

Vayeshev-Esav Does His Job, Let us Do Ours
[From Rashi and Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt'l]
By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

Rashi opens his commentary to Parshas Vayeshev with the following. After the Torah told us a summary of Esav and his descendents and how they settled their lands, the Torah returns to the main narrative which is how Yaakov Avinu and his family developed into the Klal Yisroel. The Torah devotes more space to the people that are important such as the Avos and Emahos who are our ancestors. Yishmael and Esav, though in the same family, did not become part of Am Yisroel so details about their history and development are secondary. Rashi then gives a parable of a precious stone that fell into the sand. A clump of sand is taken and sifted away and discarded in order to find the gem. The other people are the sand and the Avos and Emahos are the gems.

Rashi gives another explanation to start off our parsha. When Yaakov saw Esav and his following and all of the warlords of Esav and Seir, he wondered to himself how it would be possible to stand up to such powerful warriors who are so near to him. The Torah answers that the generations of Yaakov Are Yosef. Rashi brings from Sefer Ovadiah 1:18 'And the house of Yaakov will be fire and the house of Yosef Flame and the house of Esav Straw.' We see similarly in Vayeitzei [Bereishis 30:25] that when Yosef was born, Yaakov felt ready to return to Eretz Yisroel and face his enemy brother Esav.

Many sources indicate that Yosef, being the Tzaddik and able to resist temptations, is the force needed to fight Esav. We see Yosef personifying this idea throughout his life as, for instance, when he was tempted by Potipahar's wife. The righteousness of Yosef is the weapon to defeat Esav and Amalek, his descendent, who carry the legacy of fighting against Hashem and against all holiness.

My Rosh yeshiva, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Zt'l, asked why Yaakov felt intimidated by the warlords of Esav and Seir. Didn't he have faith in Hashem and his mission of Torah and kedusha? Rav Moshe Feinstein answered that what Yaakov was actually afraid of was his own shortcomings. Hashem made the world to be developed and inherited by the various inhabitants of the world. All people, Jewish and Non-Jewish, are meant to go out, build and accomplish things for the world. Yaakov saw Esav going out in the world, conquering and building up his civilization. In that sense, Esav was fulfilling his purpose. This caused Yaakov to question himself whether or not he was fulfilling his own purpose in the world. After all, if Esav is building the world in the material sense, Yaakov saw this as a reminder he and his descendents must fulfill their mission which is to learn Torah, do Mitzvos and carry Hashem's message to the world. If we do not do our task as we should it will be a judgment against us, chas veshalom. So Yaakov was worried as to whether or not he was really fulfilling his obligation to Hashem or not. Till this day, see Esav is fulfilling his mission and building world civilizations. We all must then ask ourselves honestly if we are indeed fulfilling our mission in the world.