

Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Vayishlach- “Davening For Our Children”

In this week's parsha, we encounter the reunion between Yaakov and Eisav. And as Yaakov prepares for this momentous event, the Torah outlines 3 different strategies that he employs to help ensure a successful meeting. Number one, he sends gifts to Eisav in order to appease him and show that he is coming with only the best of intentions. Number two, he creates a contingency battle plan, splitting up his own camp into two groups such that if one is attacked the other could escape. And finally, he davens to Hashem asking Him to save him from Eisav and his influence.

Many commentaries over the years have used Yaakov's action as a model for how one should approach a moment of conflict or when facing a challenge. First of all, we should do all we can to avoid the conflict or challenge (when possible). If that isn't successful, we must prepare for the conflict/challenge with a two pronged approach- we must do our *השתדלות* by putting in the effort to face the conflict or challenge successfully, and we must also turn to Hashem for help and protection with the recognition that ultimately not everything is dependent on us or under our control.

When it comes to parenting as well, this two-pronged approach should form the basis of our fundamental strategy. We must strive to be the best parents that we can be by putting in the time, thought and effort that is essential to our success. As we have mentioned before, we should not assume that we will simply “figure this parenting thing out”- being a parent demands of us a tremendous amount of reflection and care into how we can best raise our children.

But after all of that, we should never underestimate the other major aspect that is crucial to our success as parents- taking the time to daven to G-d regarding our children. The importance and power of davening- particularly for success in the chinuch of our kids- is something that often gets overlooked. We tend to put a lot of thought into certain aspects of how we raise our kids- where we send them to school, to camp. We also give of ourselves totally to help encourage them to become the people that we dream for them to be. But as our children get older, we come to realize that as with everything in life, there is so much about our children's lives that, despite our best intentions, we cannot control. That realization can be difficult to confront.

It is at that point that we are meant to turn to Hashem and daven for help. In doing so, we recognize that ultimately, we are not raising our children alone, but in fact are doing so in partnership with G-d. There are so many factors that contribute to who our child becomes and to the potential success of our endeavors, that are beyond our control. The child's innate characteristics and traits, who he meets and befriends, events and incidents that occur to him and around him in his lifetime are outside of our capabilities as humans. We must recognize how much we in fact depend on G-d for success in raising our children- and to daven for them on a daily basis- not just in times of crisis and when something goes wrong, but on a consistent basis.

How we do this can take many forms. For some it consists of the special bracha that fathers/parents give their children every Friday night. Others have an additional custom to say a perek of Tehillim for each

child every day. For yet others that commitment may not be realistic, but the importance of keeping our children in mind during our tefillot cannot be overstated.

The story is told of a principal of a school in Eretz Yisrael who went to Rav Aryeh Leib Steinman to get advice about dealing with a problematic child, and to get permission to kick the student out of the yeshiva. Rav Steinman turned to him and asked, "whats the boys name?" The principal answered him. "And what's his mother's name?" Not sure what Rav Steinman was getting at, the principal answered that he didn't know, but he could find out. Rav Steinman then responded- "what do you mean you don't know? Are you saying that you are thinking about throwing out this student, and you haven't even davened for him? How could that be!?" Part of being a mechanech, and parent, is to daven for those whom are under our care.

Recognizing this partnership with G-d can be incredibly meaningful and comforting. During moments of particular challenge and despair as we navigate this unfamiliar territory, we know that we always have whom to turn to for support- we are never alone, there is always more we can do. And it can also be encouraging - as we are partnering with the best there is. And finally, davening to Hashem on behalf of our children has an added benefit in that it forces us to think about, concretize, and verbalize the hopes and aspirations that we have for each of kids. While we may think about these goals often, it is important at times to reinforce them in a more concrete way by davening for them.

On the eve of his meeting with Eisav, Yaakov underscored that the Jewish approach to moments of challenge and opportunity must strike a crucial balance- we prepare and do all we can practically to be successful, and then we turn to Hashem and daven that He should help us along our path.

We need to daven that He should protect our children and give them the tools to be successful and productive in the way that we want them to be. And of course, perhaps more importantly, we need to daven to Hashem that He should give us the wisdom and knowledge to make the right decisions in raising our children to be the best that they can be.

Addendum: Story is told of a principal of a school who went to Rav Aryeh Leib Steinman to get advice about what to do with a problematic child, and to get permission to kick the student out of the yeshiva. Rav Steinman turned to him and asked, whats the boys name? He told him. And whats his mother's name? Not sure what the Rav was getting at, the principal answered that he didn't know, but he could find out. Rav Steinman proclaimed- what do you mean you don't know? Are you saying that you are thinking about throwing out this student, and you haven't even davened for him? How could you do that? Part of being a mechanech, and parent, is to daven for those whom are under our care.