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וישלה

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Why was יעקב Worried?

By Binyamin Orkaby

At the beginning of פרשת וישלח, we have יעקב preparing for his confrontation with his brother עשו, whom he hasn't seen in more than 20 years. The first action יעקב takes is to send messengers to עשו "למצא־חן בְּעֵינָיו", to curry favor with him. The messengers return to יעקב and tell him that עשו has 400 men with him. Most פירושים say that עשו was coming to fight, however, the חזקוני says that all the men were with עשו to give יעקב respect or כבוד. After hearing that עשו was coming with so many men, the פסוק says, "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד", that יעקב became very afraid. יעקב then proceeds to split his camp in two, so that if one would be attacked the other would survive. Only after splitting his camp does יעקב go and daven to 'ה.

This begs the question as to why יעקב split his camp! Didn't he trust that 'ה would save him? As it says in "וַיִּשְׁמְרֵהוּ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר-יֵלֶךְ וַהֲשִׁבֵהוּ אֶל-הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת." פרשת ויצא that 'ה will protect יעקב wherever he goes and he will be brought back to the land that he was sleeping upon - ארץ ישראל. The מעם לועז says that יעקב was afraid, and split his camp to show us that צדיקים don't rely on their good deeds to save them, for maybe they had done something wrong. for if it they'd done something wrong, perhaps 'ה wouldn't save them. יעקב thought that he might have violated something, unbeknownst to him, when he had made the ברית, covenant, with לבן. יעקב's lack of faith in himself is supported by his תפילה, as he says, "קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל-הָאֱמֻנָה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת-עַבְדְּךָ", that he is unworthy of all of the kindness and truth that 'ה has done for him. The ברית made in ויצא was made on the condition that יעקב would follow the words of 'ה, so if he thinks he's unworthy of divine help, then he must take physical precautions.

The מעם לועז then adds that יעקב was worried because עשו had two things which he'd done better than יעקב. The first being that עשו had been in ארץ ישראל while יעקב had resided outside of ארץ ישראל during the twenty years he had been with לבן. The second thing being that עשו had done much better than יעקב. יעקב had been home and able to do the מצווה, while יעקב had been away and had no opportunity to do אב. Also, עשו had not killed יעקב after יעקב had stolen his ברכה because עשו hadn't wanted to cause his father pain by killing יעקב.

יעקב was also worried that even if he himself would be saved from עשו, perhaps his children would not be saved. יעקב thought, according to the מעם לועז, that 'ה had told him, "זֶרַעְךָ כְּעֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ", that his children will be like the dust of the land. Which land? The land of ישראל. Therefore, יעקב thought that maybe his children would all be killed, and he would start a new family in ישראל, for maybe 'ה had only promised that the children he would have in ישראל would be the ones that became numerous like the dust of the land.

After splitting his camp, davening to 'ה, and sending gifts to עשו, he (יעקב) eventually meets עשו and no one gets killed. The brothers separate on good terms and all is well as יעקב continues on his journey home.

We can learn from יעקב that we must prepare ourselves for an event and that we cannot rely solely on 'ה. There is a story that there was once a man who davened all his life to win the lottery, and in his whole life he never once won. The man dies, and when he goes up to שמים he asks 'ה "why didn't I win the lottery?" 'ה responds to him, and says "you never bought a lottery ticket". May we all be זוכה for 'ה to help us, and be with us in everything that we do.

The Power of Words

By Ephraim Fischer

In this week's פרשה, יעקב is approaching a meeting with עשו. He takes all of the necessary precautions, and then he starts praying to ה'. In his main prayer, יעקב says, "הַצִּילֵנִי מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי־יָרָא אֶנְכִּי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־יָבֹא וְהָכְנִי אִמָּם", save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of עשו, because I am afraid of him, lest he should come and and kill me, the mothers and children alike. This language of "מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו" seems quite redundant, as all he needed to say was "save me from the hand of עשו"! Why did he need to use the dual language of, "From the hand of my brother, the hand of עשו"?

The בית הלוי gives a very interesting answer to this. He says that when יעקב asks to be saved from the hand of his brother, the hand of עשו, he's really asking to be saved from two different sides of עשו. He's asking to be saved from the hand of his brother, the עשו who loves him, and to be saved from the hand of עשו, the עשו who wanted to kill him. When יעקב asks to be saved from עשו, it's obvious that he wants to be saved from death. However, when he wants to be saved from his brother, he wants to be saved from the fact that maybe, his brother will be too nice. If עשו ends up wanting to reconcile with him, he might bring his idolatrous ways into יעקב's family and turn them into a family of idol worshippers, away from ה'.

In the second half of this פרשה, יעקב says that the reason that he's afraid is because maybe עשו will kill him and his family. If we use the interpretation of the בית הלוי here, it seems like יעקב is saying that while he's afraid that עשו will kill him physically, he's also afraid that עשו will kill him spiritually. On the one hand, עשו can still be mad at him and come after him and his family, but on the other hand, עשו turning him and his family into idol worshippers is just as bad. Ultimately, יעקב succeeded, as not only was he not killed, but when עשו wanted to reconcile with him, and live together, יעקב rejected the offer of living together, and they both went their separate ways.

This is not the first time that ה' saved יעקב from the words of a bad person. In last week's פרשה, when יעקב ran away from לבן, לבן chased him down. Before לבן spoke to יעקב, ה' came to לבן in a dream. He told him, "הַשְׁמֹר לָךְ", פֶּן־תִּדְבֹּר עִם־יַעֲקֹב מְטוֹב מְטוֹב עַד־רָע, beware that you should not speak to יעקב, either good or bad. According to רש"י, this is because what is good to wicked people is bad to righteous people. רבה takes this a step further, saying that whatever לבן would tell him with good intentions, יעקב would think was bad. When לבן eventually does go to speak with יעקב, he says, "יֵשׁ־לֵאֱלֹהֵי לְעִשְׂוֹת עִמָּכֶם רָע וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיכֶם אֵלֶּם אֵלֶּם אֶמֶר אֱלֹהֵי לְעִשְׂוֹת רָע", that he could have done bad, but ה' told him not to speak to יעקב good or bad. By saying that the reason he didn't do harm is because ה' told him not to **speak** good or bad, לבן is telling us that the harm he could've done wasn't physical harm, rather it was harm with his words. יעקב knew this, so this is a possible reason for why now, יעקב wanted ה' to save him from the words of עשו.

Both of these instances show us the power that our words can have. The חפץ חיים (הרב ישראל מאיר קגן) brings down in מִי־הָאִישׁ הַחֹפֵץ חַיִּים אֱהָב יָמָיו לְרֵאוֹת טוֹב: נֹצֵר לְשׁוֹנָה מִרַע וּשְׁפָתָיו מִדִּבָּר, תהילים, it says, "מִרְמָה", that the person who will live long days and will see good is the person who guards his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. The חפץ חיים says that this means that someone who is careful not to harm someone through what they say will certainly be careful not to harm someone through physical actions. The deeper meaning behind this is that our words, which affect people on a mental level, hurt people on the same level as our actions, which hurt people physically. We must be careful not only to not say bad things to others, but also to be like יעקב, and not accept the bad things that people say to us.

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