critical times. May we be privileged to receive the blessing of Jacob, about whom it is written, after his encounter with Esau, that ya-yavo Yaakov shalem ir Shekhem, that Jacob came to Shechem shalem, perfect, whole. Our Rabbis explain: shalem be'guf, be'mammon, be'torate -- whole physically, financially, and spiritually. May all of Israel attain these perfections. Above all: may all of us, without exception, attain the shalem be'torate, religious wholesomeness. For shalem must lead to the great, universal, prophetic vision of Shalom.

Amen.

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יעקב אבינו חילק את המחנה שלו לשתיים כי אמר פן יבא והכה את האחת וכו'.
 ובספר שפת אמת הבל"א בשם "אמו"ז עוד רעיון עמוק למה חילק את המחנות:
 הנה עשו התקרב ליעקב בב' אופנים לפי חז"ל -- בנשיקה ונשיכה (הניקוד
 על "וישקהו" -- אגב, השפת אמת אומר במקו"א שהנשיקה של עשו היא היא
הנשיכה שלו...) ולכן חילק את מחנתו לב', אחת כנגד נשיקתו וא' כנגד
 נשיכתו, אחת שתעמד כלפי שנאתו הגלויי' ואחת שתספול בהתקרבותו המורעלה
 של עשו (בדומה לפרעה ששעבד את ישראל כפה-רך...נ.ל.). ולכן ביקש מן
 הקבה"ה שיצלנו "מיד אחי מיד עשו", בין כשנראה לו בגלוי כעשו, בין
 כשמראה את עצמו ליעקב כתור אח ובגישת של אחוה. ולכן ג"כ הזכיר יעקב
 בחפילו חסד ואמת: לחסד צריך בכדי להגן את עצמו כנגד חרבו של עשו,
 הנשיכה. אבל רק האמת הטהורה יכולה לשמר עליו כנגד מסוה האחוה, הנשיקה.

כמו"כ בימינו עשו מחגלה בשני האופנים שהם אחד: נשיקה ונשיכה...
 וצריך לדעת איך לעמד נגד שניהם. יש בינינו המחמחים בקרב כנגד עשו
 הנושך: אירגונים כנגד אנטי-שמיות וכדומה. אבל אין זה מספיק.
 העיקר בימינו-אנו הוא לדעת איך לעמד ולהתגונן כנגד נשיקתו המסכנת
 של "אחי" - ההתכוללות הבאה בעקבי זכויות אזרחיות נוספות; גישת-
 הנשיקה של המסיונרים הנוצרים המודרניים התאכים "רק" "לדו-שיח" עם
 הוגי היהדות; ההזמנה שהוטיקן עומד להגיש לנציגים יהודים וכו' וכו'.