

Stella

Arielle bat Chanan Binyamin v'Shoshana Emet

Parashat Vayishlach

November 30, 2017

<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.32.4-36.43?lang=bi>

Summary

This week's Torah portion is Parashat Vayishlach, and I am reading from *Sefer Bereishit*, chapter 32, verses 4-6.

When Ya'akov and his family leave Lavan's home, Ya'akov sends messengers to tell his brother Esav that he is returning home and that he wants to make peace with him. The messengers return and tell Ya'akov that Esav is coming toward him with four hundred men. Ya'akov has not seen Esav in twenty years, and he is feeling scared because when he last saw him, Esav threatened to kill him for stealing his blessing.

Ya'akov divides up his camp in case Esav attacks. He sends gifts ahead to his brother Esav. He separates himself from his family, animals, and servants and is left alone. He then spends the night wrestling with a mysterious man. Ya'akov only lets him go when the man agrees to bless him. The man blesses him by giving him a different name— calling him "Yisrael." When Ya'akov and Esav see each other, Ya'akov offers Esav his blessing and they hug. Still, they go their own way after their reunion.

Rachel later dies along the road while giving birth to Binyamin. Yitzhak dies, and Ya'akov and Esav come together again to bury him in the Cave of *Mahpelah*—with ancestors Avraham and Sarah.

Questions

1) When Ya'akov sends messengers ahead to Esav and asks for peace, Esav responds by sending back four hundred men. Why do you think Esav might have done this? Do you think maybe he overdid it?

<<Choose 3>>

I think that Esav might have done this because of his anger about Ya'akov buying his birthright and then receiving the blessing that had been meant for Esav as the first born. 400 men may have felt like the right amount to Esav in order to show Ya'akov that- although Ya'akov was smart-Esav had power. To me, though, that seems like A LOT of people.

2) Ya'akov divides up everyone who's with him into two camps--in case Esav chooses to attack--then sets up his own family across the *Yabbok* River before he settles in, by himself, with no possessions, to go to sleep for the night. A man wrestles with him until the break of dawn, but Ya'akov can't manage to win. The man pulls Yaakov's leg in a way that hurts him, but Ya'akov holds on. When he sees that daylight is breaking, the man asks Ya'akov to let him go. Ya'akov only agrees to let the man go if the man will bless him--which the man agrees to do. Who do you think Yaakov was wrestling?

<<Choose 3>>

Maybe he was wrestling with an angel. He was scared and stressed and worried about meeting his brother Esav again. Maybe G-d wanted him to get those feeling off of him, and to use them to wrestle this man.

3) The man who wrestled Ya'akov blessed him with a new name--saying that he would no longer be called Ya'akov but Yisrael--because he had successfully wrestled with God and with people. Why might the man have told Ya'akov that he wrestled successfully? Just a few lines earlier in the Torah, it said that Ya'akov had NOT "won". In what way might Ya'akov's wrestling have been successful, even if he didn't actually "win" against the "man"? <<Choose 3>>

I think Ya'akov didn't really win, he just persisted. He wrestled ALL NIGHT and even though he got hurt, he still held on and kept wrestling. I think that deserves a little credit. He also demanded and received a blessing. Sort of like when I was learning this torah portion! I struggled with it, but I persisted, and here's my blessing: teaching it to you!