

HAAMEK DAVAR

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Vayishlach

On hearing that Eisav and his 400 men were on the way:

Ya'akov greatly feared, and he was distressed... (32:8)

G-d previously assured him: "Return to the land of your fathers... and I will be with you" (31:2). But Ya'akov in his concern took nothing for granted. His dread of Eisav's possible agenda reflected the murderous intentions that had made him run away from home in the first place.

Rashi highlights the three strategies that Ya'akov then used to prevent or at least minimize possible harm from Eisav. He sent him large pieces of his newly-acquired wealth in the hope that it would calm his wrath (32:14). He divided his camp into two sections, so that at least half of his people would escape should Eisav physically attack (32:9). And after he made use of all the physical courses of action, he prayed (32:10), humbly placing himself in G-d's hands, and at His mercy. He did not merely sit back and ask G-d to handle it. He did all he could to prevent and reduce the impact of an attack, very likely in the frame of mind that G-d helps those who help themselves.

And yet, the Rashbam picks up on the messengers' report that Eisav was on the way with 400 men. (Perhaps Ya'akov's not asking for details on what the 400 men were planning to do supports the idea that the messengers were, as Rashi says, angels, who characteristically disappeared as soon as they had delivered their information.) He suggests that Eisav's travelling with the support of such a large company was a testament to his importance, his wealth, and his success. And that he had 'made it', that he had been blessed despite Ya'akov's getting the b'chora and the b'racha some 20 years down the line. Eisav was not after family revenge; his message was that he had 'arrived', he had achieved his coveted position in the broader sense of being a major force in society. Possibly he possessed more wealth than all that Ya'akov Avinu acquired in 20 years with Lavan. The world was more than big enough to support both Ya'akov and Eisav. And in travelling with 400 men, Eisav was saving his face and displaying his being important.

That is something, the Rashbam explains, is something Ya'akov didn't quite get. His fear was misplaced. Though G-d had assured him of his support, possibly he felt uncomfortable about the means he had used to

obtain the b'chora and the b'racha, even though their intended outcomes came from his purest motivations...

What comes out is that where it is possible to check up on why people act in a certain way, one should. "I wasn't invited, so I'm broigez!" Pick up the courage and ask why. "Someone else was promoted, when it should have been me!" Ask why, what have you to lose? "He/she deliberately left me out, so I'm not having anything to do with him/her". Find out, ask why. 📄