

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Vayishlach
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פרשת וישלח
ט"ז בכסלו תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 32:4-36:43

In this *parasha*, Yaakov confronts Eisav, wrestles with a “man” who blesses him by changing his name to Yisrael, loses his wife Rachel in childbirth, and experiences the trauma of the incident with his daughter Deena.

Yaakov takes the following steps as he prepares to meet Eisav for the first time since the “birthright and blessing incident” (32:8-17):

ח ויירא יעקב מאד, ויצר לו; ויחץ את-העם אשר-אתו, ואת-הצאן ואת-הבקר והגמלים--לשני מחנות. ט ויאמר, אם-יבוא עשו אל-המחנה האחת והכהו--והיה המחנה הנשאר, לפליטה. י ויאמר, יעקב, אלהי אבי אברהם, ואלהי אבי יצחק: ה' האמר אלי, שוב לארצך ולמולדתך--ואיטיבה עמך. יא קטנתי מכל החסדים, ומכל-האמת, אשר עשית, את-עבדך: כי במקלי, עברתי את-הירדן הזה, ועתה הייתי, לשני מחנות. יב הצילני נא מיד אחי, מיד עשו: כי-גרא אנכי, אתו--פן-יבוא והפני, אם על-בנים. יג ואתה אמתך, היטב איטיב עמך; ושמתני את-זרעך כחול הים, אשר לא-יספר מרב. יד וילן שם, בלילה ההוא; ויקח מן-הבא בידו, מנחה--לעשו אחיו. טו עזים מאתים, ותישים עשרים, רחלים מאתים, ואילים עשרים. טז גמלים מיניקות ובניהם, שלשים; פרות ארבעים, ופרים עשרה, אתנת עשרים, ועגרים עשרה. יז ויתן, ביד-עבדיו, עדר עדר, לבדו; ויאמר אל-עבדיו, עברו לפני, ורוח תשימו, בין עדר ובין עדר.

8 “And he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two camps. **9** And he said: 'If Eisav come to the one camp, and smite it, then the camp which is left shall escape.' **10** And Yaakov said: 'God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, Hashem, who said to me: Return to your country, and to your family, and I will do good for you; **11** I am not worthy of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I have become two camps. **12** Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children. **13** And You said: I will surely do good for you, and make your seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' **14** And he lodged there that night; and took of that which he had with him a present for Eisav his brother: **15** two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, **16** thirty milk camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-donkeys and ten foals. **17** And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every flock by itself; and said to his servants: 'Pass over before me, and put a space between flock and flock.'”

Yaakov used a bifurcated strategic approach for his meeting with Eisav. On one hand, he took action, splitting the camp in two and preparing gifts for Eisav; on the other hand, he prayed to God.

We see the paradigm of action and prayer together throughout the *TaNaKH* (*Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim* – Bible, Prophets, Writings). For instance, in *Melachim Bet* (II Kings) Chapter 4, the prophet Elisha resuscitates a child (4: 32-35):

וַיָּבֹא אֶלְיָשָׁע, הַבֵּיתָהּ; וַהֲיָה הַנֶּעֱר מֵת, מִשְׁכָּב עַל-מִטָּתוֹ. וַיָּבֹא, וַיִּסָּגֵר הַדָּלֶת בְּעַד שְׁנֵיהֶם; וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל, אֶל-ה'. וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל-הַיֶּלֶד, וַיִּשָּׂם פִּיו עַל-פִּיו וְעֵינָיו עַל-עֵינָיו וְכַפָּיו עַל-כַּפּוֹ, וַיִּגְהַר, עָלָיו; וַיָּחֵם, בְּשֵׁר הַיֶּלֶד. וַיָּשָׁב וַיֵּלֶךְ בַּבַּיִת, אַחַת הַנָּה וְאַחַת הַנָּה, וַיַּעַל, וַיִּגְהַר עָלָיו; וַיִּזְוֶר הַנֶּעֱר עַד-שִׁבְעַ פְּעָמִים, וַיִּפְקַח הַנֶּעֱר אֶת-עֵינָיו.

“And when Elisha came into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed to Hashem. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his

eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and he stretched himself upon him; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house once to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.”

This is an important lesson for us. We can take steps beyond action by enlisting Divine help to assist us in our lives’ mission. At the same time, we cannot rely exclusively on prayer and decide that God will take care of everything. The rabbis tell us “אַיִן סוּמְכִין עַל הַנִּסִּים” – “we must not depend upon miracles.” We can ask Hashem to help us, but we must also invest thought and effort to accomplish what we want to accomplish.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What would you like to ask Hashem help for in your life?
- Yaakov divided his camp in two and prepared gifts for Eisav. Is there anything else you might have done in preparation for meeting the brother who hated you for stealing his birthright?
- In each example above, which comes first, prayer or action? Why do you think it’s in this particular order?