

PEOPLE SKILLS: THE ART OF APPRECIATION

Background

It is difficult to imagine the hatred that Aysav felt towards his brother Yaakov. When Yaakov ran away from his parents home, it was because his mother Rivka understood that Aysav was planning to kill Yaakov. Aysav then sent his son Alifaz and later his grandson Amalek to carry out the mission of killing Yaakov. We are now standing twenty-one years later, and not only does Aysav still hate Yaakov, but he has set out with a band of 400 men to kill his brother.

ספר בראשית פרק לג

ג) וְהוּא עָבַר לְפָנֵיהֶם
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה שִׁבְעַ
פְּעָמִים עַד גִּשְׁתּוֹ עַד אָחִיו

And (Yaakov) passed before them (Aysav and his band of soldiers) and he bowed down seven times until he got to his brother.

רש"י על בראשית פרק לג פסוק ד

ד) ויחבקהו - נתגלגלו
רחמיו כשראהו משתחוה
כל השתחוואות הללו

And Aysav hugged Yaakov - His mercy was awoken when he saw all of the times that Yaakov bowed to him.

Questions

Yaakov had already offered all types of presents and sent all types of emissaries to placate his brother — to no avail. Yet this *posuk* is telling us that one single thing changed the course of events: Yaakov bowing down. It awakened Aysav's mercy, and instead of killing Yaakov, he hugged and kissed him. What is so significant about the act of bowing that it changed a hardened killer back to a state of brotherly love?