



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת וישלח

SERIES 2: ISSUE 8

YAAKOV'S STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL OF ESAV

Chapter 32

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

כב) וַיַּעֲבֹר הַמִּנְחָה עַל פָּנָיו וְהִוא לֹן בְּלִילָה תַּחֲזָא בְּמַחְנָה.

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

כג) וַיָּקַם בְּלִילָה הוּא וַיַּקְרַב אֶת שְׁתֵּי נָשָׁיו וְאֶת שְׁתֵּי שִׁפְחָתָיו וְאֶת אֶחָד עַשֶּׂר יָלְדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת מַעֲבָר יַבָּק.

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

כד) וַיָּקַם וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת הַנַּחַל וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר לוֹ.

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

כה) וַיָּתַר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדָיו וַיַּאֲבַק אִישׁ עָמוֹ עד עַלְות הַשְׁחָרָה

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

כט) וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב עוֹד שַׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׁרִית עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעִם אָנָשִׁים וְתוֹכָל.

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 do we need to be told that *Yaakov was left alone* (verse 25)? Since verses 23-24 said he had transported everyone to the other side of the river, isn't it obvious that he was left alone?
4. Where were all the angels that had been accompanying Yaakov? Why didn't they protect him from the "man" who fought with him?
5. What is the meaning of the words that explain the change in Yaakov's name to *Yisrael* (verse 29), "*You have been mighty with the divine and with man and you have overcome*"?

When Yaakov approached the Land of Israel on his return from Charan, he was temporarily accompanied by two sets of angels. The angels of *Chutz La'Aretz* who had accompanied him outside of the Land (after his dream of angels descending and ascending a latter when he was traveling to Lavan's house) had not yet departed when he was joined by the angels of *Eretz Yisrael*. He called the place where this occurred *Machanayim* ("Two Camps") because there were two "camps" of angels. Then the first set of angels left, leaving the other camp of angels to escort Yaakov over the Yabbok River into *Eretz Yisrael*.

Now, it is the way of *tzaddikim* not to put their main trust in natural means of protection (like sending gifts to appease Esav, as described in the previous verses). They prefer to place their trust in Divine assistance. And indeed, Yaakov received such aid — the camp of angels that accompanied him into Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, verse 22 tells us that even though *the gifts went on ahead of him*, Yaakov did not rely on these to help him. Instead, *he spent that night in the camp*, i.e., the camp of angels that was accompanying him. He took refuge there, as this was his greatest protection. **[This answers Questions 1 and 2.]**

But the angels did not act as Yaakov expected. Yaakov awoke in the middle of the night and found that they had left; they had crossed over the river into Eretz Yisrael and left him without Divine protection. When he realized this, he immediately took his wives, children and all his possessions and transported them over the river into Eretz Yisrael.

Why did Hashem have the angels leave and thus expose Yaakov to danger? The answer is that God had seen that Yaakov was distressed over being so afraid of Esav that he had humbled himself before him instead of trusting solely in God. Hashem therefore wanted to reassure him and show him that He regarded him as being truly great. To accomplish this, Hashem decided to do something unique: Normally, when God wishes a nation to be conquered, He strikes down the nation's guardian angel that oversees its affairs and then hands that nation over to its enemy. This time, God wanted Yaakov **himself** to overcome the celestial guardian of the nation of Edom (Esav), without any help from his accompanying angels. Then Yaakov would know that he would be able to overcome Esav, who was, after all, a mere mortal. All this would prove to Yaakov how great and important he was before God. **[This answers Question 4.]**

In order to tempt Esav's celestial guardian (*the man*) to fight against Yaakov, God had to arrange certain conditions: (1) Yaakov would have to remain alone without his Heavenly escort. (2) It would have to take place during the night, when the forces of evil are granted more power. (3) It would have to be outside the borders of Eretz Yisrael. The verse accordingly tells us that Yaakov was *left alone and a man struggled with him until the first light of dawn*: Since he was by himself (*left alone*), having gone back across the river without the angels to retrieve some small vessels (as stated in *Chullin* 91a), and it was still night, Esav's guardian angel *struggled with him until the first light of dawn*, i.e., until the forces of evil no longer prevailed. **[This answers Question 3.]**

At the end of their fight the angel therefore said to him: "You have shown your greatness by overcoming me by yourself ("you have been mighty with the divine") — and all the more so shall you be able to defeat Esav ("and with man and לְוַיְלָה — you have overcome"). The verse uses the past tense (*וַיַּוְיַלֵּךְ*) because Yaakov's victory over Esav is now as good as done. **[This answers Question 5.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 – 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKodosh" (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.