



Parshas Vayishlach 2020, the human dilemma

This week's Parsha Perspective is dedicated in memory of Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yosef Ben Zev Wolf. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with Ya'akov Avinu returning home to Cana'an after over twenty years of absence. Still fearful of Esav, Ya'akov sent messengers to him a message of reconciliation. However, they returned with a grim report: Esav was preparing to “greet him” with 400 men.

In response, Ya'akov sent him an extravagant gift of hundreds of cattle, donkeys, and camels. He split his family into two camps, so if one was attacked, the other could escape, and then he turned to G-d to pray.

The night before he met with Esav, he moved his family and belongings across the Yabok River. After everyone had crossed except for him, Ya'akov met Esav's angel.

They started to wrestle and fought until dawn, when the angel wanted to go. But Ya'akov refused to let him go until he blessed him, so the angel gave Ya'akov a new name, Yisrael, the prince of G-d.

However, a question comes to mind: When the messengers returned with the grim report that Esav had an army with him, Ya'akov became extraordinarily fearful and distressed. The Pasuk writes (32:8), *“Ya'akov was greatly afraid and frightened, so he divided the people and his flocks of animals into two camps.”*

Why does the Torah, which is usually clear and concise with its wording, repeat the fact that Ya'akov was fearful for his life two times?!

The Malbim on this Pasuk explains that the Torah repeats itself because Ya'akov became immensely frightened, for he did not trust G-d to save him. When he traveled to Lavan in last week's Parsha, G-d appeared to him unexpectedly and told him that He would protect him. Yet, Ya'akov did not know if that pledge and assurance were still applicable many years later.

So when Ya'akov realized that he was questioning the longevity of G-d's protection, it made him even more worried and fearful. This is why he began to prepare for the reunion physically.

First, split his camp into two, then he sent Esav many gifts to appease him. Lastly, he turned to G-d and begged for mercy in the merit of his father and grandfather.

However, the Or Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ibn Attar*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He explains that the words the Torah use teach us that Ya'akov was worried for two different reasons.

The term "וַיִּירָא" - *and he was fearful*" tells us that Ya'akov was afraid that Esav would kill him and his family. But the word "וַיִּצְרַח" - *and he was frightened*" teaches us that Ya'akov was anxious and worried that he might have to kill his own brother.

Rabbi Sacks Z" L wrote in *Covenant & Conversation* that Ya'akov faced a challenging moral dilemma. When the messengers returned with the report that Esav had an army with him, Ya'akov realized he would need to protect his family by waging war against Esav.

Consequently, he might end up killing his own brother during this battle. This realization bothered and worried Ya'akov immensely, which is why the Torah repeats how Ya'akov was afraid.

Even though Ya'akov would be correct in going to battle against Esav, he would still need to live with the fact that he killed his own brother.

In our daily life, we are confronted with difficult and tough moral dilemmas because of the world we live in. The complexities we face often do not have the desired outcome making it challenging to come to an answer.

Even when we are right, it doesn't negate or remove the feelings that stem from our decisions. Therefore, it is imperative that we be kind and compassionate to each other even when we are in the right. Caring about another human being is the basis of a moral and ethical society.

“The human dilemma is that which arises out of a man's capacity to experience himself as both subject and object at the same time.”

Have an inspirational Shabbos!
Rabbi Sholom Yemini