

(14) He spent that night there and he took from what was in his hand, a gift to his brother Esav.

(15) Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred female sheep and twenty rams.

(16) Thirty nursing camels and their offspring, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

(17) He handed over each group of animals to his servants separately, and said to his servants, “Go on ahead of me and leave a gap between each group of animals.”

(18) He commanded the first one saying, “When Esav my brother meets you and he asks you saying, ‘To whom do you belong, where are you going and whose are these [animals that are] before you?’

(19) “You shall say, ‘[We belong] to your servant Yaakov, [the animals] are a gift sent to my master, to Esav, and he (Yaakov) is also following behind us.’”

(20) He commanded the second as well, and also the third and also all the ones following the groups of animals, saying, “You should speak like this to Esav when you find him.

(21) “You shall all say, ‘Your servant Yaakov is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.”

numerous offspring — how, then, can You leave them to perish by the hand of Esav? It would be a desecration of Your Name were Your promises to go unfulfilled.”

YAAKOV SENDS GIFTS TO TRY TO APPEASE ESAV

Consider the following questions:

1. Why does the Torah need to tell us (verse 14) that Yaakov *spent that night there*? It seems both unnecessary and unrelated to what happens before or after it.

(יד) וַיִּלֶן שָׁם בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיִּקַּח מִן־הַבָּא בְיָדוֹ מִנְחָה לַעֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו.
 (טו) עֲזִים מְאֹתִים וַחֲתִישִׁים עֶשְׂרִים רְחִלִּים מְאֹתִים וְאֵילִים עֶשְׂרִים.
 (טז) גְּמָלִים מִיְּנִיקוֹת וּבְנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשִׁים פְּרוֹת אַרְבָּעִים וּפְרִים עֶשְׂרֵה
 אֲתַנֹּת עֶשְׂרִים וְעִירִם עֶשְׂרֵה.
 (יז) וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד־עֲבָדָיו עֵדֶר עֵדֶר לְבָדוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדָיו עֲבְרוּ לִפְנֵי
 וְרוּחַ תְּשִׁימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶה.
 (יח) וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־הָרֵאשׁוֹן לֵאמֹר כִּי יִפְגְּשֶׁךָ עֲשׂוֹ אָחִי וּשְׂאֵלָה לֵאמֹר
 לְמִי־אַתָּה וְאָנֹּה תֵלֶךְ וּלְמִי אֵלֶּה לִפְנֵיךָ.
 (יט) וַאֲמַרְתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לִיעֶקֶב מִנְחָה הוּא שְׁלוּחָה לְאֲדֹנָי לַעֲשׂוֹ וְהִנֵּה
 גַם־הוּא אַחֲרֵינוּ.
 (כ) וַיֵּצֵא גַם אֶת־הַשְּׂנִי גַם אֶת־הַשְּׁלִישִׁי גַם אֶת־כָּל־הַהֲלָכִים אַחֲרֵי
 הָעֲדָרִים לֵאמֹר כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה תִּדְבְּרוּן אֶל־עֲשׂוֹ בְּמִצְאָכֶם אֹתוֹ.
 (כא) וַאֲמַרְתֶּם גַּם הִנֵּה עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב אַחֲרֵינוּ כִּי־אָמַר אֲכַפְּרָה פָּנָיו
 בְּמִנְחָה הַהֲלָכָה לִפְנֵי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן אֲרָאָה פָּנָיו אוֹלֵי יֵשׂא פָּנָי.

2. What is the meaning of the unusual expression, *He took "from what was in his hand"*?
3. Why are we told the precise number of all the male and female animals?
4. Why did Yaakov not send the animals to Esav until after he prayed to Hashem to save him (verses 10–13)?

It is possible that when God did not give a direct answer to Yaakov's prayer for help (verses 10–13 above), Yaakov became even more worried and afraid. His main concern was that he had acted improperly in taking Esav's *berachos*²² [and deserved

22. See Alshich above, 32:4–6 and 8–13.

to be punished, e.g., by being harmed by Esav]. He therefore decided to camp where he was for the night, advancing no further in Esav's direction until he could decide on a further plan to make things right. The Torah thus tells us that *he spent that night there* — i.e., not traveling further until he thought of the idea of sending animals as a gift to Esav in order to appease him [and make amends for having taken the *berachos*].²³ [This answers Questions 1 and 4.]

Answer to
Questions
1 and 4

The Torah then tells us that Yaakov *took* “*from what was in his hand.*” What this means is that Yaakov decided to send animals that were under his direct care (rather than the animals that his servants were herding). There were two possible reasons for this: (a) It would expedite matters if he took from his own herds. (b) His own merit would protect him.²⁴ [This answers Question 2.]

Answer to
Question 2

Our Sages²⁵ derive the conjugal obligations that men of various professions have toward their wives from the proportion of male animals to female animals in Yaakov's gift: (a) There were ten female animals for each he-goat and ram. The reason for this high ratio is that he-goats and rams do not work and therefore mate often. From this we learn that men of leisure have greater conjugal obligations. (b) There were four cows for every bull because bulls do work, and therefore mate less frequently. From this we learn that manual workers have fewer conjugal obligations. (c) There were only two female donkeys for every male, because donkeys travel long distances and therefore mate rarely.

23. The Alshich appears to be referring to the law (see *Orach Chaim* 606:1) that in order to gain Hashem's forgiveness for a sin committed against one's fellow man, one must appease him.

24. The Alshich does not explain what this merit is and its connection to his own sheep. Perhaps it is because Yaakov was herding the best animals himself, and giving them was fulfilling the mitzvah of appeasement in the optimum way; or since he took care of these animals personally, some of his own merit was infused into them.

25. *Bereishis Rabbah* 76:7. See also *Rashi* on verse 32:15.

From this we learn that those who travel long distances for work [like sailors]²⁶ have very limited conjugal responsibilities.

However, this does not explain why Yaakov was so particular about the proportions of male to female animals in his gift to Esav. Was Yaakov, then, trying to teach Esav the correct way to breed animals?!

Let us preface our explanation with a short introduction. Yaakov knew that his descendants were destined to fall into the hands of Esav's descendants.²⁷ His actions at this time were therefore all designed with an eye to the future — to protect the Jewish people from harm.²⁸ Our Sages²⁹ thus tell us, for example, that Yaakov's leaving *a gap between each group of animals* (verse 17) that he sent to Esav was an allusion to Yaakov's prayer that there should be intervals between the various sufferings brought upon the Jewish people by Esav's descendants, so that they should not become overwhelmed.

In this vein, we may suggest that Yaakov's selection of the proper proportion of male animals to female animals was done purposively, as a way of seeking Divine protection for his descendants. Our Sages give us numerous examples of the significance of showing compassion toward animals. They tell us, for example, that both Moshe and David HaMelech were chosen to lead the Jewish people because they displayed extreme concern for the welfare of their flocks.³⁰ Similarly, they tell us that R' Yehudah HaNasi was healed from his afflictions when he had pity on some rodents that were found in his house.³¹ Here as

26. *Bereishis Rabbah*, *ibid.*

27. I.e., the Romans, who were descended from Esav (Edom).

28. The Alshich compares this to the atonement of the goat of Azazel in the Yom Kippur service, which protected *Klal Yisrael* from harm.

29. *Bereishis Rabbah* 75:13.

30. *Shemos Rabbah* 2:2.

31. *Bava Metzia* 85a.

well, it is possible that Yaakov intended to arouse God's mercy through the concern he demonstrated for the welfare of the animals, going so far as to ensure that the males would not be overburdened in their mating responsibilities. Yaakov hoped that God would similarly have pity on his offspring and ensure that Esav's progeny would not oppress them beyond their ability to bear it.³² [This answers Question 3.]

Answer to
Question 3

Consider the following additional questions:

5. Why did Yaakov command the first servant to speak to Esav only after Esav had asked him various questions (verse 18): *"To whom do you belong, where are you going and whose are these [animals that are] before you?"*
6. What is the significance of each of these three questions?
7. Why does it say *"[that are] before you"*? Surely it would have been sufficient to say simply, "and whose are these [animals]?"
8. The first servant was instructed to say that Yaakov *is also following behind us*. Why does he say "behind us" when he is only one person, and what is the point of the word "also"? And why is the servant to add this phrase altogether?
9. Why didn't Yaakov also command the second and third servants not to speak to Esav until he addressed them first (see verse 20)?

When a servant brings gifts from his master to an important person and is asked, "To whom do you belong and whose are these?" he will normally answer, "I am the servant of my master so-and-so, who is sending a gift to his master so-and-so (the

32. Similarly, the Alshich writes, we find that God made the nations of the world swear that they would not make the Jewish people's exiles too heavy to bear (*Kesubos* 111a).

important person).” But if the servant is the one who begins to speak, he will [refer to his master as a servant to the important person] and say, “Your servant so-and-so is sending you this gift.” He will have no need to refer to his own master as “my master.” Yaakov wanted his servant to wait to be asked, “*To whom do you belong...*” and then answer, “[*We belong*] to **your servant Yaakov**” (instead of answering in the normal manner, “to my master Yaakov”). In this way, he would show Esav that even his own servants refrained from calling him “master” in Esav’s presence³³ — similar to the protocol that someone who is in the presence of a king should not dare call anyone else “my master.”³⁴ [He would thus show Esav once again that he regarded himself as completely subservient to Esav, and thus defuse Esav’s anger toward him]. [This answers Question 5.]

Answer to
Question 5

Yaakov predicted that Esav would ask his servant three questions. The purpose of the first question, “*To whom do you belong...*” would be to see whether he would answer, “to my master Yaakov” or “to your servant Yaakov,” as explained above. The purpose of the second question, “*where are you going...*” would be to find out whether Yaakov was sending his possessions on ahead to Yitzchak’s home for safekeeping, or whether they were in fact a gift to him. The purpose of the third question, “*and whose are these [animals that are] before you?*” was to hint that really all Yaakov’s possessions belonged to him since they were the result of the blessings that Yaakov had stolen from him. They were also his because the fact that Yaakov was Esav’s servant (as he had just admitted) meant that Esav owned everything of his.³⁵ In other

33. See similarly Alshich above, 32:4–6.

34. The Alshich cites *Shabbos* 56a, where the Gemara explains that Uriah brought the death penalty upon himself by referring to King David’s general Yoav as “my master” in the presence of King David.

35. This is because of the legal principle that *במה שיקנה עבד קנה רבו*, *whatever a servant acquired, his master has acquired*.

(22) The gifts went on ahead of him and he spent that night in the camp.

(23) He got up that night,³⁷ and took his two wives and his two maid-servants and his eleven children and he crossed the ford over the river Yabbok.

(24) He took them and brought them over the river, and he [also] brought over all his possessions.

Answer to
Question 6

words, “Whose are these animals before you? If they are a gift from Yaakov to me, everything of his belongs to me anyway.” [This answers Question 6.]

To the first question, “To whom do you belong?” Yaakov instructed his servant to answer, “[*We belong*] to your servant Yaakov.” To the second question, “Are these possessions simply being sent ahead to our father’s home, or are they a gift?” he told him to answer, “[*...[the animals] are a gift sent.*” And in response to the third point, that Esav really owns all of Yaakov’s possessions, Yaakov instructed his servant to add the words, “*to my master, to Esav,*” meaning: It is true what you say; even I, Yaakov’s servant, really belong to you. However, Yaakov trusts that you will not be strict with him. He is sending you these gifts from his own hand and trusts that you will forgive the rest.”

The third question about the animals ends with the seemingly unnecessary words, “[*that are*] before you.” Here, too, Yaakov was predicting an underlying criticism. Normally a person wishing to give a gift to a person more important than himself will give it personally rather than through his servant. The fact that Yaakov had sent them through his servant would suggest that he considered himself as important as Esav and lacked the required humility. The subtle message in the additional words **before you**, is: Why are these animals before you and not before Yaakov himself?” [This answers Question 7.]

Answer to
Question 7

- (כב) וַתַּעֲבֹר הַמִּנְחָה עַל־פְּנֵי וְהוּא לָן בְּלִילָהּ־הִיא בְּמַחְנֶה.
- (כג) וַיִּקָּם בְּלִילָהּ הוּא וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׁתֵּי נַשְׂיוֹ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שְׂפָחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אֶחָד עֶשֶׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת מַעְבַּר יַבֵּק.
- (כד) וַיִּקָּחֵם וַיַּעֲבֵרֵם אֶת־הַנְּחָל וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ.

To this last question, the first servant was instructed to reply (verse 19), “[*Yaakov*] is **also** following behind us [אַחֲרֵינוּ].” The word *behind us* (rather than *behind me*) seems imprecise, for the servant is only one person; and the word *also* seems extraneous as well (Question 7). The answer is that the word *also* is a hint that extra groups are following behind, and that Yaakov was behind the last one — “*behind [all of] us.*” If there had only been one group of animals as a gift, then Yaakov would have come himself to give them to Esav. But since there were a number of groups, all sent as gifts from him, he would come only at the end. [This answers Question 8.]

Answer to
Question 8

When Yaakov instructed the second and third servants, as well as the others who followed,³⁶ he did not tell them to wait until Esav addressed them first with various questions. He felt that if each one used the same approach as the first servant, it would seem like they were all just employing a device to flatter him. Yaakov did not want to give Esav that impression, so he told the other servants, “*You should speak like this* (i.e., just as the first servant will speak) *to Esav when you find him* — i.e., immediately, without waiting to be asked any questions. *You shall all say, ‘Your servant Yaakov is behind us.’*” [This answers Question 9.]³⁷

Answer to
Question 9

36. As verse 20 says (after mentioning the second and third servants): *and also all the ones following the groups of animals.*

37. This is the standard translation of this phrase. The Alshich will interpret it differently.

(25) Yaakov was left alone and a man struggled with him until the first light of dawn.

(26) [The man] saw that he could not overcome him and he struck his thigh and Yaakov's thigh became dislocated as he struggled with him.

(27) [The man] said, "Let me go as the dawn has come." [Yaakov] said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

(28) He said to him, "What is your name?" He answered, "Yaakov."

(29) He said, "Your name will no longer be called Yaakov. You will be called Yisrael since you have been mighty with the Divine and with man and you have overcome."

(30) Yaakov asked and said, "Please tell [me] your name." He replied, "Why are you asking my name?" And [the man] blessed him there.

YAAKOV'S STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL OF ESAV

Consider the following questions:

1. The first half of verse 22 (*The gifts went on ahead of him*) seems to have no connection to the second half of the verse (*and he spent that night in the camp*).
2. Why do we need to be told that he spent the night specifically in *the camp*? Where else would he be?
3. Why the sudden urgency to get up in the night and transport his family and all his possessions over the river before daybreak (verses 23–24)?
4. Why do we need to be told that *Yaakov was left alone* (verse 25)? Having transported everyone over to the other side of the river, isn't it obvious that he was left alone?
5. Where were all the angels that had been accompanying Yaakov? Why didn't they protect him from the "man" who fought with him?