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Executive Vice President, Orthodox Union

ORTHODOX UNION
Enhancing Jewish Life

Taking the Reigns

Jacob became very frightened and was distressed, so he divided the people who were with him and the flocks and the cattle and the camels into two camps. And he said, "If Esau comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape." (Bereishis 32:8-9)

Yaakov prepares for the overwhelming reunion. Will Esav want war or peace? Has Esav forgiven his brother, or does he still harbor animosity? These are the questions swirling around Yaakov's head. Rashi explains that Yaakov prepared for this encounter in various ways. He prayed to God for help, split the camp in anticipation for war, and sent gifts to appease Esav. Although Rashi mentions prayer first, Yaakov, in fact, prepares for war first and only afterwards prays. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (1881-1966) in his work titled *Oznayim LaTorah* asks a simple question, *"Why didn't Yaakov pray first? Isn't prayer the most instinctive, reflexive response to danger and difficulty? Why does he first split the camp and then only later turn to spiritual options?"*


Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l

Rav Sorotzkin answers that Teffilah, prayer, requires a certain level of *"yishuv ha'daas,"* inner quietude and concentration. When Yaakov hears that Esav is coming to meet him with 400 men, he is consumed with worry and fright for his children and wives. He knows he can't best Esav on the battlefield and realizes that at this point flight is no longer an option. *Teffilah*, true dialogical connection with Hashem requires concentration and some measure of inner peace. Yaakov doesn't have it and so he doesn't pray. It is only after he takes other steps and feels a bit more "prepared" for this encounter that he could reach out and converse with Hashem.

Perhaps, the Torah is teaching us an additional lesson as well. When we

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The OU Israel family sends heartfelt condolences to

Yael Tamari
Director OU Israel Free Spirit: Birthright Israel

and to

Aryeh Frankel
Founder and CEO of Israel Destination

and families

on the passing of their Father

BARRY FRANKEL z"l

Shiva at Pitum HaKetoret 56/1 Efrat

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

encounter a challenge, perhaps the step before (or at least concurrent with) prayer is action. When we encounter difficult or tumultuous circumstances, we must ask ourselves, what can I do to help myself? How can I own this situation to make it better? All too often, we rely on others to solve our problems and fix that which is broken. If you want something done in life, roll up your sleeves and get it done yourself. To an extent, we must take this approach with Hashem. Of course, the Ribbono Shel Olam is always here to help us. But what He wants more than anything is for us to own our circumstances and engage in dynamic activity to help ourselves and better our world. He doesn't only want us to pray; He wants us to act. Hashem gives us the incredible opportunity to partner with Him to advance ourselves and our world. The reality is we can't accomplish anything without God's assistance and providence. But we must take the first step. We can't ask Hashem to act if we are unwilling to act ourselves.

Perhaps, this was the dynamic unfolding with Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov realized he needed to prepare in these three ways. He understood that teffilah was an absolute necessity. Yet, Yaakov understood that there is decisive action he could take to help himself, take ownership over his circumstances, and act. And so, he splits the camps in preparation for war, sends a beautiful gift to Esav and then says, "Hashem, I have done everything I can, I need your help. Where my reach ends, is where Yours begins. *Hatzileyni Na,* save me and my family from these difficult circumstances."

We all encounter challenges, difficulties, and moments of uncertainty. In those moments, it is tempting to wait for someone else to solve our problems or to place the responsibility in the hands of Hashem. Yaakov Avinu teaches us that Hashem is always with us and always ready to help, we must be willing to help ourselves. We must take ownership of our circumstances, When life becomes overwhelming, we must have the courage to split the camp by doing what is in our hands and then placing what is beyond our reach in the hands of Hashem. ■

Rabbi Shmuel Silber has served the Orthodox Union (OU) as its Executive Vice President since November 2026. As the executive vice president, Rabbi Silber is responsible for representing the OU's vision on both Torah and public policy, and providing hashkafic and halachic guidance within the organization and beyond. Prior to joining the OU, Rabbi Silber served for 23 years as the rabbi of Suburban Orthodox Congregation Toras Chaim, building it into one of Baltimore's most vibrant and dynamic kehillahs. Rabbi Silber is also the founder and dean of the Institute for Jewish Continuity (IJC), which provides contemporary Torah learning with Chassidic influences for adults at all levels. As the Founding Rabbi of the Berger Towers community in Katamonim, Jerusalem, Rabbi Silber oversees the community's rabbinic leadership and hashkafic direction. Rabbi Silber received semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University and holds a master's degree in secondary Jewish education from the Azrieli Graduate School.

May the learning in this issue of Torah Tidbits be לעילוי נשמת

הרבנית שולמית דולגין ע"ה
Rebbitzin Shirley G. Dolgin a"h

Beloved mother, grandmother & great-grandmother
on her 20th Yahrzeit, 18 Kislev

The Dolgin, Glasser, Weinstock and Slomiansky families

יהי זכרה ברוך