

A STRATEGY BORN FROM STRENGTH

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the angels returned to Yaakov saying, "We came to your brother to Essav and he is also coming to greet you and four hundred men are with him" And Yaakov was very afraid and it distressed him and so he divided the nation that was with him... (Breishis 32:7-8)

He was afraid and distressed: He feared maybe he would be killed. It distressed him that he might kill others. (Rashi)

It is easy to picture how Yaakov experienced fear of death when confronting his enraged brother marching towards him with four hundred men. How do we picture that he, Yaakov, the studious brother had any chance for military victory?

In last week's portion a scene is described in which Yaakov approaches the shepherds of Haran. They are squatting by a well of water which is covered by a huge rock. That rock served as a communal safe. Three flocks had already congregated there and they were waiting for all the flocks to arrive before attempting to roll the rock off the well. We can only imagine how big this rock must have been that a large group of people were needed to roll it from its place. Keep in mind that rolling a rock or a car or a piano or any large object is many times easier than to lift it up.

When Rachel appears with the sheep, the Torah records for us, "And Yaakov drew close and he revealed the stone from on top of the well and he watered the sheep of Lavan the brother of his mother." Rashi tells us that he didn't even roll it. He pulled it out like one uncorks a bottle.

We see from here that Yaakov was enormously strong. He was not some pale skinned weakly creature who avoided fighting with his brother because he was afraid of being beaten up. It was rather a matter of principle for him to dodge a violent confrontation by praying and sending gifts etc.

At a press conference in London in 1969 Golda Meir is reported to have said, "When peace comes we will perhaps be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our sons. But it will be harder for us to forgive them for making having forced us to kill theirs."

We can easily understand how Yaakov was distressed by having now to face the terrible option of exercising his own brute force. He would have preferred not to have to manifest that ugly side of his self and he did all he could to keep it hidden. It was not from weakness and vulnerability alone that Yaakov our great Patriarch used paths of peace in dealing with his arch enemy Essav. It may well have been a strategy born from strength. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and

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