

RADIO PROGRAM - JACOB & ESAU  
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shalom. I have often been puzzled by the story of Jacob and Esau. We all know how Jacob took away the blessing from his brother, Esau. We all know how Esau was unworthy and a man of violence, but how could Jacob act the way he acted also? It is interesting to note that in the Bible Jacob is referred to as "Yoshai VoHaleem" - one who sat in the tents, one who was a student, one who had learned all the civilization could teach. In fact, the rabbis say he had studied 14 years in the university of Shaim and Aiver, but, yet, this man who had so much education, who knew a lot of things, ended up tricking his father, cheating his brother, and being an accomplice with his mother in deception. How could this happen? How could a man with so much education do a thing like this? Perhaps under the circumstances maybe it could be understood, but, yet he should have done it in a direct way. Why did he do it in this particular way? In fact, after he deceived his brother he was forced to flee back to Mesopotamia to the old family home. When he fled it says in the Bible, "And Jacob went out from Beersheba and he went to Choren, and he alighted at the place and he lodged there because the sun had set, and he took from the stones of the place and he put it under his head and he lay down in that place." Right after he had tricked his father and cheated his brother he left and he had to take a stone and put it under his head, and then he had that famous dream of the ladder going up, the ladder whose foot was standing on the ground and whose head reached up to heaven with the angels going up and the angels going down in which G-d promises him that at the end everything will be all right. And then it says, "And Jacob woke up from his sleep," but actually in Hebrew that word can be said to mean, "And Jacob woke up from his learning." In fact, this is the way the rabbis interpret it, that Jacob was a man who, after he had

this vision and took a rock and took it under his head, had a vision of what it means to be human, and then he woke up from his learning. What does all this mean?

It seems to me that Jacob made a mistake that many people make, and that is that they feel just because they understand the rules of interpersonal behavior, of sexuality, of psychology, therefore, they can break these rules, because it no longer applies to them. They confuse understanding with exemption from the rules of nature. Just because I understand that if I cut my finger blood will flow does not mean that from now on when I cut my finger my blood will not flow. Understanding does not exempt you from the laws of nature, but somehow people feel that it does, especially in interpersonal relationships. They say, "Oh, if I understand how these factors work, how these laws of nature work, I am exempt from them," but you are not exempt from them just the same way that if you understand the laws of gravity does not mean that you can jump off a cliff and you will not fall. But Jacob seemed to think that he was. Because he understood it, therefore, he would be exempt from them. Therefore, he could manipulate all sorts of factors and nothing would happen to him. Unfortunately, this is not true. Man is bound by these rules just as surely as any other creature. Whether he understands the rules or not, he is still bound by them. Hopefully, if you understand the rules you can avoid some of the pitfalls. You will know better than jumping off a cliff. You will also suffer if you break the rules of interpersonal behavior. Jacob did not know that. It says in the Bible, "And he alighted," and that word in Hebrew has many meanings, and it can also mean, "He hurt in this place." At this stage of life he hurt. He did not know what had happened to him. He was not the man he thought he was,

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and so he took a rock and put it under his head. Jacob had now to face the rock of life, a very basic fact of life. He had to get down to the rock of existence. He had to realize that he was only human, that just because he understood the rules of interpersonal relations, it did not mean he was exempt from them. And he laid down in that place, and in Hebrew the word "Yishgad" can also mean he was sick. He was sick. He was upset with himself. Then he had a vision, and he realized that in spite of the fact that he was human, he could still rise, but he has to always realize he is human. There are certain things he cannot do and expect to come out unscathed. Too many people today feel they can do everything as far as sexual relations, psychological relations, manipulating people and they will come out unscathed, but Jacob had to realize he could not do that, that he could rise on the ladder of life and accomplish great things if it was set upon the ground, upon the rock, upon the understanding that he was only human, that he should never put himself into situations where he would be tempted and could only fail.

Yes, this is the story of Jacob. This is the problem that unfortunately many people face today. They think they can avoid the rules of psychological behavior, of sexuality, and the rules that pertain to human contact because they understand them, but this is not so. That is why I believe in this bicentennial year that we must again give credit to our great founding fathers who understood this principle, and, therefore, built a Constitution based on checks and balances knowing that absolute power corrupts, that people when they feel they understand everything and when they have the power to implement what they think they understand will ultimately corrupt themselves unless there is somebody watching them. People must always realize that we are human, and, because we are

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human, we are subject to certain temptations, and we should stay away from these things if we want to maintain our homes. Jacob eventually succeeded because he realized that he, like all the rest of us, was subject to the same rules of interpersonal behavior, psychology, and sexuality.