

A number of years ago, I did a personality test. Among the discoveries were that I was ENTJ according to Meyers-Briggs and that I was a pretty good conflict avoider. While I have not retaken those tests recently, it seems fairly clear that many of our ancestors were similarly conflict avoiders. In last week's portion, the family is disappointed in whom Esau marries, but they never tell him. Rather than making the case for Jacob to get the blessing, Rebecca and Jacob trick Isaac into giving it to him and following the stealing of the blessing, they send Jacob away so that he and Esau need not confront each other. Again, this week, Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah rather than simply telling him that in order to marry Rachel, he must also marry Leah. Additionally, at the end of the parashah, Jacob and his family sneak away rather than letting Laban know that they are leaving, only to be confronted by Laban along the way.

These examples show us that "conflict avoidance" does not actually lead to a lack of conflict, it just means fewer difficult conversations. The resentment, anger, frustration remain, but there isn't an outlet for it to subside. It is only in next week's portion, when Esau makes Jacob engage with him that their long-standing struggle can come to an end. Challenges conversations are hard. The possibility of making someone angry or disappointed is scary. And yet, if we aren't willing to have those talks, the problem never has the opportunity to go away, just live on in each individual. The stories of our ancestors are not designed to tell us what to do, but rather, for us to learn from their mistakes and do better ourselves. This is one way that we can do just that.