

Rabbi's Column

Atrocities continue worldwide, and the death count keeps mounting. May God grant strength and comfort to the mourners, and may the injured be granted stamina and trained medical professionals. May we all be granted years in which man-made atrocities come to an end.

This week Jacob comes to terms with his twin brother. Twenty years earlier he had left town because Esav was extremely upset with him. Rebecca had indicated she would send for him when Esav no longer was angry, but that word was never received. As far as Jacob knows, Esav is still angry enough to kill him. [While never mentioned explicitly in the text, it seems very possible that a messenger might have arrived, given the message to Laban, who proceeded to make sure that Jacob never heard about it.]

Jacob had spent the last six years accumulating something to take home with him - and then makes the tactical decision to give a portion of this to Esav. There are other strategic and tactical choices which Jacob makes along the way to the final meeting. After Esav accepts Jacob's gift, they part company with the fear of a death threat no longer hanging over anyone's head.

You might learn the lesson that bribery works from this sequence of events. One lesson that I think is more to the point is that when people feel cheated of something (especially if you have actually cheated them) it is important to restore what they have been missing before trying to restore a relationship. When they were much younger, Jacob had bought the birthright at a bargain basement price. Now he is simply paying back to Esav the potential amount he mentally stole from him then.

At this point in the story, Jacob knows what we know - neither birthright nor human blessing is to be confused with God's promise of land and progeny.