

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayishlach 5784

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Yaakov is about to meet Eisav and Yaakov davens to Hashem.

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת-עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן
הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הִיִּיתִי לְשָׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

“And I am reduced from all the kindness and all the truth that You made for your servant. Because with my staff I crossed this Yarden River and now I am in two camps.” (Bereishis 32:11).

How is Yaakov saying he is reduced when he has two camps? He is about to loads of animals to Eisav so how can he feel small? If Hashem has done the kindnesses and truth then Yaakov should feel secure. What is the significance of the staff crossing the Yarden River?

When one davens to Hashem, he is allowed to summon up all his fears and quandaries. It is an act of faith to put these doubts before Hashem. Yaakov, though, has no reason to fear. Hashem told him to leave Aram by saying “I will be with you.” (Ibid 31:3). Hashem said further, “I am the Lord of Beis El, that you anointed there a monument and you swore to Me a vow.” (Ibid 31:13). This episode of Beis El occurred when Yaakov left his parents and headed toward Aram. Yaakov anointed the monument there. “Anointing” is done by pouring oil on the place or person. Moshe was instructed to anoint the kohanim (Shmos 28:41) and he poured oil on them (ibid 29:2). Shmuel was instructed to anoint Shaul (Shmuel I 9:16) and he did so by pouring oil on his head (ibid 10:1). “Yaakov arose early the next morning, and he took a stone that was there and placed it on the head [of the mizbeach], placing there a monument, and he poured oil on its top.” (Bereishis 28:18). He found the mizbeach that Avraham erected when he came to Eretz Canaan and where he offered up a ram instead of his son, Yitzchok. Yaakov placed another stone, erecting a monument, and anointed it with oil.

At that place Hashem made him a promise that his descendants will spread out all over the world and “I am with you, I will protect you, wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this Land.” (Ibid 28:14-15). Yaakov then made a vow. “If the Lord remains with me, protecting me on this journey that I am making ... and returns me in peace to the house of my father, then Hashem is to me the Lord.” (Ibid 28:21). This is what Hashem was referring to when He told Yaakov to return to Yitzchok’s house.

Therefore, it is strange that Yaakov felt reduced. He had twelve children, enough animals to spare five hundred and fifty of them to send to Eisav, and he was able to divide his family into two camps. Where is the reduction? Why did he feel inferior?

The key is where Eisav was. “וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל-עשו אחיו ארצה שעיר שגדה אדום:” And Yaakov sent messengers before him to Eisav his brother, to the land of Seir, the fields of Edom.” (Ibid 32:4). Eisav was already in Seir. “And Eisav took all his wives,

daughters...and all the property that he acquired in Eretz Canaan, and went to the land because of Yaakov, his brother.” (Ibid 36:6). The Torah goes on to explain that the land could not support both of their possessions so Eisav moved out and went to Seir. (Ibid 36:6). This is confusing because Eisav seemed to move to Seir because he and Yaakov were both wealthy, yet Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav in Seir – indicating Eisav moved to Seir while Yaakov was away in Aram-Naharayim.

The clarity is in Eisav’s dispute with Yaakov. After Eisav purchased the food from Yaakov while feeling faint and almost dying – Eisav most likely suffered from hypoglycemia or a similar condition rectified by a stew of carbohydrase – the Torah says, וַיִּבְזֶה אֶת-הַבְּכֹרָה “and he was unsatisfied from the primogeniture.” (Ibid 25:34). The word “vayivez” / “unsatisfied” is only one other place in Tanakh. “It was unsatisfactory in Haman’s eyes to only destroy Mordechai himself, because it was told to him Mordechai’s nation.” (Esther 3:6). It means a lack of satisfaction. Eisav found the *bechora* lacking after Yaakov also took the brochos. “Was his name to be Yaakov so he can supplant me these two times?” (Ibid 27:36). Eisav knew that Yitzchok, the younger, inherited Avraham. The older was not always the inheritor. Yehuda, Yoseph, Ephraim, Kehas, Amram, Moshe, Eliezer, on and on, younger brothers inherited positions and power. Eisav figured he still could inherit Yitzchok or at least take half. However, Yaakov took it all. Still, Eisav became wealthy from the Land of Canaan. (Ibid 36:6). Yet, he felt compelled to leave it, because of Yaakov’s wealth. What wealth?

Eisav understood that Yaakov would inherit Eretz Canaan and become very wealthy. He preemptively left. It was at this point that Eisav “was unsatisfied” with the primogeniture. It gave him neither wealth nor inheritance. He took his own wealth from the land. Now that Yaakov was returning to Eretz Canaan he picked up and left for Seir.

This context gives understanding to Yaakov’s tefillah. Yaakov divided his camp in two out of fright. (Ibid 32:8). Despite his wealth and success in Aram he still feared Lavan (ibid 31:31) and he feared Eisav and his four hundred men (ibid 32:7). The two camps defense indicated how little he was. At first, Yaakov sent messengers with a verbal message. (Ibid 32:5). It was only after hearing that Eisav was now leaving Seir to meet Yaakov with an army that Yaakov sent the actual gifts. Yaakov thought Eisav was in Seir and that meant he would arrive at his father’s house in peace. However, upon hearing Eisav “invading” Eretz Canaan and across the Yarden, Yaakov realized how small he really was. He said, “Lord of my father Avraham and my father Yitzchok” and then calls out to “Hashem, who said to me to return.” (Ibid 32:10). Yaakov was fulfilling his promise and acknowledging “Hashem” as his Lord. He was reminding Hashem, I am still small, weak, and few, I have not yet settled Canaan, I have not had children that cover the earth, and my brother – while he seemed to yield to me – has now invaded my lands. “You said, ‘I will deal bountifully with you, make your offspring like the sands of the sea.’” (Ibid 32:13). Yaakov was accepting Hashem upon himself and asking Hashem to fulfill the promise.

The staff hints that in history a man with a staff will cross the Yarden to give Yaakov’s children this land. The staff went from Yaakov to Moshe to Yehoshua to fulfill that promise.