

Vayishlach

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The steps Ya'akov *Avinu* took to prepare for his final confrontation with Eisav, *Chazal* tell us, teach us about how to prepare for any confrontation we might have as nation. They also teach us about how to partner with God and *Hashgochah Pratis* to turn a situation in our favor.

I learned this last *Motzei Shabbos*. I had five minutes before *Ma'ariv* and picked up Rav Zilberstein's *sefer* on the *parsha*, *Aleynu L'Shabayach*. He made the point using a story about Rav Shach, *zt"l*, who had been hospitalized.

Rav Shach at that time was very old and weak, but he insisted upon paying a visit to a man on the floor below. Those close to him were surprised by the request and concerned about fulfilling it. They suggested strongly that the man be brought up to the *Rav*, but Rav Shach explained:

"This man is having *shalom bayis* problems, and I have been trying to get him to improve his ways. So far, I have been unsuccessful, and I am concerned that if I ask him to come to me he still won't change. But if I go down to him, perhaps *Hashem* will take note of my *mesiras Nefesh* (self-sacrifice) and, have mercy and provide me with the right words to save his marriage."

Rav Zilberstein said that this also applied to Ya'akov's preparations too. After all, he asked, was Eisav such a *chacham* to understand Ya'akov's subtle hint that he had kept all of the 613 *mitzvos* while living with Lavan ("*Im Lavan garti*"), and would be protected as a result? Not likely.

Rather, Ya'akov's *bishtadalus*—effort—fell into the category of self-sacrifice, especially living by the *mitzvos* while in *Chutz L'Aretz* which the *Avos*, according to the *Ramban*, were not strict about. It wasn't to impress Eisav, even if he could decode Ya'akov's message, but God, in order to invoke Divine mercy and extra

Heavenly help to survive his confrontation with Eisav.

It's probably the most powerful weapon known to mankind, humility is. If a person doesn't believe in God or understand that He controls everything, then humility just seems wimpy. If a person believes that they are the maker of their own destiny, then arrogance seems like the way to go. But history shows that arrogant people either have limited success, or a limited time to enjoy whatever success they may have attained. God makes sure of that.

In any case, it's a nice *psbat* with a few applications, one of which helped me to answer a question I have had for a couple of years. It's doesn't come up until *Parashas Mikeitz*, but it is answerable now.

Shabbos Day

I ONCE SAW in a *sefer* how Yosef's accusation that his brothers were spies (*Bereishis* 42:9) was actually a hint to them that he was not only the viceroy of Egypt, but their long-lost brother. How? Through the word *meraglim*—spies. The Hebrew letters, *Mem-Raisb-Gimmel-Lamed-Yud-Mem*, are actually the first letters of the words, "*m'Rachel Immi genavtem, l'Midianim Yishmael mechartem*—From Rachel my mother you stole [me]; to Midianites, Arabs you sold [me]." How could they not have figured that one out?

The real question is, how could Yosef have expected them to figure it out? Even had his brothers suspected that the mean Egyptian standing before them was none other than Yosef, why would they have thought that the word *meraglim* was any kind of clue? The word made sense in the context of their discussion, so it was easy to take it at face value, which they did.

My answer until this week was that people, when they find themselves in unusual circumstances, start paying more attention to details. They'll even rethink ideas and discussions looking for clues to better help them understand what is happening to them. That, plus a little Heavenly help, might cause them to stumble over his clue and crack it. Maybe.

Or maybe the answer has more to do with Rav Shach's answer. Perhaps Yosef wasn't completely sure how to handle the situation with his brothers, knowing how much was at stake. He wanted them to do *teshuvah*, but of their own volition. He wanted to direct them, not repel them. It's hard enough doing that with only one brother. Doing that with 10 brothers must have been daunting.

All Yosef could do was invoke Divine mercy and assistance. He had to do something

to put himself out there to catch God's attention and warrant His help in righting Jewish history for all time. If he didn't get that help, then the brothers would not be the wiser and, he would have to play it by ear from that point onward. But if he did get the help he sought, then the brothers would get direction from God that could lead them to understand the impossible.

It doesn't seem as if the brothers ever did figure out the code in the end because, after returning home and recounting the story to their father, they only refer to the Egyptian leader. They didn't even hear what they told their father, things that hinted to Yosef's involvement in what was happening. For example, like how the viceroy knew the wood their cribs had been made from.

In fact, maybe Yosef knew how to code his message in the word *meraglim* from his father's encoding of *taryag*—613—in *garti*—I lived. And maybe just maybe, the coded word was not for his brothers in the end, but for his father, Ya'akov, knowing that they would eventually tell their father all that happened to them. Perhaps it was Yosef's way of saying, "Hi *Abba*, I'm still alive and doing just fine down in Egypt. After I finish with my brothers, I'll be in touch again. Until then, your loving son and viceroy of Egypt, Yosef."

Seudas Shlishis

THE SAYING GOES, "You open a pinhole, and I will drive a wagon through it." Either it has to be a very large pinhole, or a very small wagon, or . . . a great miracle. It is, of course, the latter, God's way of saying that a little effort on our part "inspires" Him to do a lot on His part. The *Gemora* says that Heaven helps someone who comes to "purify" themselves (*Yoma* 38b). The first statement says that "they" help them *a lot*.

It's not a matter of "ripping off" Heaven. You can't shortchange God. It's a matter of showing how much you care about what He cares about, which is more a function of the heart than arm strength. The actual physical effort can be minimal to receive great *siyata D'Shemaya*—Heavenly help—if the spiritual effort is also great.

In other words, *mesiras Nefesh* often translates into great physical effort to do something meaningful to get God's attention, and certainly the intention of others. Being so physically oriented, we tend to put "quantity" above "quality," physical prowess over spiritual prowess.

But sometimes we can be more impressed by something small than something big, because of what it means. The fact that someone paid attention to certain details that most people don't even consider, tells us the extent to which they care about what they do, or about how others feel.

I once went to a beautifully set up *Sheva Brochos*, but the part that really caught my attention was how someone folded the napkins. Everything else was what I was used to and expected from such talented and caring people, so I enjoyed what I saw and was very happy to be part of the *simchab*.

But the folded napkins were so over the top. Had they not folded them so creatively (I didn't know you could fold them like that), no one would have thought twice about it. They were decorative right out of the package, but the fact that the napkin folders went the extra distance sent a message that made me feel good, saying, "We think this is a very special event, and thank you for being part of it."

So what Ya'akov and Yosef did respectively to invoke Divine help may seem small because each didn't involve much physical effort, it was the care behind what they did that God took note of. It was their attention to detail, details that may not have come to matter until generations later, that impressed God and aroused His mercy. As Dovid *HaMelech* wrote, "*The sacrifices of God are a broken heart*" (*Tehillim* 25:14). That is, a *caring* heart.

Ain Od Milvado, Part 75

CONTINUING ON FROM last week, life is about being the *Vav* that connects the two *Yuds* to make an *Aleph* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2mM9TgO3LQ>). Any time a person increases awareness of the God of the Torah in the world, they are being the *Vav*. And FYI, anyone who supports someone who does it has a share in that process.

There is another important *Aleph* that I did not mention yet. *Kabbalah* explains that when Adam was first created, he "wore" something called *Kasnas Obr*, clothing made of light. After he sinned with the *Aitz HaDa'as*, his clothing was transformed from *Kasnas Obr* (*ALEPH-Vav-Raish*) to *Kasnas Obr* (*AYIN-Vav-Raish*), clothing made of skin. the basis of the induction of the *yetzer bara* into his being.

This is one of the main reasons for *Techiyas HaMeisim*, the resurrection of the dead. We cannot go to the World to Come with *Kasnas Obr* with an *Ayin* because the World to Come is not physical but spiritual. We have to return to our original, spiritual state of *Kasnas Obr* with the *Aleph*, which is what resurrection will do for each of person.

Our changed state interferes with our ability to properly relate to *ain od Milvado*. Our increased physicality makes it harder to relate to increased spirituality. It takes a spiritual being to relate to a spiritual being, something that is lost on so many people who have a difficult time "seeing" God.

Until, that is, they become a *ba'al teshuvah*. By becoming more spiritual, they find that they can relate more to spirituality and, of course, God. Then they can't understand how they could have ever doubted God's existence.

So, by becoming the *Vav* and completing the *Aleph*, we don't just rectify the world. We also start the process of restoring our *Kasnos Ohr* with an *Aleph*. We may not notice the difference that much right now but only because God hides it from us, for the sake of free will. But the moment that is no longer an issue, we will instantly become and enjoy what we achieved at this stage of history when playing the role of the *Vav*.