



THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB

OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus

IN THE PARSHA

See You Later

There is an expression that we often use when we say goodbye. Most of us pay no attention to what we are saying. I doubt that very many of those who use the expression really mean it.

I refer to the words, “See you later.” I am quite confident that everyone reading this column has said these words of farewell to someone whom he wished he would never see again.

Seldom do we consider, “See you later” as a promise of a reunion or a commitment to a subsequent encounter.

I find it fascinating that this expression has its equivalent in other languages. In Hebrew, for example, we say, “*Lehitra’ot*,” which implies that we anticipate seeing each other again in the future. The German, “*Aufwiedersehen*,” conveys an even stronger degree of intention to meet again.

It is not surprising that we ordinary folk occasionally use language loosely and do not literally mean to fulfill every casual remark that we make. But it is surprising to find a biblical character using the same expression. Surely, the Bible does not trouble itself to record casual remarks.

In this week’s Torah portion, *Parshat Vayishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), we find the patriarch Jacob using just such an expression. The careful reader of this week’s

parsha faces the dilemma of either viewing his remarks as mere empty words, or worse, seeing in them a deliberate attempt at deception.

I refer to the passage at the very end of the narrative of the dramatic encounter between Esau and Jacob after a separation of many years. Surprisingly, the encounter concludes on a peaceful note, in which Esau suggests, “Let us take our journey, and let us go together...”

Jacob responds, and rendering his language into contemporary conversational English, he says, “You go first, and because of the kids and the cattle, I’ll follow slowly. I’ll see you later, in Seir, your mountain retreat.”

The reader of this passage cannot help but anticipate that we will read, at some point in the narrative, of how Jacob indeed sees Esau later, in Seir. After all, he promised to follow, albeit slowly, and to reunite with Esau at Mount Seir, his home base.

But we never read of such a reunion; not in this week’s Torah portion and not anywhere else in the entire Bible. Jacob says, “See you later,” but that “later” never occurs.

Our Sages were troubled by this seeming gap in the narrative. They provide us with several explanations.

Rashi suggests that Jacob was trying to avoid any further encounters with his brother, assuming that he would treacherously abandon his feigned brotherly façade.

In other words, he told Esau to go ahead with no intention of following him all the way to Seir.

Jacob's "See you later" was thus a ruse. He was justifiably resorting to deception in the interests of self-defense.

The Talmud in the tractate of *Avoda Zara* 25b actually advises all who find themselves threatened by suspicious companions while on the road to resort to Jacob's tactic. The Talmud advises that when one is confronted by such a companion, he should inform him that his destination is far off and not disclose that his true destination is a much closer one. This is not an uncommon example of the practical advice that the Talmud often gives to those who face the difficulties that Jews have faced throughout our history.

But the rabbis have an alternative approach to Jacob's "See you later." This approach insists that Jacob used those words in all sincerity, with no guile whatsoever. Rather, he was predicting that whereas a true reunion of Jacob and Esau was not likely to happen in their lifetimes, there would come a time when that reunion would happen.

That time will be in the distant future. Then, the descendants of Jacob, the Jewish people, and the descendants of Esau, the historical enemies of the Jews, will indeed meet again, at the time when the Esaus of the world will be judged, finally and fairly.

This ultimate "reunion" was foretold by the Prophet Obadiah in the very last verse of his Book: "For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau; and dominion shall be the Lord's" (*Obadiah* 1:21).

In this light we come to see that Jacob

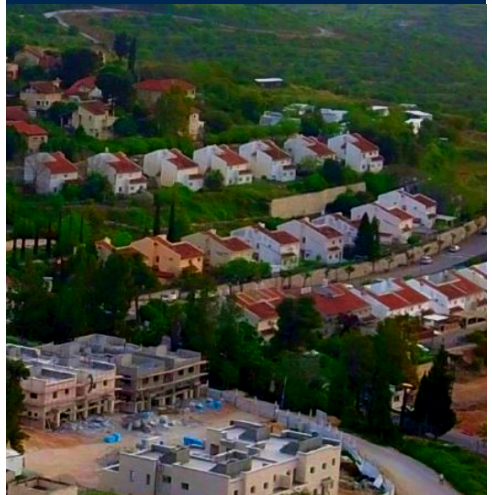
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was not using the expression “See you later” loosely or casually, and certainly not deceptively. Rather, he was peering into the messianic future and envisioned a time when Jacob and Esau would come together, if only for a final reckoning.

Does this final reckoning mean victory for Jacob and defeat for Esau? It is often assumed that this is exactly what is meant, and such a conclusion is warranted by a literal reading of some of the concluding verses of the book of *Obadiah*; for example, verse 18: “The House of Jacob shall be fire... And the House of Esau shall be straw...”

But Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz, in his (regrettably underutilized) commentary on the *Pentateuch*, suggests otherwise and makes the following hopeful statement:

“There is no record that Jacob went to Seir to see his brother. But, add the rabbis, Jacob will yet visit Esau on the day of the Messiah, when the reconciliation between Israel and Edom will be complete.”

The medieval commentator Rabbeinu Bachya finds a hint in the Hebrew words which Jacob uses to say “See you later (until I come unto my lord unto Seir),” which suggests the messianic meaning behind the words. He points out that the final letters of the words which constitute that phrase spell out the name Elijah, who, in our tradition, is the herald of the Messiah.

It is safe to conclude with the assumption that most uses of the term “See you later” have no significance. However, Jacob’s use of the term had great significance. It gives us occasion to reflect upon the millennia of hostility that existed between Jacob and Esau, and upon the prophecy that that hostility would eventually end. ■



Be'er Tziporah a'h - Bottled Water Gemach



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In loving memory of Yoni's wife
Tziporah a'h, a true Eishes Chayil, always full of chessed, kindness and laughter, and brought life and strength to so many people, that she touched!
She was like Aron, who loved peace and pursued peace.



Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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Husband, father, grandfather and
great-grandfather, on his 5th yearzeit
He is greatly missed - יהי זכרו ברוך
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