



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Vayishlach | Sichah 1

The Context:

When Yaakov learned that Eisav was approaching him with 400 men, he “became very frightened” (*Bereishis* 32:8) and sprung into action. “He divided the people with him, and the flocks, and the cattle, and the camels, into two camps. He said, “If Eisav comes to the one camp and strikes it, then the remaining camp shall be a refuge.” (Ibid., 32:8-9)

The Rashi:

Then the remaining camp shall be a refuge — against Eisav’s will, because I will do battle with him. Yaakov readied himself for three things: To pay a tribute, for prayer, and for war. To pay a tribute, as it says, “So the tribute passed on before him” (Ibid., 32:22); for prayer, as it says, “G-d of my father, Avraham” (Ibid., 32:10); for war, as it says here, “Then the remaining camp shall be a refuge.

The Questions:

Commentaries explain that the first part of Rashi’s commentary explains why Yaakov was certain that “the remaining camp **shall be** a refuge.” How could Yaakov be certain that the remaining camp would survive? Rashi explains that Yaakov was sure that the remaining camp would survive because he was prepared to do battle and save the remaining camp, “against Eisav’s will.” (*Sefer Zikaron*)

Yet this explanation is unsatisfactory: Even if Yaakov was determined to go to war with Eisav, this was still no guarantee that he would be successful and save the remaining camp. At best, it increased the probability of at least

one camp surviving, but it was by no means a certainty. The question remains, then, how could Yaakov have been certain that “the remaining camp shall be a refuge”?

Concerning the second part of Rashi’s commentary:

- 1) Why was it necessary for Rashi to mention all three of Yaakov’s strategies if we will encounter them as we read further?
- 2) Why did Rashi employ the unusual phrase “readied himself” rather than “prepared?”
- 3) There is an anomaly in the verses Rashi cited as evidence for Yaakov’s three actions. Regarding the tribute, Rashi cites the verse that describes Yaakov actually giving the tribute, “the tribute passed before him.” Yet regarding prayer and war, Rashi cites verses that attest to Yaakov preparing for prayer and war, but not verses that describe him actually praying and going to war. Why did Rashi cite two different types of prooftexts?

The Explanation:

Rashi was bothered by a fundamental question: How could Yaakov have prepared for war (verse 9) before turning to G-d in prayer (verse 10)? To resolve this difficulty, Rashi concluded that Yaakov divided his entourage into two camps as an actual preparation for prayer. In verse 9, Yaakov divided his family from his possessions (his flock, his cattle, and his camels). [The next morning, he arranged his family in a specific order, but the entire family remained within one camp. (ibid., 33:1 ff.)] Once his family was isolated, he could then begin praying with absolute confidence that G-d would protect him, for G-d had promised Yaakov that He would always guard Yaakov and his family. “I will guard you (Yaakov) wherever you go.” (Ibid., 28:15, *Rashi to Bereishis* 32:10)

Thus, separating his family from his possessions guaranteed that Yaakov’s prayer would be fulfilled, even if he had to go to war with Eisav, because

G-d had promised to protect his family. Now that his family was isolated, they could not be destroyed.

The second part of Rashi's commentary is an extended proof of the assertion that Yaakov was certain he would overcome Eisav. The unique ways in which Yaakov prepared himself to give tribute, to pray, and to do battle expressed his confidence.

The phrase "readied himself" implies that Yaakov had to overcome some internal reluctance or reservation in order to do these three things. He was frightened to go to battle (*Bereishis* 32:8), but he steeled himself anyway. He was angry that he had to resort to giving Eisav some of his possessions (*Rashi's* commentary on *Bereishis* 32:22), yet he did so anyway. He was worried that he would be undeserving of G-d's promise (*Rashi's* commentary on *Bereishis* 32:11), yet he prayed anyway.

The fact that Yaakov overcame his own reservations and performed these actions is evidence that he was confident that in the end, he would be successful.

This also explains Rashi's choice of prooftexts: The verses all allude to Yaakov "readying himself" despite his reservations because of his conviction that G-d would protect him.

"To pay a tribute, as it says, 'So the tribute passed on before him.'" This verse alludes to Yaakov overriding his anger at having to pay a tribute.

"For prayer, as it says, 'G-d of my father, Avraham.'" This alludes to the promise G-d had made to Yaakov's ancestors that He would always protect them. Because of this promise, Yaakov prayed despite his own uncertainty.

"For war, as it says here, 'Then the remaining camp shall be a refuge.'" This alludes to his certainty that, if he would have to go to war, he would be successful ("shall be").

The Deeper Dimension:

Yaakov's three phase preparation was done simultaneously and was aimed at defeating one enemy — Eisav. This alludes to the need to marshal several forces in order to defeat even one element of profane opposition. We must be prepared to employ tribute — kindness; battle — severity; and prayer, — compassion,” in order to overcome “Eisav.” This means that we must be willing to go beyond our natural dispositions and employ the full spectrum of Divinely inspired methods to overcome the forces of negativity in our generation.