



### The Text:

*(After their emotional reunion, Esau offers to have some of his men escort Jacob on his journey. Jacob politely declines.)*

Rabbi Yannai, when he traveled to the Imperial Court (on communal business), would first look into this Parsha (to learn from Jacob's example how to behave towards the hostile Romans); and he never accepted a Roman escort (just as Jacob rejected Esau's offer). Once Rabbi Yannai neglected to look at the Parsha, and accepted a Roman escort. They had not yet reached Akko when he had to sell his cloak (to bribe his way out of the Romans' clutches).

[Midrash, as interpreted by Ramban]

### The Question:

How could Rabbi Yannai make such an obvious mistake? He's faced this situation before, and done the right thing every time, just as Jacob showed us. Did Rabbi Yannai suddenly forget the Torah's explicit message?

### The Answer:

"Don't associate with Esau and his kind." It's a simple principle, and Rabbi Yannai surely remembered it. Clearly, he thought this situation was different – and if we had been there, he could have explained why, and probably convinced us that he was right. But in reality, the situation was *not* different; what was different was *Rabbi Yannai*. By neglecting to re-read the Torah, he found himself a bit less in touch with its wisdom, and made a nearly fatal error in judgment.

### The Message:

The Torah teaches us broad, general principles – honesty, kindness, faith, charity. These are basic concepts. "I know that already," we think. But life is full of confusing dilemmas: Should I be honest or tactful? Decisive or deliberate? Should I volunteer for the community, or does charity begin at home? Should I give to others or attend to my own needs? The Torah *does* have the answers; but we can't get it right without taking the time to study, analyze and reflect on the Torah's messages. By immersing ourselves in Torah wisdom, we can slowly begin to internalize its principles, so that they guide the decisions we make every day of our lives.

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**After escaping from the treacherous Laban**, Jacob turns to face the next peril: his imminent return to Canaan, home of his brother Esau, whose murderous wrath he fled more than thirty years ago. Jacob sends envoys of peace – who return with the news that Esau is coming with four hundred armed men. Greatly alarmed, Jacob prepares for the confrontation: he sends a lavish tribute to appease Esau; he divides his household into two camps in case of battle; and he prays to G-d, expressing gratitude, humility, and a plea for salvation.

**In the middle of the night**, Jacob is attacked by a mysterious stranger, who wrestles with him until dawn. Jacob is unharmed except for a limp; the stranger –in reality an angel representing Esau – is forced to acknowledge Jacob's legitimacy as heir to the Patriarchal blessing. The angel informs Jacob that G-d will soon change his name to Israel, indicating leadership and victory.

**Jacob finally meets Esau**, who, quite out of character, hugs and kisses him. Jacob insists that Esau keep the gifts he had sent ahead, and politely but emphatically refuses Esau's offer to travel together.

**Rachel dies delivering her second child** – Benjamin, Jacob's twelfth and final son – and is buried by the side of the road. Rachel's tomb remains one of Israel's most beloved sites of prayer.

**Jacob camps near the city of Shechem**. Dinah, his daughter, is abducted and violated by the local prince, also named Shechem. Jacob's second and third sons, Simon and Levi, attack Shechem in return. Jacob agrees in principle but criticizes his sons for endangering the family; G-d, though, protects them from retaliation, and they complete their journey unmolested.

**Now Esau leaves his parent's home**, moving away to escape the destiny of bondage that is a prerequisite to inheriting the Holy Land. The Parsha ends by listing the members of Esau's family, who are enumerated briefly, representing no moral accomplishment; the coming chapters will discuss in careful detail the meaningful lives of Jacob and his family.

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