



Parshat HaShavuah

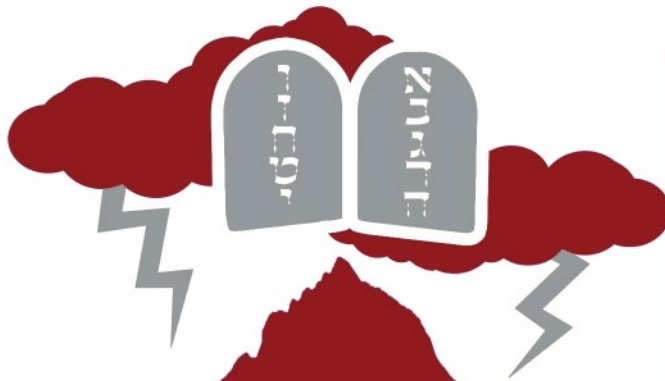
וישלה

VAYISHLACH

י"ד כסלו תשע"ה

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

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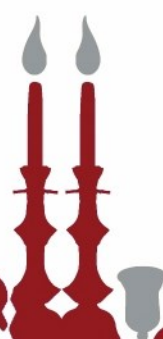
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Motzei

Shabbat

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Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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MOURNING A LOST LINK

MRS. ORA LEE KANNER

Mysteriously sandwiched between the travails and travels of Yaakov back to Eretz Yisrael is the rather strange telling of the death of Devorah, the nursemaid of Rivka. So great was the mourning and weeping for her that her burial place was named "Alon Bachut," connoting extraordinary sadness and manifold tears. Considering that the Torah had told us absolutely nothing about this woman or her life, why would the Torah tell us of her death and why the abundance of tears?

Our 11th century commentator Rashi explains that Rivka sent her nursemaid, Devorah, to bring Yaakov and his family back to Israel, and she died on the way back to Israel. Furthermore, Rashi relates that the family of Yaakov was informed of the death of their mother and grandmother, Rivka, at the same time that Devorah died. The "double" tears were shed for the deaths of Devorah and Rivka.

Really? What would lead Rashi to assume that Rivka died specifically at this juncture, along with Devorah?

Yaakov raised his eleven sons and daughter born in Charan with the knowledge that they had a great and righteous Bubby and Zaidy living in Eretz Yisrael. He undoubtedly regaled them with stories of his youth, their teachings, details of their deeds, depictions of their characters and descriptions of their home.

When Devorah appeared, the children of Yaakov were finally afforded an opportunity to hear through Devorah an echo of their grandmother's voice, to see in her movements the actions of their grandmother, to taste in her cooking the love of their Savta. To the family of Yaakov, Devorah was their connection, their link to their unknown grandmother. It was therefore with the death of Devorah that Rivka died for them as well, thus the overabundance of tears.

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FAMILY DYNAMICS

BAILA EISEN ('15)

MONTHLY WRITER

This past Thursday, Americans celebrated Thanksgiving – a holiday which, like many others, tends to involve a huge family meal: a gathering of all those odd, quirky family members you only see twice a year. You've got your crazy great-uncle sleeping in the corner, drool coming out of his mouth. You've got that one aunt who laughs too loudly at her own jokes. But even your most dysfunctional family can't compare to the one described in this week's parsha.

When Yaakov hears that his long-lost brother Esav is coming to visit, he immediately freaks out and prepares for the worst. He splits his family into two camps in case one is attacked. He davens like crazy. He makes a gift, hoping to appease Esav. And all the while, Esav – and the four hundred men that accompany him – are coming closer. This is one family gathering you do not want to see. Finally, the dreaded moment comes. Esav runs toward Yaakov...and kisses him, weeping. How's that for anticlimactic?

There are many explanations for this strange turn of events. Some say that the kiss was insincere; I'm sure we've all heard the midrash about Yaakov's neck turning to marble as Esav tries to bite it, leaving Esav in tears of pain rather than brotherly love. But my favorite explanation is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's. He says that even though it is the way of the world for Esav to hate Yaakov, for that one moment Esav had mercy on Yaakov and kissed him wholeheartedly. The display of affection was sincere.

But that still doesn't answer the question. How could Esav's feelings towards Yaakov change so dramatically, so suddenly?

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THE COMPLETE TEFILLAH

LEOR LEVENSON ('16)

MONTHLY WRITER

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Yaakov learns that Esav is coming to meet him with 400 men. To Yaakov, this hostile action leaves him with three possible non-mutually exclusive courses of action: he can pray, send gifts to try to appease Esav, or prepare for war. Yaakov decides to do all three to ensure his family's survival. He first prepares his family for war by dividing them into two camps. He reasons that if one camp is attacked, at least the other one will survive. Next, he prays to Hashem.


This raises an obvious question: why does Yaakov, one of our three avot and one of the greatest tzaddikim in history, prepare for war before praying to Hashem? Shouldn't he of all people first ask Hashem for help and then, based on Hashem's answer, plan accordingly?

Yaakov is actually demonstrating the important concept of *hishtadlut*, human effort. As humans, we cannot just sit around and ask Hashem to fulfill all of our heart's desires without sacrificing anything; however, if we put in effort and actually try to accomplish something on our own, Hashem is more likely to answer that prayer.

Very often, people may think that their tefillot are not being answered because nothing in their lives changes despite repeated prayers. The truth is that Hashem hears every prayer and answers every prayer, but sometimes the answer is yes and sometimes the answer is no. Yaakov is demonstrating that we must put in effort and make sacrifices as a prerequisite to tefillah. An essential factor of a tefillah that is answered with a "yes" is *hishtadlut*.

However, we cannot mistake our *hishtadlut* as the true source of success. While this may be the case very often, we must constantly thank Hashem for the times that He answers, "yes" to our tefillot. There is a story of a man who is late for a meeting, but he cannot find a parking space. After a few minutes of searching, he makes a deal with Hashem: "If you help me get a parking space, I will give tzedaka every day for the rest of this week."

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As he finishes his prayer, he sees a car backing out of its space, so he turns back to G-d and says, "Never mind, I found one!"

We must remember that as Jews we need to put in *hishtadlut* and make real sacrifices before we pray, just like our forefather Yaakov Avinu; however, we can never forget that our success comes from Hashem, and not just from ourselves.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

SHANEE MARKOVITZ ('16)

The third movie of the Hunger Games series came out last week.

Spoiler alert: For those who did not read the books, the ending of this third movie would be described as absolutely frustrating. Viewers spend two hours watching the protagonist, Katniss, try to save someone she loves from his prison. When they finally rescue all of the imprisoned characters, each one has a beautiful reunion with another character in the movie. The protagonist is the last person to approach the person she wanted to rescue.

Everyone in the theater is clenching their fists in anticipation of a heartwarming welcome. Every person who had not read the books was looking forward to cliché hugs and happy tears and joy. Katniss ends up getting attacked by the person she rescued. And then the movie ends. Frustrating, right?

In this week's parsha, Vayishlach, we find the opposite scenario. Yaakov is preparing to see his brother Esav. The same brother who is driven by hatred and animosity. The brother who is prepared to kill Yaakov. As the reader, I am clenching my fists. As the reader, I am anticipating the worst, playing out in my head every possible way this scene can go totally askew. When Yaakov finally meets his brother, he is embraced warmly and almost lovingly. He is welcomed with open arms. In both the movie and the parsha, the unexpected unravels before us. In both cases, the drastic opposite of what was initially anticipated occurs. How is this possible?

In our own lives, we see one way. We often look towards an extreme outcome and define it as the *only* possible outcome. We limit ourselves. We narrow down our opportunities and possibilities. We need to get rid of this habit. We should expand our limited view and look around to see everything that is possible. When it seems like there is only one way to react to a situation, a struggle, or a dilemma, think again. Know that Esav did not attack his brother, as we had expected him to. Know that we all have the option to react, adjust, and be flexible to any scenario. *Im yirtze Hashem* we should all make a choice just like Esav, someone who is usually frowned upon, did at that moment. We should all merit to exceed our limitations and become greater people.

WORLDS APART

EDEN SABAG ('16)

This week's parsha describes the reunion between Yaakov and Esav. The brothers have been separated for many years due to Esav's anger about the birthright which he believed that Yaakov stole. During this reunion, Yaakov takes the opportunity to start over with Esav and make things right. In an effort to make peace, Yaakov offers Esav a portion of his flock. Esav rejects Yaakov's peace offering and says, "I have plenty... let what you have remain yours." Yaakov responds to Esav and says, "I have everything" (33:9-11).

Esav and Yaakov view life in two different ways. Esav focuses on living a very physical and superficial life. This is already evident during his youth when he cares about the here and now and doesn't understand that there is a future beyond the physical world. For example, Esav trades his birthright for soup. Now, as an adult, Esav responds to Yaakov's peace offering by saying, "I have plenty." The word "plenty" evokes quantity and materialistic possessions. This is proof that Esav is still selfish and materialistic and only focused on the physical world.

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Mrs. Ora Lee Kanner continued

Upon the death of an individual who is the last living link to an earlier generation, the mourning and grief is not limited to that individual but includes the loss of the entire previous generation.

For the many talmidim of Rav Moshe Twersky, who was brutally murdered just two weeks ago, his death was the loss of not only a beloved Rebbe and mentor, but a loss of a link to their Rebbe's Rebbe and grandfather, Harav Yoseph Dov Halevi Soloveitchik. With Rav Moshe Twersky's death came a renewal of the pain, emptiness, and chasm that resulted from the loss of the Rav and the great Brisk heritage that he embodied. May Hashem bring comfort to the families of the *niftarim hakedoshim* and consolation to all of Klal Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom, Mrs. Ora Lee Kanner

Eisen continued

Take a closer look at R' Shimon Bar Yochai's words: "For that moment, he had mercy." The answer is a simple testament to human emotion. Yes, Esav hated Yaakov. But when he saw his brother bowing to him, all of his children in tow, his heart melted a little. Family loves family, even if it is just for a little while. It's the same reason we put up with our own crazy relatives once a year, or even more. No matter how annoying they are, no matter how much we think we hate them, it's impossible to stop loving them completely.

By the time Yaakov and Esav part ways, this warmth has already begun to cool. Ha'emek Davar points out that Yaakov and Esav don't kiss when they part as they did when they met. But the moment was there. The love was there. And even though it didn't last very long, it existed, and that's got to count for something.

Sabag continued

Yaakov differs in that he focuses on spirituality and understands the significance of *olam haba*. Yaakov was a shepherd. Shepherds exemplify spirituality because they spend their days in solitude, contemplating the spiritual world and God's power. This concept is demonstrated by the fact that our three forefathers as well as Moshe and King David were all shepherds.

With this exemplary spiritual outlook, Yaakov's statement, "I have everything," alludes to an essential life lesson. When Yaakov declares that he has it all, he is teaching us that our lives, family, health, and happiness are our most valuable possessions in life. These prized possessions will remain with us even after we die. Unlike Esav, who has never outgrown his materialistic perspective, Yaakov not only thinks about the future but also has his priorities straight and understands the big picture.

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