

פרשת תולדות begins where פרשת ויצא concluded. פרשת ויצא began where פרשת תולדות concluded. And פרשת תולדות concludes where it began, telling the story of Jacob and Esau. In each case, we find Jacob on the run from someone. In פרשת תולדות, Jacob arrives on the scene holding onto his brother's heel. He is the true first born, בכור, but fate and circumstances condemn him to follow his brother and Esau being considered, at least by Isaac, the firstborn. The Torah describes Esau as a hunter, strong and merciless killer. Jacob on the other hand is described as studious, without the killer instinct. Jacob is entitled to the birthright but he cannot challenge Esau's superior strength and skill set as a killer. He does not confront his brother to demand his birthright. Instead he finds an opportunity to negotiate a deal to purchase the birthright from his brother for a bowl of lentil soup and a slice of disparaging insults.

Rebekah and Jacob both realize that Isaac is about to bless Esau with the blessings that should be given to the true first born, Jacob. They realize that physical confrontation is out of the question. Ultimately they arrive at a plan to allow Jacob to surreptitiously take the blessings that were really his but intended for his brother. In cinematic like timing, Jacob leaves the stage just as his brother enters. Esau, unaware of what just transpired, assumed he was about to receive the coveted blessing from his father. He is shocked and dismayed to discover that his brother deceived him yet again. The first deception was his acquisition of the birthright, and now this deception to take the blessings that should have gone to the first born, who Esau still believes is him despite acknowledging that he sold that very birthright to Jacob! Esau realizes that his brother has now outwitted him twice. His cunning is apparently more successful than Esau's strength. Jacob is now an adversary who must be eliminated. Esau plots and plans to murder his brother at the earliest opportunity after his father passes away. After all, Isaac believed his end to be near, as he instructed Esau to hunt and return with a meal so he could be blessed prior to Isaac's death. It would not be long till he had his revenge.

When Rebekah informs Jacob of Esau's intentions, Jacob does not confront his brother and strike preemptively in self defense. Instead, Jacob turns the tables again on his brother. He recognizes that Esau is physically stronger and instead relies on his intellect to find a way out of his predicament. He and his mother conspire to save him from his brother and his wrath, and send him to the house of Laban under the pretext of finding a wife. The Torah describes how Jacob exits Beer Sheva and sets off on his journey to Charan. He does not tarry so as not to provide Esau an opportunity to kill him.

Chazal tell us Jacob arrived in Charan penniless. Elifaz was dispatched by his father, Esau, to kill Jacob on the way to Charan, but could not bring himself to murder his uncle. Jacob again cleverly came up with a plan to save himself and instructed Elifaz to take his possessions and leave him destitute. Since the destitute are compared to the dead, he would fulfill his father's command. Jacob does not struggle, he finds a way to extricate himself from the situation in the quietest possible way.

Upon his arrival in Charan, Jacob is immediately taken advantage of by his own flesh and blood, his uncle Laban. Rather than being thrilled at the possibility of his daughter(s) marrying the son of Isaac and Rebekah, Abraham's grandson, he deceives Jacob into tending his flocks for 14 years. Jacob does not attack Laban when, after 7 years of anticipating marriage to his beloved Rachel, Laban deceives him yet again and by switching Leah for Rachel. Jacob meekly agrees to work another 7 years for Rachel. When he attempts to leave the first time, Laban convinces him to stay. Jacob negotiates a deal, only to have Laban change the terms 100 times, yet remains for an additional 6 years. Jacob takes all of this seemingly stoically. He is incapable of, or unwilling, to confront his antagonist. Finally, in the dead of night, after Laban departed on a 3 day journey, Jacob seizes the opportunity and departs clandestinely. Rather than confronting Laban, he hopes to sneak away from Laban before he realizes

Jacob has gone. Though he stands his ground when Laban and his cohorts intercept Jacob's family at Mount Gil-ad, Jacob still allows Laban to search his belongings and threaten him and his family. He negotiates a truce with Laban and he sets out for home. Jacob again avoids physical confrontation.

Upon approaching his familial home, Jacob tests the waters to see if his brother's hatred has diminished with time. Upon being informed that it has not, Jacob prepares himself for prayer, a bribe and battle. Clearly, battle is Jacob's last option. At the ultimate moment of their long-awaited meeting, Esau accepts the bribe Jacob offers him. When Esau offers to ride alongside Jacob, Jacob responds meekly to Esau's offer to accompany him to Mount Sayir. Jacob provides an excuse to separate himself from Esau and his men, as he has no intention to follow his brother until Messianic times when the children of Israel will conquer Mount Esau. Again, Jacob is not concerned that his response makes him look weak. He chose negotiation over confrontation as the best means to ensure his family's survival. He slinks away as Esau departs and heads in a different direction.

Jacob diverts from his goal of reaching Beth El, the place he erected and consecrated a monument to Gd, and purchases land outside the city of Sh-chem. Jacob could have asserted his right to the land that was promised him and his children in the Abrahamic Covenant, ברכת אברהם, that Isaac transferred to him prior to his departing for Charan. Had Jacob followed Esau's example, he surely could have simply taken ownership of the land without purchasing it or asking permission. In fact, Sh-chem., the prince who raped Dena, mocked her father, saying Jacob wasted so much money purchasing a small parcel of land. Again Jacob avoids confrontation in favor of evaluation of the situation and negotiation, to the detriment of his own reputation and honor.

Jacob was surely distressed when he was informed that his only daughter, Dena, was kidnapped and raped. However, the Torah's description of his reaction is remarkable in the emotional calm he displayed as he waited for his sons to return from the field. We might have expected Jacob, who had great physical strength, to threaten Sh-chem. and his father Chamor, if not physically attack them, for the crime they perpetrated against his daughter. His calm demeanor is noteworthy. He seems to agree with his children who suggest an accommodation with the local people, following their father's many examples of negotiating with their adversaries.

The brothers' response to the news of their sister's kidnap and rape is interesting. They were distressed by something that could not be abide: כי נבלה עשה בישראל לשכב את בת יעקב וכן לא יעשה. The Torah says Jacob's sons answered those that defiled their sister במרמה, with cunning. Rashi translates that word בחכמה. They assessed the situation and suggested an option that would salvage the situation, at least temporarily. According to some commentaries, the brothers as a group did not intend to leave their sister behind. They intended to free her on the third day after the people underwent circumcision and leave with her. They were agreed that this situation could no longer be negotiated away as past situations were. Where Jacob negotiated, Israel stood strong and acted with strength against those that sought to harm them. Simon and Levi were decided to act in an extreme manner and killed all the inhabitants of the city. In their eyes, they were all complicit in the act and were punishable by death.

The discussion between Jacob and Simon and Levi is interesting. The Torah uses the name Jacob when narrating their discussion. Jacob said that their actions will lead to the surrounding nations banding together to exact revenge and wipe out his family. He was thinking from the Jacob perspective, negotiate and survive instead of fighting. Simon and Levi replied that as children of Israel, they could not stand by and watch their sister be treated as a prostitute. Israel does not stand by when Jewish women are taken captive and raped. They punish the perpetrators to defend their honor and set the bar

very high so others contemplating acting this way again will reconsider. They put the surrounding nations on notice that where Jacob appeared weak, Israel projected strength and commitment.

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