

Rabbi's Article II -Lik" S Vol 20, Vayishlach I

Esau's Kiss

On our parsha's verse (-Genesis 33:4), "And Esau ran toward him and embraced him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept," Rashi comments: (i) "and embraced him": His compassion was moved when he saw him prostrate himself all those times," and (ii) "and kissed him": There are dots over the word. There is controversy concerning this matter in a Baraitha of Sifrei (-Beha'alothecha 69:2). Some interpret the dots to mean that he did not kiss him wholeheartedly. Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai said: It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob, but his compassion was moved at that time, and he kissed him wholeheartedly."

Questions: Why, in the first comment, Rashi explains, "and embraced him," only according to the second opinion: "His compassion was moved," in tune with, "he kissed him wholeheartedly," while in his second comment, Rashi explains "and embraced him," according to both opinions?

Additionally, Rashi's wording of, "There is controversy concerning this matter," that --unlike Rashi's usual format, in which the first explanation he quotes is the one closer to the, "simple meaning of the verse", here,-- both opinions are equally the, "simple meaning of the verse." However, seemingly, the opinion of, "he did not kiss him wholeheartedly," is closer to the, "simple meaning of the verse," in the verse having dots, being that the dots come to weaken² the usual meaning of the word. While according to the opinion, "he kissed him wholeheartedly," there is no, "simple meaning of the verse," as to why we need the dots to tell us what the word itself is telling us anyway³?! Hence, (i) why does Rashi feel the need to bring the second opinion at all, and (ii) why the 'equalizing' introduction of, "There is controversy concerning this matter"?

Lastly, (i) why does Rashi specifically quote the "controversy" from the, "Baraitha of Sifrei," when this is taught in different sources as well? (ii) Why does Rashi tell us the source? Why does Rashi tell us specifically the name of the second opinion, as it is in the Sifrei? (ii) Of what need does Rashi tell us, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob," when the outcome for our verse is, "but his compassion... he kissed him wholeheartedly"?

Possible Partial Answer: As explained, the simple meaning of a dotted word is to weaken the simple meaning of the word. Thus, we can say that both opinions are coming but to weaken the simple meaning of, "And he kissed him." Only that the first opinion is weakening the, "kissed" part of the word וַיִּשָׁקֵהוּ, while the second opinion is weakening the "he (Esau)" kissed "him (Jacob)" part of the word וַיִּשָׁקֵהוּ. Meaning that the first opinion is saying that the universal meaning of a kiss, which is always wholeheartedly was weakened, for this kiss was not wholeheartedly. The second opinion is saying that the dots are weakening the specification of the essence of this verse's kiss, which is a kiss from Esau to Jacob, which is always, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob," and hence, always a kiss from Esau to Jacob would be not wholeheartedly, while in this verse, the "well known" Esau to Jacob kiss is weakened, and Esau does kiss Jacob wholeheartedly. This now means: (i) both opinions follow the same rule that when all the letters are dotted, the dots weaken the simple meaning of the word. (ii) The reason Rashi brings also the second opinion, is because according to the first opinion only the kiss part of the word should have been dotted (וַיִּשָׁקֵהוּ). (iii) Rashi specifically quotes the wording of the Sifrei, for only in this wording is there the, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob," which is necessary to explain what is being weakened according to the second opinion. (iv) Rashi tells us the name of the second opinion, because specifically this sage is the one (-Gittin 49b), "Rabbi Shimon, who expounds the reason (underlying) the verse (as a basis for drawing halakhic conclusions)." Thus, it makes sense that Rabbi Shimon expound the weakening of dots upon the reason of the verse, which is the novelty of Esau kissing Jacob, due to the reason that, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob," and thus the dots are weakening this reason.

However, this answer still leaves us with the unusualness of the dots strengthening the simple meaning of the word (that Esau kissed Jacob wholeheartedly) instead of weakening it. Additionally, there still remains unanswered as to why: (i) Why does Rashi specifically tells us that this is a, "Baraitha of Sifrei"? (ii) Why the specification of, "(It is a well known) Law (-lit. Law)," when all that is important to the understanding of the dots according to the second opinion is that this law is, "well known"? (iii) In most of the manuscripts of the Sifrei

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- Concerning the rule of how to extrapolate dotted words in the Torah, the Midrash Rabba (-Bereishit 78:9 and Shir Hashirim 7:5) tells us the rule: "Everywhere that you find the script more numerous than the dots, adopt the script and ignore the dots. If the dots are more numerous than the script, adopt the dots and ignore the script (letters). However, here, neither is the script more numerous than the dots, nor are the dots more numerous than the script, but rather it is dotted above vayishakehu in its entirety," which leads to the controversy quoted in Rashi. Meaning, that the dots on top of the letters never come to uproot the meaning of the word entirely. Rather, the dots, when more than the letters, are telling you to follow the dots' extrapolation over the simple meaning of the word. While when the letters are more than the dots, then we are to follow the meaning of the letters, with but a direction of the dots. For example, with the verse (-Numbers 9:10), "Any person... or is on a distant journey... he shall make a Passover sacrifice...," "There is a dot over the word --one dot over one of the letters--, to teach us that he does not really have to be far away, but even if he was merely outside the threshold of the Temple courtyard throughout the time allowed for the slaughtering," meaning that the dots are merely defining the word distance in a weaker way than usual. While, on the verse (-Genesis 18:9), "And they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'" "Heb. אָלוּי. There are dots over the letters אָוּי in the word אָלוּי... they also asked Sarah, 'Where (אָוּי) is Abraham?'" Meaning, that the letters of the word mean, that the angels asked him, and the dots teach us that they (also) asked her.
- Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, known as the RaLBaG (-Link) explains (-In the opening Biur HaMilos of his commentary on Vayishlach), "And he kissed him' is dotted in order to teach us that he did not kiss him with a complete heart. Rather, in was the middle, between a kiss and not a kiss. Therefore, this word is between the written and the erased (dotted)." Meaning the dots come to weaken the simple meaning of the word, without completely erasing the meaning of the word.
- There are commentaries who explain that the second opinion is saying that it is quite the contrary! Being that, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob," hence, we don't need the dots to tell us that Esau did not kiss Jacob with wholeheartedly. Thus, the dots teach us the novelty of the present kiss of Esau to Jacob, that it was wholeheartedly! However, this would not be aligned with the rule that dots come to weaken the actual simple meaning of the word, which is, "And he kissed him," the usual wholehearted kiss.

the word is "הפכו רחמיו" -but his compassion was turned," while Rashi writes, "שֶׁנֶכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו" -but his compassion was stirred (lit. heated up)?"

Answer: Rashi's intention with his commentary is not to explain the dots --for numerous times throughout the Torah we find that Rashi does not explain the dots on a word, which proves that Rashi does not see no difficulty created to the "simple meaning of the verse," just as with the different types of 'full' or 'missing' letters of a word⁴. Rather, Rashi is dealing with a question that is aroused within the "simple meaning of the verse," which is answered by the meaning behind the dots on the word. The question within the "simple meaning of the verse" that Rashi is dealing with is: *Knowing that we are dealing with Esau's* (-Genesis 27:41), "And Esau hated Jacob... I will then kill my brother Jacob," which is presently (-ibid 32:7, Rashi), "He still has hatred," and (-ibid 32:7), "and he is also coming toward you, and four hundred men are with him," how then do we have such a sudden total transformation of love, to the point of, "And Esau ran toward him and embraced him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept"?!

To explain this Rashi begins with his first comment: "and embraced him": His compassion was moved when he saw him prostrate himself all those times." And in this Rashi says that there is no controversy, and all agree to this⁶. And the reason for this sudden, "His compassion was moved," was because of, "when he saw him prostrate himself all those times." In this Rashi says that there is no controversy, and all agree to this⁵. However, when it gets to the, "And he kissed him," which is way above and beyond just the love that brings to, "and he embraced him," here Rashi feels that the, "when he saw him prostrate himself all those times," does not suffice to create such a, "and his compassion turned," so drastically, from one extreme (hatred, kill Jacob, and an army of 400 men) to the other extreme ("and he kissed him")?! Thus, Rashi needs to turn to the meaning of the dots in order to understand the "simple meaning of the verse," for the dots, as always, weaken the word, and therefore, we are not speaking of a true kiss, nor of a true love. And it is upon this weakening of the dots that Rashi explains, "There is controversy": (a) "he did not kiss him wholeheartedly," even though the kiss came about through, "and embraced him": His compassion was moved." (b) "he kissed him wholeheartedly," "at that time," because, "his compassion was נִכְמְרוּ -heated up strongly," as a furtherance in the evolution of, "His compassion was moved when he saw him prostrate himself all those times." And nevertheless, being that this was, "at that time," this too was not true.

Now, understanding that Rashi is explaining that in the, "simple meaning of the verse," we cannot say that there was such a drastic extreme transformation of Esau's deep hatred turning into such true love, even according to the second opinion, hence, Rashi has to tell us, "Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai said: It is a well known Law" that Esau hated Jacob," for a "Law" never changes. Only that, "at that time, his compassion was נִכְמְרוּ -heated up strongly," and, "he kissed him wholeheartedly," just as we find within "Laws" that there is the exception of a specific moment (-Deuteronomy 12:13, Rashi) "However, you may offer [a sacrifice outside of the Holy Temple] by the bidding of a prophet, for example, as Elijah [did] on Mount Carmel⁶."

Likewise, we now understand why Rashi (i) states that this is a, "Baraita of Sifrei," being that the other sources learn that according to the second opinion there was a true kiss, while the *Sifrei* is saying that both opinions agree that there was no true kiss, only that they argue in how far the kiss was untrue: whether (a) it was totally untrue, or (b) while this time the kiss was wholeheartedly, but nevertheless, remains untrue, being that the unchangeable "Law" is, "that Esau hated Jacob." (ii) Being that even the second opinion agrees that ultimately the kiss was untrue, hence, Rashi changes the *Sifrei's* wording from, "compassion turned," to say that it was only, "heated up." (iii) Rashi emphasizes that this "Law" is taught in the 'unchangeable' Legal "Braitha" teachings of the *Sifrie*, and not in the *homiletic* teachings of the *Sifrei*.

However, what drives Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai to say that at this time Esau did kiss Jacob wholeheartedly, when he himself just stated the unchangeable "Law"? The answer lay in the theme of the follow-up words and verses: "and he wept... let what you have remain yours... Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me," which makes it difficult to say that, according to the, "Simple meaning of the verse," Esau's kiss, "at this time," was not even wholeheartedly. Hence, Rashi begins by saying that from the perspective of the "simple meaning of the verse," "There is a controversy," in which "both opinions are equal."

Nevertheless, the "sharp student⁷" can ask, *Ultimately, how is it that the very sage who states the "unchangeable 'Law'" teaches, "his compassion was strongly heated at that time, and he kissed him wholeheartedly"?* The answer lay within understanding the life of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, who lived in the times of Edom's (Roman) --(-Genesis 36:1), "Esau, that is, Edom"-- tyranny rule over Israel. And even more so, Rabbi Shimon, who had to hide in a cave for 13 years in order to avoid being put to death by the Romans! Nevertheless, we find (-Meilah 17a), "(The Sages) said: Who will go and nullify (these Roman) -Cont. on page 3

4. Due to Hebrew not having vowel letters, but drawings, hence, a word can be written 'full' in which letters are written to fully express the vowel. For example, the 'ee' sounding vowel can have the letter *yud* to spell out its annunciation. i.e. the word *Tzitzit* can be written as צִצִּית, צִצִּיט, or צִצִּת, due to the 'ee' vowel found under the *y*.
5. Which is yet another reason as to why Rashi quotes specifically the *Sifrei*, being that the *Bereishis Rabba* and the *Avot D'Reb Nosson* are seeing the controversy applying even to the, "and embraced him."
6. And the 5-year old, studying only the, "simple meaning of the verse knows this already," as he previously learned of (-Genesis 25:27), "Jacob was an innocent man," however when Esau (-ibid, Rashi), "deceive his father," causing Isaac (-ibid), "thereby thought that he was scrupulous in his observance of the commandments," hence, Jacob had to (-Genesis 27:35), "came with cunning," which was (-ibid, Rashi), "with cleverness," in order that it be (-Genesis 27:33), "He, too, shall be blessed."
7. The Rebbe teaches that often when Rashi quotes the name of the sage of a teaching, he is hinting to the *sharp student* to research the sage, and he will there find the answer to a *sharp student's* question.

decrees? Let Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai go (to Rome), as he is accustomed to (experiencing) miracles," and he was successful in Rome to overturn their hateful decrees. Hence, Rabbi Shimon was of the opinion that Jacob, who was also, "accustomed to miracles," was able to bring about that this time, Esau's kiss was wholeheartedly.

Mystically Speaking: We find that even though RaShB"Y's service was, "Torah(-study) was his craft," nevertheless it was RAShB"Y who would heal the physical world: (-Shabbos 33b), "They emerged (from the cave). Everywhere that Rabbi Elazar would strike, Rabbi Shimon would heal." More than this (-Sukkah 45b), "Said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, 'I am able to absolve the entire world from judgment (for sins committed) from the day I was created until now.'" Meaning, not that RaShB"Y would change the world to do Teshuvah, but rather, with the world being exactly how it is, and nevertheless, RaShB"Y can "absolve the entire world," which is even greater than changing the world, in which world as world remains separated from G-d, and only if the world is willing to go beyond being just world, and instead, do Teshuvah, can it experience a unity with G-d. So too, it is RaShB"Y is of the opinion that even when Esau is Esau, within the "unchangeable Law" of who Esau is, and nevertheless, Jacob was able to "absolve" Esau, and Esau as Esau give Jacob a wholehearted kiss.

The Lesson: Throughout the entire time of our "Edom Exile," we must know that (i) we can not rely on (the compassion of) gentiles, for, "It is a well known law that Esau hated Jacob." Nevertheless, (ii) it is within the power of a Jew, when he is, and he notifies Esau that he is (-Rashi, Genesis 32:5), "I lived with the wicked Laban, but I kept the 613 commandments," to have an influence upon Esau, even when he is being Esau, that, "His compassion heated up, and he kissed him wholeheartedly."

This then leads to the fulfillment of this week's haftarah (-[Link](#)), (-Obadia 1:1&21), "The vision of Obadiah (-[Link](#)); So said the L-rd G-d concerning Edom..., --which (-Sanhedrin 39b), "Obadiah was an Edomite convert. And this is as people say: From and within the forest comes the ax to it (as the handle for the ax that chops the tree is from the forest itself)-- And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the Lrd shall have the kingdom." Which Jacob, as the aftermath of Esau's kiss, already promised to Esau (-Genesis 33:14), "Until I come to my master, to Seir," which Rashi defines as, "So when will he (Jacob) go? In the days of the Messiah, as it is said, 'And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Esau.'" Speedily in our days, Amein!