

Parashat Vayishlach 5780, 2019:

Encountering Our “Eisavs”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The beginning of our *parasha* depicts *Ya’akov Avinu’s* return to *Eretz Yisrael* and the preparations he undertook before encountering his estranged brother, Eisav. What thoughts and feelings were racing through his mind as this meeting drew near? The Torah informs us: “Ya’akov became very frightened and was distressed.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 32:8, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Rashi (1040-1105) notes that Ya’akov’s fear was very powerful — to the extent that “he was frightened lest he be killed.” In the following verse, Ya’akov strategizes and splits his family into two camps, with the hope that at least one group would survive. Once again, Rashi’s midrashically-infused interpretation helps us understand “the story behind the story:”

the remaining camp will escape: ... He (Ya’akov) prepared three options: *doron* — a gift, *milchamah* — war, and *tefilah* — prayer. For a *doron*: “So the gift passed on before him.” (32:22) For *tefilah*: “G-d of my father Abraham...” (32:10) For *milchamah*: “the remaining camp will escape.” (32:9)

This famous gloss contains the essence of Ya’akov’s three-part strategy for confronting Eisav: “*doron, tefilah* and *milchamah*.” At first, he sought to propitiate Eisav through gifts of tribute, while simultaneously praying to Hashem in heartfelt and soul-wrenching *tefilah*. As a last resort, he prepared himself for war should the other two approaches fail to achieve their desired purpose.

Rabbi Isaiah ben Avraham HaLevi Horowitz *zatzal* (1565-1630), known as the *Shlah Hakodesh*, has a fascinating approach to applying Ya'akov's tripartite plan to our modern "Eisavs." In essence, he reinterprets *doron* as *tzedakah*, and *milchamah* as doing *teshuvah* (returning to the proper path of Torah observance), whereas *tefilah* maintains its normative meaning:

Just like he [Ya'akov] occupied himself with gifts, prayer, and war, so, too, should we act accordingly with the sons of Eisav...in order to ensure a powerful foundation and the continued existence of Diaspora Jewry... [In our time,] these three things represent *teshuvah*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah*. *Doron* refers to *tzedakah*, *tefilah* is understood in the standard manner, and *milchamah* is *teshuvah*... (Translation my own)

Moreover, the *Shlah Hakodesh* views our meritorious actions of *teshuvah*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah* as key to bringing *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the one true righteous Messiah):

...in the time of the Messiah [the *Navi*] says: "And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Eisav, and the L-rd shall have the kingdom." (*Sefer Ovadiah* 1:21) The coming of the Messiah is the direct result of the *zechuyot* (merits) that will accrue on behalf of these three actions (that is, *teshuvah*, *tefilah* and *tzedakah*).

With Hashem's help, and the *Shlah Hakodesh's* inspiration, may we successfully encounter the "Eisavs" of our time through *teshuvah*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah*; and may these *zechuyot* enable us to witness the arrival of *Mashiach Tzidkanu* soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

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*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.