

The *Biblical Saga* of Jacob and Esau: Religious Education and the UNESCO Standards for Peace and Tolerance

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Executive Summary

This article is a reworked version of a presentation prepared for the *International Symposium on Religious Studies and Global Peace (16 – 18 May 2013)* organized by the Faculty of Theology of Necmettin Erbakan University in Turkey. The challenge posed by the conference organizers was to answer, for one's own culture, the following questions: "What is the most appropriate method for understanding and interpreting the Scriptures today? What is the soundest and most effective method in deriving principles from those Scriptures and relating them to the life of an individual and to society? In what way and how can these religious principles and moral values be taught in educational institutions?"¹

Focusing on global peace, the organizers stressed that "there is an urgent need for underscoring the positive aspects of religion and bringing out its guiding principles and values for the wellbeing of society."² In light of the fact that the Turkish educational system is going through a process of reform and in all likelihood, could serve as a model for Islamic education in other Muslim and non-Muslim countries, I took the organizers' challenge to make a contribution from my own culture very seriously.

On the assumption that for religious peace education, personal stories may well be more effective than abstract religious philosophy, I chose the *Biblical family saga* of Jacob and Esau as a case study.³

My main findings are that this *Biblical family saga* teaches that humans cannot justify wrongdoing by claiming to be acting in the name of God's revealed wish and that human actions must be judged according to universal standards. These standards – as one can deduce from the *IMPACT-SE UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education* – are the result of a millennia-old process of human observation that is largely based on revealed wisdom in the various civilizations. Therefore, if religious education is to remain faithful to the message of the Holy Bible, it must abide by international standards for peace and tolerance in school education.

¹ "Aims and Scope," *International Symposium on Religious Studies and Global Peace*, Konya: Faculty of Theology, Necmettin Erbakan University, Dedeman Convention Center, May 16 – 18, 2013.

² *Ibid.*

³ I wish to thank Alexander Rofé for kindly directing me to some of the sources consulted here.

The Patriarchs lived sometime during the second millennium BCE, and perhaps even earlier. The *family saga* of Jacob and Esau came later, in the first half of the first millennium, suggesting that the story served for centuries as an educational tool in ancient Israel to explain the complicated relations between the two neighboring peoples, Edom and Israel. It has served for millennia as paradigm for peace and reconciliation. In monitoring the *family saga* according to the *IMPACT-SE Methodology*, I found that, indeed, the *saga* fully conforms to the UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education.

In other words, the Jacob and Esau *family saga* teaches RESPECT for the other, treats the "Other" as an INDIVIDUAL, espouses NO HATE, teaches PEACEMAKING, provides UNBIASED INFORMATION about the conflict that includes criticism of one's "national self," is GENDER sensitive and is aware of women's critical role in peacemaking. Finally, the Biblical *saga* educates for sound economic development through ingenuity, hard work and deep understanding of nature and the environment.

The *IMPACT-SE Methodology* also confirms the conclusions of Biblical and literary scholars as regards the dominant role of female figures in Biblical *family sagas*. I compared the role of Rebecca and other figures in the *saga* with that of women in two other genres, the Iranian *Ta^cziyeh* passion plays and ancient Greek tragedy and found Rebecca's role to be unique, being both an enabler of God's will and a *universal guardian of peace*. Combining the interests of the common people with the will of God against the patriarchal order, she enables the *saga* to move ahead smoothly; no tragedy or bloodshed occurs.

Instead, with Rebecca's initial guidance, the Jacob and Esau *family saga* culminates in an emotional reconciliation between the two main protagonists and the two peoples.

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The biographies of prophets and religious figures provide role models and set traditions for educating the young. Indeed, it could be argued that for religious peace education, personal stories may well be more effective than abstract religious philosophy.

My study focuses on the story of Jacob and Esau, the Biblical Israel and Edom, as a model for religious education aimed at enhancing value-based prosperity, peace and reconciliation. I will demonstrate that this ancient *family saga* complies with cutting edge UNESCO-derived international standards for peace and tolerance in school education – the *IMPACT-SE Methodology*.⁴ I argue that this ancient religious story could make an excellent classroom text for religious peace education and underscore the effectiveness of the UNESCO-based *IMPACT-SE Methodology* for monitoring *and* planning peace-promoting religious curricula.

1.1 Why Jacob-Israel?

At first glance, one could choose the Biblical stories of either Abraham or Moses. For Jews, Abraham is the father of the Hebrew nation. Being the first to hear and obey the commands of God, he establishes the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12-17), receives the Divine blessing for his people, and leaves his homeland for the Promised Land. Abraham is the direct father of all the Jews. His appellation, *Avraham Avinu* (אברהם אבינו) in Hebrew, literally means "Abraham our father". Still, while Abraham remains the "first Jew,"⁵ Abraham is the father of many nations. In recent years, with the emergence of the concept of Abrahamic religions to denote the monotheistic tradition,⁶

⁴ See discussion below. *IMPACT-SE* is the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education.

⁵ Yanki Tauber, "HaYehudi HaRishon (The First Jew)," *Beit Chabad*:

http://www.he.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/578793, (no date, downloaded July 15, 2013). Abraham was associated in Nazi Europe strictly with the Jews. In 1938 Germany, the Nazis legislated the addition of Abraham and Sarah to the names of all adult Jews (male and female respectively) in the Reich. Abraham J. Edelheit and Hershel Edelheit, *History of the Holocaust: A Handbook and Dictionary*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994, pp.438-439.

⁶ "Abrahamic" typically refers to the three main monotheistic religions (in chronological order of their appearance): Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As a unifying interfaith term, "Abrahamic" has emerged in the mid-20th century as part of the efforts to heal the trauma of WWII Holocaust. The term was used in the Vatican Council II of 1962. The category gathered momentum among Muslims and Jews in Israel in the late 1990s with the establishment of the *Abrahamic Way (Derech Avraham/Al-Tariqa Al-Ibrahimiyyah)* and across the world (Khalid Durán, *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Islam for Jews*; Reuven Firestone, *Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims*, Hoboken NJ: Ktav, 2001). Then, after the events of September 9, 2001 across the world as a way to heal the East West chasm (Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths*, New York Harper Collins, 2002). More recently, other subgroups and religious faiths such as the Druze, Bahá'í, Mormon and Unificationists, are also included. Some scholars advise caution with the category. Adam Dodds, "The Abrahamic faiths? Continuity and discontinuity in Christian and Islamic doctrine," *Evangelical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2009): 230-253. Aaron W. Hughes argues that the "Abrahamic" academic category is "artificial and imprecise, a modern projection that we then transcribe onto the historical record." (*Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, p.3). Jon D. Levenson demonstrates that while about half the people of the planet consider Abraham to be the father of their faith, they are not reading the same textual base. Each of the different Abrahams represents a particular individuation and identity of its related faith (*Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Abraham acquired a quality that goes beyond Judaism. If Adam is the father of all humanity, Abraham becomes the father of all monotheists, almost a prophet of a new creed, *Abrahamism*. Besides, Abraham has no meaningful "Other."

The birth of Judaism, as a faith and a nation, is often assumed to occur with the Exodus from Egypt and hence, "The religion of Moses" (*Dat Moshe*, דת משה, in Hebrew), predicated on the Mosaic Covenant, the Ten Commandments and the Torah. Israelites or Jews, when described in a non-pejorative way among Muslims, are often associated with Moses: *Musevi* (Turkish), *Musawi*, *Kalimi* (موسوي، كلیمي, Arabic) and *Kalimi* (کلیمی, Persian). The Exodus of the Israelite slaves is seen by Jewish sages as the birth of the people of Israel, accompanied by blood, water and pain. The first to take this line of interpretation was the Prophet Ezekiel (16:4-6), comparing the people of Israel to an embryo cast out of the womb and left abandoned, covered by its blood, in the desert: "In the day that thou wast born [...] I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."⁷ Moses, with God behind him, is also *the* father of the Jews.⁸

Admittedly, then, both Abraham and Moses could be seen as having superior qualities to Jacob for purposes of religious education. Nevertheless, I chose Jacob mainly because of the riveting process he experiences in dealing with his "Other," his twin brother Esau. Being a twin, Jacob has to grapple from birth with a competing sibling. In this rivalry, he learns useful peace strategies. In some cases, as I show in sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.4, handling the "Other" in a peaceful manner forces Jacob to rely on his resourceful mind and overcome inner fears and anxieties. Hence, Jacob serves as a quintessential archetype for living in peace with the "Other," while achieving prosperity and spiritual growth – as reflected in his actions in Padanaram and his subsequent encounter with Esau.

Brian Arthur Brown et al. (eds.), *Three Testaments: Torah, Gospel, and Quran*, Lanham Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

⁷ Based on "take him a nation from the midst of another nation" (Deuteronomy, 4:34), *Yalkut Shimoni* (תורת, רמז תתנו), an ancient Midrash (homiletic exegesis) collection, compares this to "an embryo, located in the bowel of an animal, and the shepherd comes forth to deliver it." See also *Midrash Psalms*, 114 (Venice, Daniel Bomberini, 1546). Rabbi Bar Aba in the name of Rabbi Bar Akha "What is 'a nation from the midst of another nation'? Like a man who delivers the embryo from the bowel of an animal, so did God take Israel out of Egypt." Similar interpretations can be found in *Sefer Arvei Nahal* by the 17th century Hassidic Rabbi David Solomon Eibenschutz (1755-1813) as well as in the *Pesach Haggadah* commentary by Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver (1789-1853).

⁸ Interestingly, argues Pardes, following Freud and Melanie Klein, if Moses [or God] plays the role of the father of the people of Israel, then Pharaonic Egypt plays that of the mother: "The Israelites are delivered collectively out of the womb of Egypt." Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000, p. 26.

The second reason for choosing Jacob-Israel as a role model is that his name is identical to his target audience: the Biblical and the modern-day Israel. Jacob stands out as representing the beginning of the nation of Israel as a community of memory. Beginning with Jacob, the Bible no longer uses the term "Hebrews," but the "Children of Israel,"⁹ even though Hebrew continues to be the language of the Jews.

The third reason relates to Esau and the Edomites as "the Other". The portrayal of Esau, as a round character who elicits empathy and sympathy, fear and love, laughter and compassion, is helpful for educational purposes. As I explain in section 3.1 below, this rounded description of "the Other" is required by international educational standards in order to avoid demonization, bigotry and group labeling.

Moreover, I believe modern-day Middle-Easterners could benefit from the historical background of twin Levantine peoples struggling with each other, making peace and developing cultural tools to maintain peace. It is no less significant that the Biblical cultural tool was written in Hebrew, "The language of Canaan,"¹⁰ which was the language of the protagonists and the language which binds all Israelis. It is easily accessible in the original to all of them – Muslims, Christians, Druse and Jews – as well as to many Palestinians. Hebrew, alongside Arabic, is Israel's official and most widely spoken language.

Another advantage of the character of Jacob for our purposes is the utterly human and accessible nature of his personality, which could serve as a role model.

A fifth reason for choosing Jacob is the prominent role of women in his family saga. At some of the central junctures of his life, Jacob takes the advice of women on personal issues as well as on matters pertaining to the destiny of the people of Israel. Rebecca, Jacob and Esau's mother, is a key mover and shaker in the story. Rachel, Jacob's second wife, is one of the most important Biblical characters for Jewish women. Indeed, women's status – in Jacob's biography as well as in our contemporary Middle East – forms a critical component in peace education.

Finally, Jacob is one of the first role models for the typically Jewish pattern recurring throughout the ages of wandering cycles, ascending *to* (*aliyyah*, עלייה) and descending *from* (*yeridah*, ירידה) the Promised Land.¹¹ Hence, the

⁹ Elliot N. Dorff and Arthur Rosett, *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1988, p. 17.

¹⁰ In Hebrew, *Sefat Kna'an*, שפת כנען (*Isaiah*, 19:18).

¹¹ Zakovitch points out that "even a rough sketch of the patriarchs' wanderings coincides with the broad lines traced by later generations." Yair Zakovitch, *Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 6-7. In the Hebrew edition of his book, he states that these wanderings manifest a "table of contents" and a "genetic code" for Israelites' history in Biblical times (Hebrew ed., p. 13). A *longue durée* historical perspective, however,

story is a powerful example of the multi-generational effect of behavioral patterns instilled in educational texts. It also proves to be relevant to some of the current tensions around the existence of the modern state of Israel, which is itself a product of similar wandering cycles. The exodus of entire Jewish communities, fleeing persecution by chauvinistic nationalisms in Europe and the Middle East, generated similar constellations of neighbors-brothers in conflict. It is no coincidence that the Jacob-Esau encounter-reconciliation occurred on the border of Canaan, at the Jabbok tributary of the Jordan River, as the first Israelite clan was returning to the Land.

My discussion begins with a methodological grounding: A short presentation of the latest version of the Applied International Educational Standards based on UNESCO Declarations and Recommendations, as developed by Yohanan Manor and the scholars of *The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE)*. These standards provide guidelines for the examination of any story from the perspective of an educational text.

1.2. Methodological Grounding: Applied International Educational Standards Based on UNESCO Declarations and Recommendations

This article argues that the story of Jacob-Israel and Esau served the educational purpose of teaching the Israelites that their Edomite neighbors should not become an object of hate, regardless of ongoing rivalry and occasional flare-ups. Indeed, the story may have served as a tool for safeguarding the peace by teaching the Israelites that their neighbors have legitimate rights and grievances.

One way to examine a text in this light is through the Applied International Educational Standards based on UNESCO Declarations and Recommendations. These educational standards were extracted over the past two decades from publications issued by the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* at *The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-SE)*.¹² They are used regularly to test modern school textbooks in various modern Middle Eastern curricula and to evaluate whether students are being educated toward a future of peace and coexistence.

Hence, in applying this methodology to the Jacob-Israel story, we benefit from a rare opportunity to examine an ancient educational text that teaches peace

can teach us that wandering cycles—"ascending" to and "descending" from the Land of Canaan, alongside other wandering waves—extends beyond Biblical times. These wanderings have always been, and still remain, a hallmark of Jewish/Israelite collective experience.

¹² <http://www.impact-se.org/research/methodology.html>. More references below.

and tolerance toward a neighboring nation, intriguingly enough, by following the most advanced 21st century standards for peace education.

However, it should come as no surprise that an ancient Biblical narrative conforms to modern-day UNESCO international standards. This paper argues that education for peace and tolerance, as well as for human rights, can in fact be traced back to Biblical narratives.¹³

The following is a condensed version of the international standards, which can serve as a roadmap for understanding the story of Jacob-Israel.¹⁴

(1) RESPECT: The curriculum should promote tolerance, understanding and respect toward the "Other," his or her culture, achievements, values and way of life.¹⁵

(2) INDIVIDUAL OTHER: The curriculum should foster personal attachment toward the "Other" as an individual, his or her desire to be familiar, loved and appreciated.¹⁶

(3) NO HATE: The curriculum should be free of wording, imagery and ideologies likely to create prejudices, misconceptions, stereotypes, misunderstandings, mistrust, racial hatred, religious bigotry and national hatred, as well as any other form of hatred or contempt for other groups or peoples.¹⁷

(4) PEACE MAKING: The curriculum should develop capabilities for non-violent conflict resolution and promote peace.¹⁸

¹³ Micheline R. Ishay, *The History of Human Rights: From Ancient Times to the Globalization Era*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004. Interestingly, as Ishay points out, it was UNESCO that had been charged by the declaration's authors to conduct an inquiry into the diversity of human rights viewpoints across the globe.

¹⁴ This is an updated version of the standards prepared by this author.

¹⁵ As defined in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995, Articles 1, 4.2. See also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Peoples (1965), Principles I, III. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): *Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*

¹⁶ The goal of education for peace is the development in an individual of values which are universally recognized, regardless of different socio-cultural contexts. See *ibid.* Article 6. See also, on exchanges between youth, the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principles IV, V.

¹⁷ Based on *ibid.* Articles III.6, IV.7 and VII.39; and on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eight session, Paris, November 1995, Article 18.

¹⁸ Based on the Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy, approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its twenty-eight session, Paris,

(5) UNBIASED INFORMATION: Educational materials (textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides, maps, illustrations, aids) should be up-to-date, accurate, complete, balanced and unprejudiced, and use equal standards to promote mutual knowledge and understanding between different peoples.¹⁹

(6) GENDER: The curriculum should foster equality and mutual respect between women and men. It should refrain from stereotyped gender roles.²⁰

(7) SOUND PROSPERITY and COOPERATION: The curriculum should educate for sound and sustainable economic conduct and preservation of the environment for future generations. It should encourage regional and local cooperation to that effect.²¹

2.1 The Biblical *Family Saga*

The primary goal of the Hebrew Bible is educational. The genre of Patriarchal narratives, such as the story of Jacob and Esau, is the *family saga*. Note that the term *saga*, borrowed from the Norse *saga*, does not prejudge the historicity of the narrative.²² The *family saga* aims to educate its readers or listeners by inducing them to see themselves in the narrative and gain knowledge and experience as a result. It nurtures "awareness of the historical continuity of the community" and of their own history.²³ Especially important to our case is that Biblical *family sagas* tell the stories of the progenitors of peoples, especially those of Israel. The relations between peoples were regarded as "the relations of individuals: two races it is said are brothers, i.e., are closely related and are equal."²⁴ This kind of education was needed

November 1995, Article 9; and on the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995, Article 5.

¹⁹ Based on UNESCO Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, 19 November 1974, Article V.14.

²⁰ The preamble to the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and signed by Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995, notes the Convention on the Elimination of Any Form of Discrimination against Women and emphasizes respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to gender.

²¹ Based on UNESCO Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, cooperation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, adopted by the General Conference at its eighteenth session, Paris, 19 November 1974, Articles III.6, and IV.7. On the imperative for developing "systematic and rational tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance," see the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance Proclaimed and Signed by Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995, Article 4.2. On education for international cooperation, see also the UN Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples (1965), Principle II.

²² William F. Albright, Introduction to Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis: the Biblical Saga and History*, [translated by W.H. Carruth] New York: Schocken Books, 1964, pp. xi-xii.

²³ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Translated by J Bowden), London 1985, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1986 [1983], p. 85.

²⁴ Gunkel, *The Legends*, p. 18.

because of the cultural affinity of the often-competing peoples. Hence, Jacob-Israel represents the entire people of Israel; Esau the Edomites, Lot the Ammonites and Moabites and Ishmael the Arabs.²⁵

The Patriarchs lived sometime during the second millennium BCE, and perhaps even earlier. Some of these stories were incorporated into the kernel national compact history of Israel before the founding of the United Kingdom in the 11th century BCE.²⁶ The Jacob-Esau *saga* possibly came later, in the first half of the first millennium and was probably instrumental in keeping the peace between Israel and Edom for centuries. Episodes of conflict, violence and even hatred occurred from time to time culminating in the context of the period leading to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.²⁷ Still, the two peoples finally reconciled and became one.²⁸

²⁵ Firestone, *Abraham*, p 11. Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 19.

²⁶ Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, Jerusalem: Simor, 2009, 292-93. There is no agreement as to the beginning date (2000-1200 BCE) of the "Israel before the Settlement" period. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament*, pp.6-9. Malamat describes the Patriarchs' narrative as telescoping a prolonged process he calls *the Proto-History of Israel* lasting a few hundred years and leading to the actual emergence of the historical Israel in the 13th century BCE. The Patriarchs' narrative, he believes, may even echo stories from early Western Semitic settlement in late 3rd millennium BCE and perhaps beyond. Abraham Malamat, *Israel in Biblical Times: Historical Essays*, Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute and the Israel Exploration Society, 1983, pp. 11-12 [Hebrew]. Friedman argues the texts known as J and E, which cover the Jacob family saga, were composed from 922 to 722 BCE, when the Biblical Promised Land was divided into two kingdoms: the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judah in the south. J (from *Jahwe*, the name of God in Hebrew, but in German spelling) was written in Judah, while E (from *Elohim*, God in Hebrew). Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed: A New View into the Five Books of Moses*, New York: HarperCollins, 2003, pp. 3-4. Wellhausen concluded, however, that J dates back to the 9th century, while E belongs with the 8th century BCE. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, translated by Black and Menzies, New York: Meridian Books, 1957 [1878].

²⁷ Isaiah 21:11-12; 34; 63: 1-6; Jeremiah 49: 7-22; Ezekiel 25: 12-14; 35; Joel 4:19-21; Amos 1: 11-12; 9: 13-15; Obadiah, the whole book; Malachi 1:1-5.2 Psalms 60, 137; Lamentations 4:21-22. Elie Assis, "Why Edom? On the Hostility towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 56, Fasc. 1, (Jan., 2006), pp. 1-20. Juan Manuel Tebes, "The Edomite Involvement in the Destruction of the First Temple: A Case of Stab-in-the-Back Tradition?," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol 36.2 (2011): 219-255.

²⁸ Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 BCE-70 CE)*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1988, pp. 46-76. I accept Kasher's argument that the Edomites adopted Judaism, "of their own free will and collectively" (p. 46). Cf., Steven Weitzman, "Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 92, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 37-59. Weitzman generally accepts the conclusions of Kasher and other scholars (Samuel Klein, Uriel Rappoport, Shaye Cohen), but points out that the Hasmoneans themselves had to present the conversion as forced, to uphold their religious ideology and because not all Jews liked this unification.

2.2 Biblical Characters: Why are they not perfect?

One of the main characteristics of Biblical heroes is the emphasis the text places on the shortcomings of each and every individual portrayed. Two main explanations for this literary strategy are typically presented. The *first* relates to the theological question of sharing perfection with God, and thereby deriving a measure of holiness and veneration. The fear was that presenting individuals as saints could lead to personality cults and the worship of shrines. The *second* relates to education through highlighting the wages of sin. The Bible's heroes sin and transgress mainly to allow the narrator to present the consequences — the punishments — that result from these sins. Indeed, all are punished, one way or another, "[...] for there is no man who does not sin" (1 Kings 8:46).²⁹ In other words, the Bible teaches us how to behave and the price of misbehavior.

To these two explanations from the personal sphere, we may add three further points with educational/didactic implications. For one, overly perfect role models could intimidate young people striving to follow in their footsteps. The presentation of a nation's greatest achievers — patriarchs, kings, priests — as fallible, teaches the young student that everything is possible, and that even though human beings have weaknesses, they can still achieve great things for their people. The *second point* pertains more directly to the cause of peace. The innate fallibility of all human beings allows for empathy, forgiveness and reconciliation. In fact, despite the well known biblical injunction of "an eye for an eye," Judaism, from very early on, has actually been unenthusiastic about vengeance and punishment.³⁰ The *third point* is literary: round and complex characters rooted in time and place — as in good fiction — are critical for a good story and, therefore, an effective message.³¹ Literary depth brings out the mysteriousness of God and the world, surprises the readers and makes them engage in a dialogical investigative process, looking for key words, questions and answers.³² In other words: the Jacob and Esau *saga* makes for a good read.

²⁹ Zakovitch, *Jacob*, p.11.

³⁰In fact, the legal application of this principle in Judaism and ancient Mesopotamia has been compensation: "An eye for an eye — money" (עין תחת עין - ממון); the *lex talionis* formulation simply suggests that morally money cannot correct physical assault. Elsewhere, Abraham asks God to spare Sodom and Gomorra, and Jacob's disapproval of the vengeful deeds performed in the case of Dinah. Additionally, capital punishment is seen as something that should be avoided at all costs. *Mishnah*, tractate Makkoth 1:10, *Babylonian Talmud*, Makkoth 7b.

³¹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, New York: Basic Books, 1981, pp. 28-9, 44.

³² Jonathan Cohen, "Is the Bible a Jewish Book? On the Literary Character of Biblical Narrative in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig and Leo Strauss," *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 87, No. 4 (October 2007), pp. 592-632. Rosenzweig's literary analysis of Jacob's deceit, p. 605 note 39. On the theological impact of the Biblical narrative according to Rosenzweig and Martin Buber, as precursors of Alter (above, note 31): Mara H. Benjamin, "The Tacit Agenda of a Literary Approach to the Bible," *Prooftexts*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Special Issue: Before and after *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Spring 2007), pp. 254-274. Alter, *The Art*.

3. The Saga of Jacob and Esau and the UNESCO-derived Standards

For our purposes, I generally treat the Jacob and Esau *family saga* as an indivisible canonical text, disregarding theories about its derivation.³³

Generally speaking, there is not much debate about the antiquity of the text and its largely positive attitude toward Esau, which forms the crux of our argument.³⁴ Zakovitch demonstrates that in all likelihood, the original oral tradition was much more critical of Jacob, and hence showed more understanding toward Esau, the "Other," than the text we have today.³⁵ Also, since this article aims at recommending the Jacob-Esau text for religious education today, there is little point in analyzing a host of theories that are largely irrelevant to most believers. No less important, the canonical Biblical text commands literary power and grace that should not be tampered with. The literary quality of the revealed text is essential for eliciting religious feelings and insights that unleash the educational process. In Cohen's words: "The Jewish element in the Bible—the dialogical, revelational element, that aspect that engenders the event of living speech—is to be found woven into the epic."³⁶

3.1 Esau as a Round Individual Character with Rights and Emotions³⁷

Among other goals, the Jacob *family saga* was probably fashioned to teach the Israelites about handling their relationship with the Edomites. Surprisingly, as Haller points out, the text often takes the Edomite side or narrative: "Yes, Esau-Edom is even Isaac's preferred child, not Jacob."³⁸ In Fokkelman's words, Esau "displays that much-esteemed quality that Jacob lacks so shockingly, considerateness toward his father."³⁹

³³ In a separate research project, I elaborate on the historical context of this *saga* considering at length text criticism. Probably the best introduction to Biblical Criticism is Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible*, Jerusalem: Simor, 2009. [Updated Hebrew edition, 2012]. See also, Rendtorff, *The Old Testament*. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

³⁴ Alexander Rofé, "Storia d'Israele e critica biblica," *Henoch*, 25(2003): 361-371. Jacob M. Myers, "Edom and Judah in the Sixth-Fifth Centuries B.C.," in H. Goedicke (ed.), *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, Baltimore and London, 1971, p. 377. Jacob Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," in J. Liver (ed.), *The Military History of the Land of Israel in Biblical Times* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: 1964, p. 190. For a different opinion: Bert Dicou, *The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1994.

³⁵ Zakovitch, *Jacob*, pp. 18-13. Based on *Hosea* (12:4), *Isaiah* (48:8) and *Jeremiah* (9:3), as well as a comparison of the birth of Perez and Zerah (*Genesis* 38:29, 1 *Chronicles* 2:4), twins of Tamar and Judah, to the birth Jacob Esau.

³⁶ Cohen, *Is the Bible*, p. 631.

³⁷ See above UNESCO-derived IMPACT-SE standard number II.

³⁸ *Ja, Esau-Edom ist sogar Isaaks bevorzugtes Kind, nicht Jakob*, in Max Haller, "Edom im Urteil der Propheten," in Karl Budde (ed.), *Vom Alten Testament*, Giessen: Töplemann, 1925, pp. 109-117 [109].

³⁹ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd Edition, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 1991 [1975], p. 119.

The description of Esau in the *saga* is positive, albeit not without humor, particularly when it comes to the hunter outsmarted by his brother, a mere shepherd.⁴⁰ Yet this type of light derision should be examined in the context of the Biblical presentation of the Edomites as a particularly wise people.⁴¹ It is also possible that the Edomite god, Kos or Kose, was also known to have some relation to this image of wisdom.⁴² In other words, the simpleton outsmarts his smarter brother. Besides, as pointed out by Alter, Jacob is ridiculed as well, since he is described as "innocent," although he is anything but.⁴³ Nevertheless, despite the criticism directed at Jacob and the victimhood of Esau, Jacob remains Israel's national "Self" and hence the favorite and the brother presented as peaceful. In Wellhausen's words: "Jacob is a peaceful shepherd, not only because of the idyllic form of the narrative, but in his own being and character. He forms the strongest contrast to his brother Esau, who in spite of the idyllic form is a man of war."⁴⁴ The genre is that of peace-seeking. The national "Other," Esau, is presented as a red and hairy, dynamic, passionate, emotional and impulsive hunter-warrior – but, with all that, a straightforward man of the field who is considerate to his father. This national father of Edom, the national "Other," has therefore been wronged by Jacob-Israel, the national "Self."

The Israeli audience is called upon to take note. It should extend maximum toleration to the national "Other" (wronged, emotional, warrior) and exert maximum restraint by the national "Self" (in the wrong, sophisticated, peaceful). In other words, we can already see at this early stage that the text follows the UNESCO standards. It features *respect*, describes the *individual other* in detail, displays *no hate* regardless of existing political tensions, and encourages *peace-making*. Below we will see more on the *unbiased information* category.⁴⁵ But let's turn first to the *gender* standard.⁴⁶

3.2 Women and World Peace: Rebecca's Role in Shaping Jacob's Destiny and Peace Strategies

The role of Rebecca, Jacob's mother, in writing the history of Israel is central and dramatic. The scripture tells us time and again that Jacob listens to his mother and obeys her. Respect, love and appreciation of the opinions of other women are also vital for the *saga*, in particular Jacob's love for Rachel and respect for Leah, Rachel's sister and his first wife. The story of Jacob's

⁴⁰ Gunkel, *The Legends*, p. 44

⁴¹ *I Kings*, 5:10 on the wisdom of Bnei Qedem (בני קדם). Also, the Job story, *Obadiah* 5:8, *Jeremiah* 49:7.

⁴² Haller, *Edom*, p. 110.

⁴³ Alter, *The Art*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, translated by Black and Menzies, New York: Meridian Books, 1957 [1878], pp. 318-19.

⁴⁵ See UNESCO-derived IMPACT-SE standards 1-5 in section **1.2. Methodological Grounding**.

⁴⁶ See UNESCO-derived IMPACT-SE standard 6 in section **1.2. Methodological Grounding**.

daughter Dinah also elucidates Jacob's positive attitude towards women's rights.

Jacob's love for Rachel has become the foundation of Jewish family life. The Tomb of Rachel in Ephrat, near Bethlehem, became the holiest place of supplication for generations of Jewish women. The Bible – emphasizing the critical role of love as a foundation of family life – informs us that, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (29:20). This grand love allows Jacob to overcome peacefully his disappointment when Laban – his mother Rebecca's brother – deceitfully gives him Leah, his elder daughter, instead of Rachel. However, despite this deceit, for Jacob, the centrality of the women in his value system enables him to adopt a peaceful attitude.

Moreover, Rachel embodies a mirror image of Jacob – *Jacoba* as Fokkelman calls her – since she also competes with an older sibling, Leah, and displays perseverance and ambition.⁴⁷ Both Leah and Rachel, as wives, express their own will and conduct active lives. They put pressure on Jacob, struggle with each other – but also collaborate – over their husband's love.⁴⁸ Jacob consults them with regard to leaving and returning to his homeland. The wives' voices are heard loud and clear and include an approval based on analysis of their lack of prospects for any portion or inheritance of their father's house (31:4-16). Indeed, Rachel nearly unleashes a family feud when she steals Laban's gods as the family stealthily departs for the Land of Israel (31:19, 26-35). Jacob's attitude toward women also finds expression in the case of Dinah, his daughter by Leah, who is involved in an illicit love affair with Shechem, the Canaanite prince Hamor's son. Her brothers take revenge against the family of Shechem, but Jacob condemns the violence. Moreover, Dinah herself is not punished, in contrast with current Middle Eastern honor practices (34:30). In Dinah's case, the value of peace, and implicitly women's interests, supersedes patriarchal honor.⁴⁹

There is, however, a sea of difference between Rebecca and the other female characters in this *saga*. Rebecca constitutes the pivotal point of the narrative and, similar to Sarah, serves as the female embodiment of God's will (25:23), which corresponds with attention to the needs and wishes of the people as

⁴⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, pp. 130-141.

⁴⁸ See especially the mandrakes episode, 30: 14-16, 22-23. For an exhaustive analysis of Rachel's activism: Ilana Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 60-78, 116. Pardes and Fokkelman (*Narrative Art*, p. 137) present Jacob as humiliated by his wives' control, yet this seems to be the rule, hence no humiliation. Compare God's instruction to Abraham: "in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice" (*Genesis*, 21:12). Both texts are believed to have been incorporated into the E document.

⁴⁹ Note that some scholars believe that this episode should be dated to the time of Nehemiah.

well as with curbing patriarchal rule. In Alter's words: "She is to become the shrewdest and the most potent of the matriarchs."⁵⁰

Female characters often personify the nation, the common people and the latter's earthly day-to-day concerns.⁵¹ Male characters often represent the ruler or the abstract moral ideas of the patriarchal order that require war and sacrifice. These Biblical stories should teach our students to heed their mothers and sisters, respect and obey them, to be attentive to the needs of the people around them, to always seek harmony and to find peaceful solutions to crises.⁵²

Jacob's career as the father of the Jewish nation begins with his mother Rebecca receiving God's revelation at an early stage of her pregnancy: "And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb [...] and the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). Rebecca assumes the mission of fulfilling the prophecy and assigning the proper roles to her twin-boys. Furthermore, she succeeds in changing the course of the saga without bloodshed.

27:5 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it.

27:6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, 27:7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death.

27:8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee.

[...]

27:13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them.

27:14 And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved.

⁵⁰ Alter, *The Art*, p. 54. And yet, Sarah represents independent will supported by God.

⁵¹ Eldad J. Pardo, "Iranian Cinema, 1968-1978: Female Characters and Social Dilemmas on the Eve of the Revolution," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 3 (2004): 29-54, especially p. 30, notes 4,5. Young boy characters can also personify the nation in young nations. Hence, **the** Israeli nation in the Pentateuch is presented as the child of God, but **in** the time of Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel the people is metaphorized as God's adopted daughter, a bride and an unfaithful wife, and again as a child forgiven. In the Midrash, God is metaphorized as Rachel, the wife hurt by Jacob-Israel. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, 9-36. See also the modern Israeli caricature character Srulik (Little Israel, שרוליק), by Kariel Gardosh (Dosh), and the Palestinian Hanzala (حفظلة), by caricaturist Najji Ali, who also created a less famous mother nation, Fatimah (فاطمة المرأة الوطن). In modern Israel too, female personification for the nation/land exists, although no particular character, to my knowledge, is paramount. Listen to Yankele Rotblit and Shmulik Kraus' 1994 "Are you at Peace?" (*ha-shalom lakh?*).

⁵² Female personifications of the nation, homeland and freedom, also serve the purpose of enlisting men to fight to defend that female (see: Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 28 July 1830). This is clearly not the case here.

27:15 And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son: 27:16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: 27:17 And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

Rebecca emerges from this description as a top notch strategist and a compelling leader: "Obey my voice." She takes responsibility for cutting corners: "Upon me be thy curse." She is also extremely quick and efficient, as evinced by the rapid chain of verbs in the text, here and elsewhere, when time is of the essence.⁵³ She listens, plans, gives orders and acts herself.

Fuchs argues that Biblical women are characterized as deceptive, which "perpetuates the subordination of women based on their alleged moral deficiency."⁵⁴ Yet her three valid examples – Rebecca, Ruth and Esther, and one could add Tamar as well – suggest that Biblical women's activism, deception included, solves cardinal problems and demonstrates that "the divinely appointed process of election cannot be thwarted by human will and social convention."⁵⁵

Intriguing indeed are Rebecca's keen perception and swift action. First to see Esau's rage, she forcefully takes command of the situation and sends Jacob away in order to save both her children from a bloody confrontation, "obey my voice; arise, flee ":

27:43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; 27:44 And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; 27:45 Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?

Again we see the same resolve: "Obey my voice." Interestingly, Isaac cannot fathom the possibility of an inclusive blessing. He tells Esau that he had already given the blessing to Jacob, making all the brothers his slaves.

27:37 And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants

Esau then cries out asking for another blessing:

27:38 And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

⁵³ Alter, *The Art*, pp. 53-54.

⁵⁴ Esther Fuchs, "Who is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins. Chico Cal.: Scholars Press, 1985, 137-144, 143.

⁵⁵ Alter, *The Art*, p. 10.

In other words, Esau unknowingly adopts Rebecca's attitude of loving both children and asks why should there be only one blessing? Indeed, Isaac finally accepts Rebecca's logic and gives the blessing to Esau as well:

27:39 And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;

27:40 And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

Still, as can be seen here, Isaac's logic does not include permanent and true peace, reconciliation and shared love of God, and hence love of each other, and he predicts that Esau will live by the sword and "break Jacob's yoke."

Jews and Israelis throughout most of their people's 3,500 plus year history have opted for peace – and for millennia even pacifism – over war and military struggle. As can be seen in the Biblical narrative, Esau also gradually internalizes the wisdom of peace through generosity. He first sells his birthright to Jacob, and then, although angry and sad at the loss of Isaac's first-born blessing, he still manages to extract from his father a magnanimous compensatory blessing for himself. Esau's move is not unlike that of Jacob, who overcomes his disappointment at not receiving Rachel by pressing head on for more hard work and commitment until he does. Later Esau will complete the reconciliation with his brother Jacob, signaling for generations of Jewish readers that war is indeed unnecessary. God's will, as encapsulated in Rebecca's action, demands that each people and each individual find their own destiny, prosperity and spiritual mission.

The text, however, clarifies that men, as opposed to women, are typically very late in understanding God's infinite wisdom. Jacob, who is closer to his mother, realizes the consequences of a conflict. Esau, who is closer to his father, sees the world in black and white terms and commits himself to killing his brother (27:41).

The Holy Scripture is unequivocal about this point: Rebecca's vision becomes the advice of both parents and the scripture tells us that Jacob obeyed both his father and his mother:

28:7 And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padanaram.

A brief comparison of the woman's role in this *family saga* and two other *sagas*, in fact tragedies, one from the Greek mythology and the other from Shiite martyrology, is enlightening. Rebecca is the enabler of the people's wish against the patriarchy, without bloodshed and martyrdom. This is not surprising. We know that women characters often represent family or the

nation, with their earthly human aspects, particularly life, while strong males personify heavenly patriarchal ideals that require sacrifice and killing.

In Sophocles' play, *Antigone* (Ἀντιγόνη), the main character, the young woman Antigone, also acts in the name of family and the popular will.⁵⁶ In the name of these values, Antigone breaches the order of King Creon and buries the body of her brother Polynices. Creon, who intends to execute Antigone for defying his orders, personifies state ideals and patriarchal order. The play ends in tragedy as Antigone and her fiancé commit suicide. Antigone dies for challenging the patriarchal order and for trying to make the wishes of the people happen.

Similarly, in Iranian-Shiite passion plays on the martyrdom of Imam Hossein (*ta'ziyeh*, تعزیه), the women at Karbala try to keep the Imam alive. Zeynab, Imam Hossein's sister, beseeches the Imam to have pity on the family, and not to go all the way to martyrdom, but he does not heed her call. In these plays, Hossein represents the patriarchal order and its demand that he be martyred for the sake of the believers.⁵⁷

This short comparison helps to illuminate the role of Rebecca. Just like Antigone and Zeynab, she challenges the patriarchal order: Isaac, the *paterfamilias*, decides that the blessing should go to his beloved elder son, Esau. Rebecca – representing both the Israelite audience and God – differs. Unlike the heroines of the Greek tragedy and Iranian Passion plays, this Biblical heroine succeeds in challenging the patriarchy, winning her case and also nipping violence in the bud by sending Jacob away. Rebecca serves as a powerful educational tool for peaceful change.

3.3 Service, Loyalty and Economic Initiative

A relatively new UNESCO/IMPACT-SE standard pertains to the challenge of providing a responsible, sustainable and environmentally-friendly economic education.⁵⁸ Collaboration and global networking forms part of this standard. Together with economic and environmental issues, fostering self-reliance and international collaboration could facilitate spiritual growth, making hatemongering inconsequential. The Jacob-Esau Biblical *family saga* approaches this challenge on three levels: hard work, collaboration-globalism and nature-sensitive economic ingenuity. All three characterized Jewish

⁵⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone, Oedipus the King, Electra*, translated by H.D.F Kitto and edited by Edith Hall, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 1-46.

⁵⁷ Sadeq Homayuni, *Taziye in Iran*, 2nd Edition, Shiraz: Navid, 1380/2001 (in Persian), Charles Virolleaud, *Le Theatre Persan ou Le Drame de Kerbéla*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1950. Enrico Fulchignoni, "Quelques considerations comparatives entre les rituels du Ta'ziyeh iranien at les "Spectacles de la Passion" du Moyen-age chrétien en Occident," in *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, edited by Peter J. Chelkowski, 131-136. New York: New York University Press, 1979.

⁵⁸ See UNESCO-derived IMPACT-SE standard 7 in section **1.2. Methodological Grounding**.

experience over the past three millennia, further testimony to the extremely powerful effect of religious education.

On his way from the Land of Israel toward Haran, in today's Northern Syria or Southern Turkey, Jacob sees in a dream "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (28:12). While the legendary *Jacob's Dream* is rife with meaning, for our purposes it suffices to show that any spiritual growth must "be set up on the earth." For a more spiritual and peaceful future to be realized, down-to-earth economic responsibility is vital. Economic responsibility, as displayed later on in this *saga*, suggests hard work and self-reliance.

But *Jacob's Dream* also stresses a permanent contribution by Israel to other nations:

28:14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

The lesson for every child learning this paragraph is therefore that his people shall serve as a source of blessing for all the families of the earth.

Certainly, Jacob's attitude to life is one of energy and hard work. In his first meeting with Rachel, "[H]e has an obstacle to overcome—the stone on the mouth of the well... the man who seizes his fate, tackles his adversaries, with his own two hands."⁵⁹

Throughout his stay with Laban, for twenty years, Jacob will work hard. The metaphor for this hard work and hard life is that of the stone. A deeper reading reveals that "Jacob is a man who sleeps on stones, speaks in stones, wrestles with stones, contending with the hard unyielding nature of things."⁶⁰ The prophecy "and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" begins to materialize when Jacob works for Laban, his uncle who lives in faraway Haran. When, after 14 years of work, Jacob expresses a wish to return home, Laban asks him to stay longer because of his economic success.

30:27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

We later learn that Jacob uses ingenuity, along with hard work, to make the herds grow. His knowledge and attentiveness to nature and its ways allow him to strike a better deal for his future working years and make his own share

⁵⁹ Alter, *The Art*, p. 55.

⁶⁰ Alter, *The Art*, p. 55, rephrasing an argument by Fokkelman.

larger too. Hence, the text teaches us that self-reliance requires hard work and ingenuity as well readiness for collaboration and giving.

Joseph, Jacob's preferred son, becomes the visionary economic savior of Egypt, and the precursor of many prominent Jews in economic life throughout history. Jacob and Joseph serve as role models for economic, interfaith and international wisdom and collaboration, environmental sensitivity and sustainability at home and abroad. Combining responsible self-reliance with significant contribution to the prosperity of the "Other" constitutes an important key to peace education.

3.4 Conflict Resolution and Recognition of the Other: Jacob vs. Laban

Jacob's inclination to avoid conflict runs like a *leitmotif* throughout his Biblical biography. Even when the will of God is at stake or when justice is clearly on his side, Jacob tries to avoid confrontation. Instead of fighting his twin brother, he buys his way out or follows the instructions of his mother, including the one to flee. Instead of demanding that Laban fulfill his side of the bargain and give him Rachel's hand as agreed, Jacob chooses a compromise. The Rabbis, particularly Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi ("Rashi," 1040–1105), believe that Jacob was aware of Laban's duplicity from day one. Therefore, he specified in great detail which of the two sisters he wished to marry. The Holy Scripture tells us the following.

29:18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

The Rabbis argue that the extremely detailed specification, that includes the name Rachel and the fact that she is Laban's younger daughter, suggests legal caution on Jacob's part. The expression "for Rachel thy younger daughter (בְּרַחֵל לְבִתְךָ הַקְּטָנָה)" is widespread in Hebrew and conveys the meaning of an explicit clause in a contract. Still, if one follows the Biblical narrative, one cannot but be puzzled by the way Jacob succumbs to his fate. He simply agrees to work seven more years for free.

How can one explain Jacob's acceptance of Laban's deceit? Esau when deceived bursts out in fury and threatens to kill his brother. Jacob, however, acquiesces. One answer is love; Jacob wants Rachel. But, there is another explanation: what goes around comes around. Jacob cunningly snatched from Esau his birthright and blessing, albeit according to God's master-plan and Rebecca's leadership. Now, "Jacob, master-deceiver, has found his master."⁶¹ Here, we can appreciate the Bible's inclusion of human weaknesses and the capacity to change and develop. Jacob's awareness of his own deceit makes him tolerant of that in others. Awareness of individual flaws makes Jacob mature and patient; therefore, in a sense, recognition of human flaws holds

⁶¹ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, p. 129.

the key to compromise and peace. Justice does not lie solely with one party. All are fallible. And although sins are punishable, Jacob, unlike Esau, does not even consider revenge. In the interests of peace, he swallows his pride and moves on to many more years of hard work.

Another conflict with Laban almost erupts when Jacob and his family steal away one day for the Land of Israel. An enraged Laban pursues and catches up to them and calls upon Jacob to explain himself.

31:31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me.

Typically, Jacob first moves rapidly and energetically but then opts for humility to keep the peace. His main argument to justify himself is his hard work in the service of his host.

31:38 This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.

31:39 That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night.

31:40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

31:41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

31:42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

Jacob speaks about the God of Abraham. Not about *the one* God. We have to bear in mind that the religious environment was polytheistic. People believed in many gods. The process of the emergence of the one God was slow and therefore, when speaking to people outside the religion, Jacob adopts a moderate stance, thanking the specific God who helped him.

The Biblical story shows us that even in a pre-monotheistic environment, the belief in the presence of the Divine, leads people to peaceful resolution of conflicts. This section teaches us that conflict resolution tactics such as finding the religious common denominator, self-awareness, patience and hard work are all important elements in peacemaking, underlining the educational value of the text.

3.5 Conflict Resolution and a New Attitude towards God: Jacob vs. Esau

3.5.1 Roots of the Conflict

Peace education standards require imparting conflict resolution and peacemaking skills to the students.⁶² The Biblical text provides a great deal of detail about the "Other," such as Esau's character, profession, suffering, frustration and success as well as his family and Edomite descendants' fate and achievements. Most importantly, Jacob never appears as the perfect party beyond reproach. He is only the second son and his brother is good looking, sophisticated and loved by their father.

25:26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob

[...]

25:27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

25:28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Then we learn that Jacob deceived his brother twice. The story of stealing, first the birthright and then the blessing, is presented to us as the will of God. Still, our heart goes out to the "Other," even if we identify with our forefather:

27:38 And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

This heart-wrenching story explains to the readers that the enemy has good reason for holding a grudge. Yet, it also teaches the danger inherent in this situation:

27:41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

If we consider the Biblical narrative as an educational text, we learn that originally God's wish is for Jacob to prevail so that the people of Israel can receive His blessing. God promised to stay with the people, "I am with thee" (18:15), and this is how things should be. We also learn that the goal does not justify the means and, therefore, Jacob and the people of Israel, while being the blessed ones, are not automatically exempt from the consequences of actions taken against someone else – a brother – in order to fulfill God's will.⁶³ This manner of presenting history encourages students to protect their rights,

⁶² See UNESCO-derived IMPACT-SE standards 4, 5 and 7 in section **1.2. Methodological Grounding**.

⁶³ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, p. 118.

but also to understand that others have rights and grievances too. The challenge then is how to reconcile the conflicting interests and hurt feelings. The first step is to be aware of the problem in order to forestall possible violence. In this *family saga*, it appears that Jacob is well aware of the challenge he faces.

In other words, education for national-religious identity and preference of one's own nation-religion do not contradict education for peace, understanding the other and conflict resolution.

3.5.2 Facing the Conflict

As we have seen earlier, Jacob follows Rebecca's advice and chooses peace first. After actively fulfilling God's wish to appropriate the birthright and Isaac's blessing, and knowing all too well that Esau may kill him, Jacob flees to Haran. The idea of attacking his would-be-killer brother never crosses his mind. He follows Rebecca's instructions to take a short break and put some distance between him and his brother. Violence is nipped in the bud, but unfinished business remains lurking in the dark. Twenty years later – after much suffering and effort – a vulnerable Jacob slowly moves towards the Land of Israel, and, at the gates, has an unavoidable encounter with his brother. Although physically strong, he is burdened with the care of a large family that includes four women and many children, as well as large herds of sheep and cattle. The "short break" is over and Jacob must confront Esau, heading an army of 400 men. What to do? Rebecca is no longer at Jacob's side. Nobody in the family is as wise, trustworthy and powerful as Rebecca was. He must face his destiny alone.

32:24 And Jacob was left alone.

In a few sentences, the Hebrew Bible presents how an extremely complicated conflict-resolution process was achieved. Energetic and pragmatic as usual, Jacob devises a plan that includes three tracks simultaneously: Prayer-Gift-Security. The plan works extremely well, but as it unfolds, we discover that it covers only one aspect of what actually took place; the pragmatic active dimension. A serious conflict resolution, according to the Bible, must embrace a spiritual dimension as well. This, in turn, comprises two levels, (a) a struggle with God and (b) remorse-apology. Let us now turn to this 3+2 Biblical structure for peace among the nations that combines an earthly plan and a spiritual journey.

3.5.3 Jacob's Pragmatic 3-Track Plan: Prayer-Gift-Security

Jacob's plan includes three tracks of action to be prepared simultaneously and implemented in a consecutive manner: *Prayer-Gift-Security*.⁶⁴ The first track is *prayer*. Understanding that the problem with Esau emanates from God's wish to have Jacob as the father of the people of Israel, Jacob returns to God pleading for help.

32:11 Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.

⁶⁴ In Jewish tradition, Jacob's 3-track peace plan is known as Prayer-Gift-War (*tefilah, doron, milhamah*; תפילה, דורון, מלחמה). What our *family saga* actually describes is far from being a war; rather, the text pictures precautions taken with the aim of saving a few lives. In other words, war here means *flight*... No plan is conceived that involves resistance or responding in kind to violence. It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the multitude of interpretations given in Jewish tradition through the ages to this critical episode in war and peace. A few points are in order: everyone agrees that the episode relates to saving the peaceful weak (Israel) from the violent powerful (Esau as a metaphor for Israel's enemies); "In any frontal confrontation between Esau and Jacob, it will take a miracle to save Jacob." (below, *Navon*, p.129). The debate begins with *Old Midrash Tanhuma* (Buber edition, 1885) *Vayishlach* 6 (believed to be composed before the 5th Century), "Prepared himself to three things, to a prayer, a gift and a war." Rashi (Rabbi Shlomi Yitzhaqi, 1040-1105) changes the order, "Prepared himself to three things, to a gift, a prayer, and a war" (Quoted in *Porath*, below). In other words, Rashi argues that action for peace should precede prayer to God. There should be no hesitation about it and, indeed, how can one face one's creator when neglecting one's commitment to peace. As to the other pragmatic avenue, preparing for a war; in this case, one can deduce from Rashi, prayer comes first. Rabbi Yitzhak Arama (15th century) explains that without effort there is no benefit in prayer and hence the change of the order of things (quotation in *Porath*, below). In the writing of Sages from the *Hazal* (Hebrew, חז"ל, acronym for "Our Sages, may their memory be blessed") period (circa 200 BCE-600 BC), Jacob is criticized for humiliating himself (Rav Huna, *Genesis Rabba*; 75, B) presenting himself as Esau's slave (Hebrew, *avdekha*, עבדך, your slave), "Thy servant Jacob saith thus" (32:4). Nahmanides (Rabbi Moshe Ben Nahman, 1194-1270) explains that this criticism was directed towards policies during the 2nd Temple period aimed at establishing an alliance with Rome, the global superpower that ended up destroying the Temple and scattering the remnants of Israel. Two views also emerged as regards Esau's conduct: can peace overtures by implacable enemies be trusted? In Nehama Leibowitz's words, "an optimistic one, that saw a revolutionary change for the better, and a pessimistic one that detected the old Esau behind it." She quotes Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) who believed that weeping cannot be artificial and hence, sincere. Namely, modern 19th Century Europe (Esau) has finally become civilized and humane. Leibowitz comments: "We shall not quarrel with Hirsch who didn't know what we know today about the sword turning into Holocaust and not love." Mois A. Navon, "The Kiss of Esau," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 35 (2007), No. 2, pp. 127-131. Hanan Porath, "Prayer, Gift, and War: What Comes First, Why?" (Hebrew), 2006, www.tora.co.il/parasha/meat/vayislach_66.doc. Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit (Genesis) in the Context of Ancient and Modern Jewish Bible Commentary*, translated by Aryeh Newman, Jerusalem: Joint Authority for Jewish Education, 1993. Leibowitz's Direct quotations: <http://www.jafi.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Compelling+Content/Jewish+Time/Jewish+Sources/Iyunum/Parashat+VaYishlach.htm>.

In tandem with his prayer to God, Jacob prepares an enormous *gift* for Esau. Wisely, the gift – a generous assortment of cattle, sheep and camels⁶⁵ – is sent to Esau drove after drove, with messages of peace attached to each of the deliveries.

32:17 And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? 32:18 Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us.

32:19 And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him.

Finally Jacob takes *security* measures and prepares his family for a war situation dividing them into two camps in order to minimize casualties if violence erupts.

he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 32:8 And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.

Moreover, for extra security, Jacob oversees a retreat on the critical night – sending his family back beyond the river – and remaining alone.

32:22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok.

32:23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had.

This rapid retreat suggests that Jacob is not satisfied with pragmatic preparations. He feels his sophisticated 3-Track Plan of *Prayer-Gift-Security* does not cover all bases. Something needs to be fixed at the core of the conflict.

3.5.4 Jacob's Spiritual Journey: A Struggle with God and Apology

The core of the drama of the encounter between Esau and Jacob lies in the conflict between family and human values on the one hand, and God's will on the other. This archetypal conflict explains the turmoil in Jacob's mind. If we follow family and general human values, then what Jacob did to Esau is wrong. Yet, if we follow God's logic, as perceived by Jacob and his mother, what he did was right. The Divine oracle was there from birth. Now he has to face Esau. What should he tell him? Apologizing means admitting that the will of God amounts to a personal whim. How can one apologize for doing God's bidding?

⁶⁵ Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals (32: 14-15).

Not apologizing is not an option, either. He wronged his brother and this is something that cannot be denied. But then again an apology means carrying a heavy burden of guilt and facing the consequences.

The text simply tells us:

32:7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.

Jacob is afraid and distressed. The solution provided by the Hebrew Bible is astounding. Jacob turns against God and struggles against his angel throughout the night. In his great distress and his quest to apologize and find peace with his brother, Jacob finds himself fighting with God. No more prayer, now it is a fight.

32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

32:25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

32:26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

32:27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob.

32:28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

32:29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.

32:30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

As the struggle with God is over, Jacob becomes Israel. The Bible explains that the meaning of Israel is the one who struggled with people and with God (-יְיִשְׂרָאֵל). Linguists tell us that the meaning of the word is actually that "God will rule" (ישור אל). Both versions complement each other: for God to rule, people must have freedom of choice. Human beings must choose God. In Jacob-Israel's case, the struggle with God makes Jacob independent of the deity, obeying God out of free will. The God he struggles with is the God that was supposed to assume responsibility for Jacob's actions as the latter had no free will.

Jacob-Israel can now take responsibility for his actions against Esau performed on God's orders. Once Jacob is independent, he becomes personally responsible for actions taken in fulfilling God's will. Jacob can now apologize whole-heartedly to Esau and a happy ending ensues. Tragedy is avoided. The woman's voice is translated into personal and national transformation. Nobody dies.

4 Summary and Conclusions: Combining Religious and Humanistic Values

Human beings, the Biblical *family saga* of Jacob and Esau teaches, cannot justify wrongdoing by claiming to be acting in the name of God's revealed wish. All human actions must be judged according to universal standards. These standards – as one can deduce from the *IMPACT-SE* UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education – are the result of a millennia-old process of human observation that is largely based on revealed wisdom in the various civilizations. Therefore, if religious education is to respect the message of the Holy Bible, it must abide by international standards for peace and tolerance in school education.

The Patriarchs lived sometime during the second millennium BCE, and perhaps even earlier. The *family saga* of Jacob and Esau came later, in the first half of the first millennium, suggesting that the story served for centuries as an educational tool in ancient Israel to explain the complicated relations between the two neighboring peoples, Edom and Israel. It has served for millennia as paradigm for peace and reconciliation. Biblical scholars agree that the Genesis stories – particularly the Jacob and Esau *family saga* – are peaceful and portray an image of Edom that is generally positive. We monitored the *family saga* according to the *IMPACT-SE Methodology* and found that, indeed, the *saga* fully conforms to the UNESCO-derived standards for peace and tolerance in school education.

In other words, the Jacob and Esau *family saga* teaches RESPECT for the other, treats the "Other" as an INDIVIDUAL, espouses NO HATE, teaches PEACEMAKING, provides UNBIASED INFORMATION about the conflict that includes criticism on one's "national self," is GENDER sensitive and is aware of women's critical role in peace. Finally, the Biblical *saga* educates for sound economic development through ingenuity, hard work and deep understanding of nature and the environment.

The *IMPACT-SE Methodology*, here applied, has also confirmed the conclusions of Biblical and literary scholars as regards the dominant role of female figures in Biblical *family sagas*. We compared the role of Rebecca and other figures in the *saga* with that of women in two other genres, the Iranian *Ta'ziyeh* passion plays and ancient Greek tragedy. We found the role of Rebecca to be unique, being both an enabler of God's will and a *universal guardian of peace*. Combining the interests of the common people with the will of God against the Patriarchal order, she enables the *saga* to move ahead smoothly; no tragedy or bloodshed occurs.

Instead, the Jacob and Esau *family saga* culminates in an emotional reconciliation, "And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his

neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (33:4). The religious significance of this reconciliation is profound. In Jacob's words to Esau, "I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me." (33:10) Jacob – now Israel – sees God in Esau's face. Thus, the Jacob-Esau story teaches that God looks at us from our brother's face.