

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayishlach 5785

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Yaakov braces to meet Esav and is surprised.

וַיִּשָׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹשֶׂו בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיִּחַץ אֶת-הַיְלָדִים עַל-
לֵאָה וְעַל-רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשִּׁפְחֹת:

“And Yaakov raised his eyes and he saw, behold! Eisav was coming, and with him was four hundred men. And he divided his children upon Leah and upon Rochel, and upon the two maidservants.” (Bereishis 33:1).

Why did the Torah say Yaakov raised his eyes? There is no break from the previous segment and the Torah does not usually specify a pronoun unless it is confusing. Also, why was it a surprise that Eisav was coming with four hundred men; didn't the messengers report that back to him already? And didn't Yaakov already divide his family previously?

Upon traveling south, even as he traveled with his retinue on the Transjordan, Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav. These messengers were empty handed but they came with word from Yaakov. (Ibid 32:6). They returned to Yaakov and informed him that Eisav is actually on the way to Yaakov and is coming with four hundred men. (Ibid 32:7). The wording is: וְאַרְבַּע-מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ “And four hundred men are with him.” This wording means that four hundred men are coming along with Eisav. These men, though, are not bound to Eisav by anything more than money. However, later, Yaakov sees that וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ “with him are four hundred men.” These men are attached to Eisav. They are more than just hired hands; they are coming with the same purpose that Eisav is coming.

Yaakov divided his entire party into two camps. (Ibid 32:8). At this point he thinks Eisav is coming with his four hundred hired men to attack him. Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav to see if Eisav still had a grudge against him. Would Eisav stay in Seir as Yaakov entered his promised land, Canaan? The messengers returned stating that Eisav already knew Yaakov was returning and was coming to greet him. Yaakov thought there was only one explanation. He actually was bringing these four hundred men to Charan to kill Yaakov in Charan. Now they would meet on the road instead.

Next, Yaakov davens to Hashem, asking that Hashem fulfill the promise that Yaakov will become a great nation and his children will be the rulers of the Land of Canaan. (Ibid 32:13). Then he stays over “that night” and then begins to send presents to Eisav. בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא “That night” in the Torah often means Pesach night. The good report was told to Avraham and that night Lot was saved from destruction. The pasuk says “that night.” (Ibid 19:35). Hashem appeared to Yitzchok “that night” on Pesach, promising him the brochos of Avraham. (Ibid 26:24). This was Pesach night and history was on the line.

“And he rose that same night, and he took his two wives and two maidservants, and his eleven children, and they passed the ford of the Yabbok.” (Ibid 32:23). That night,

in history too, Pharaoh got up, (Shmos 12:30). They got up about midnight with purpose. Yaakov at that time felt alone. The heavenly angels that he met when he left Lavan (Bereishis 32:2) were either not with him or he did not feel their presence. The pasuk can also be read: and “Yaakov” was left alone. When the nation is “House of Yaakov” or referred to as Yaakov, that means each individual tribe is by itself. Yaakov stands alone. However, Yisroel, Klal Yisroel, Beis Yisroel, and Bnei Yisroel, all refer to the nation as a whole; together. On that Pesach night, the historical night of Redemption, Yaakov was to be left alone, but saved anew. Hashem was going to prove to Yaakov that from then forward he will be a great nation. This could not be said of Avraham – who had to leave Yishmael behind – and of Yitzchok – who had to leave Eisav out. However, Yaakov was to be alone and he was about to turn into the father of Yisroel.

At his most vulnerable, at night and without protection, one of Eisav’s men approached and tried to kill Yaakov. (Ibid 32:25). Yaakov prevailed. (Ibid 32:26). The man promised that Yaakov will get another name. (Ibid 32:29). The promise was made because: *כי גם ישראֵל כִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעַם־אֲנֹשִׁים וְתוֹכֵל:* “Because [you are] also Yisroel, because you are a prince with the Lord and with men you prevail.” (Ibid). Yaakov was the blessed of Hashem. He was a prince of the Lord just as Bnei Ches called Avraham. (Ibid 23:6). Yaakov also prevailed over his father, Eisav, and Lavan. Now he prevailed against this man, too. Yaakov named the place after he came “face to face” with the Lord. He saw Hashem’s hashgacha pratis. He now saw he was not just to be Yaakov, the father of eleven sons, but his children will be a nation and a people. He no longer needed to feel alone.

Yaakov fully expected this man to report back to Eisav and the entire episode to be done with. However, Yaakov then raised his eyes. That new Yaakov that now understood his destiny, raised his eyes and “Behold! Eisav was coming and he had with him four hundred men.” Defeating Eisav’s man did not help and the gifts did not stop Eisav, either. Yaakov, though, was no longer running. They were just men. Yaakov understood he would overcome whatever danger he faced. This time, he did not fear. He was surprised that Eisav was still coming; and that the entourage were all loyal men. Originally, he had made a division and an escape plan. But Yaakov thought it was all over and done with. As the sun rose and he looked at the horizon, he saw what he had perceived to be the danger.

He divided his family. Originally “Yaakov feared greatly, and he trembled, and he divided his people that were with him, along with the flock, herds, and camels, into two camps.” (Ibid 32:8). He did not divide his family at the time. He figured, Eisav would attack one camp and the rest would survive. He would send himself and his family with whichever camp was not being attacked. However, now he realized two things. First, Eisav was within eyesight. Meaning, it was too late to send one camp in one direction and the other in another direction. Eisav was too close. Yaakov thought he had time and the messenger scouts would tell him from which way Eisav was approaching. Second, now Yaakov divided his family. This was no escape plan. This was now a scheme of how to greet his brother. They were divided by status. Yaakov no longer feared. That Yaakov was left alone by the Yabbok. This Yaakov walked out ahead to greet his brother.