

Valley Beit Midrash

The Reunion of Jacob and Esau – Friendly or Antagonistic?

<p>Genesis 32:4-8</p> <p>4. Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, 5. and instructed them as follows, "Thus shall you say, 'To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now; 6. I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor.'" 7. The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him." 8. Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps.</p>	<p>בראשית פרק לב:א-ד'</p> <p>ד. וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֲדוֹם. ה. וַיִּצְו אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו: כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם לְבָן גִּרְתִּי וְאַחַר עַד עֵתָהּ. ו. וַיְהִי לִי שׂוֹר וְחִמּוֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וְאֲשֻׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ. ז. וַיֵּשְׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֵל אָחִיךָ אֶל עֵשָׂו וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לְקִרְאָתְךָ וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ. ח. וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרַר לוֹ וַיַּחֲץ אֶת הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וְאֶת הַצֹּאן וְאֶת הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמָלִים לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת.</p>
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<p>Abarbanel to Genesis 32</p> <p>"And he is coming toward you," It seems to me from the messengers that they did not know Esau's hatred toward Jacob, and so when they went to him and spoke to him regarding their mission, her replied to them, 'behold he is coming toward you.' And They thought that he was coming toward him to honor him, and because of this they went back to Jacob and said to him, 'we came to your brother, to Esau,' meaning 'why should you call him 'my master'? He is none other than your loving loyal brother, and behold he is also coming toward you, meaning it is not enough that he should receive your messengers, but he himself is going and coming toward you to receive you, and four hundred men are with him to honor you. But Jacob, who knew the truth, and of Esau's wickedness, was not convinced of this matter, and was very afraid of his coming, and was concerned about the four hundred men he was coming with, because he knew that he was coming for the purposes of war.</p>	<p>אברבנאל בראשית פרק לב</p> <p>וגם הולך לקראתך. והנראה מהשלוחים שלא היו יודעים משטמת עשו מיעקב ולכן כאשר הלכו לו ודברו אליו שליחותם הוא השיבם הנה הוא הולך לקראתו. וחשבו שהיה הולך לכבדו ומפני זה שבו אל יעקב ואמרו לו באנו אל אחיך אל עשו כלומר למה תקראהו אדוני והוא אינו אלא כאח אוהב נאמן כי הנה גם הוא הולך לקראתך ר"ל לא די שיקבל שליחותך אבל גם הוא בעצמו הולך ובא לקראתך לקבל אותך וארבע מאות איש עמו לכבדך. אבל יעקב שהיה יודע אמתת הדבר ורשעתו לבדו לא נתפתה בזה ויירא יעקב מאד מביאתו ויצר לו מד' מאות איש שהיה מביא עמו כי ידע כי למלחמה הוא בא.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">ShaDaL to Genesis 32:7</p> <p>"And he is going toward you." For they believed that Esau was only coming to honor and protect him on his way. And perhaps this really was Esau's intention, and perhaps they also understood from Esau's answer that he did not have in his heart any evil or hatred for his brother, and perhaps they also told Jacob all these things that he said to them, words of peace and brotherhood. However, Jacob did not trust all of this, for he was afraid when he heard that he was coming with four hundred men, and Scripture did not want to expand upon the conversation of Esau and the messengers, since they did not have any benefit to him, because Jacob did not trust them.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">שמואל דוד לוצטו – בראשית ל"ב:ז</p> <p>וגם הולך לקראתך: כסבורים שאין עשו בא אלא לכבדו ולשמרו בדרך. ואולי כן היתה באמת כוונת עשו, ואולי ג"כ הבינו מתשובת עשו שלא היה בלבו רעה ושנאה על אחיו, ואולי ג"כ ספרו ליעקב את כל הדברים אשר דבר אליהם דברי שלום ואחווה. אמנם יעקב לא בטח בכל זה, כי פחד בשמעו שהוא בא אליו בת' איש, והכתוב לא רצה להאריך בדברי עשו והמלאכים, מאחר שלא הועילו כלום, כי לא בטח בהם יעקב.</p>
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Questions for Hevruta discussion:

1. Why was Esau coming to meet Jacob with 400 men?
2. What do you think Jacob told his messengers (if anything) about his relationship with Esau before sending them to his brother bearing gifts?
3. What is the messengers' interpretation of Esau's intentions?
4. Is that understanding of the Esau's intentions different from or the same as that of Jacob's interpretation? What are those interpretations?
5. Take a look at the explanations of Abrabanel (Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel, 1437–1508, Spain) and ShaDaL (Samuel David Luzzatto, 1800-1865, Italy). Are their interpretations different from one another? Do they differ from your interpretations?