The Daily Portion - Sivan Rahav Meir

Five thoughts for this Shabbat

Translated by Janine Muller Sherr

1) This Shabbat we will read Parashat Toldot, the sixth parasha in the Book of Bereishit.

2) But first a reminder: We are now in winter time so Shabbat begins early and ends early. It's worthwhile to begin to prepare for Shabbat in advance so that we can bring it in calmly and not under stress.

3) This week's parasha describes the lives of our patriarch Yitzchak and our matriarch Rivka. They struggle with 20 years of childlessness until their prayers are finally answered. Then they must cope with the friction between their twins, Yaakov and Eisav. The Torah describes this fraught situation in detail so that we can learn from it. The mothers and fathers of our nation struggled with numerous challenges and endured many hardships – pressures from the outside world and tension within their own families. Learning how they grappled with their challenges gives us strength to cope with our own.

4) Our patriarch Yitzchak repeats what his father Avraham did before him: he clashes with the same enemies, and digs his father's wells for a second time after they were sealed by the Philistines. Our commentators emphasize the centrality of Yizchak's contribution - not to forge a new path, but to stay the course; not to introduce something new but to continue what was started. In our current age of "likes", thrills, and drive for constant innovation, our Sages urge us to learn from Yitzchak's example of dedication, loyalty, and quiet perseverance.

5) One more point: In our parasha, Eisav sells the birthright to Yaakov for a bowl of red lentil soup. He gives up his eternal, spiritual mission for instant gratification. Our Sages note that we, too, often face similar dilemmas in our lives: to adhere to our values or give in to temptation. Yaakov and Eisav are twin brothers who represent two opposing world-views, two conflicted impulses that wage a battle within us, pulling us in different directions.

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