

Yayishlach-Genesis

The portion of the week is about family . . . and it's complicated. I would like everyone to think of a family interaction that we regret. I regret my frustration with my kids, especially at bedtime when I lose it because I just want them to go to sleep. Perhaps unkind words were shouted. Perhaps someone stole a favorite toy and hid it from a sibling. Perhaps we were mean simply because we had the power to do so. Then later, upon reflection, we regret our actions.

In Yayishlach, Jacob decides to take action and does something very hard. After 20 years, he goes back to reunite with his brother, Esau. Jacob knows that he has wronged his brother by cheating him out of his birthright and inheritance. Jacob has all the wealth and riches imaginable . . . and God's blessing. He does not have to return to Canaan, yet he chooses to do so. He could travel alone to meet his brother. But he decides to take his whole family and all of their belongings.

How do we expect Esau to behave? Any ideas? Jacob was "terrified" that his brother would seek revenge. But when Esau sees his brother, he "ran to meet him, and embraced him." Esau forgave Jacob and has continued to love him as a brother. This is the power of family that we continue to love and forgive each other, no matter what. Jacob has chosen to do the hard thing. He could have spent the rest of his life enjoying the riches and family around him, but he would have the regret of never facing his past. Instead, he brings his family with him to confront his brother. He demonstrates that our actions are powerful. Now Jacob can begin to move past the regret of what he did as a young man.

The rest of the passage this week is messy. Suffice it to say that we are all likely to take actions we will regret. Actions that will have consequences to all of those around us. But if we try to live life without regret, then we can shape our actions to be kinder to our family and everyone around us.

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