



Vayishlach: It Takes Time

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

After the dramatic encounter with Esav, Yaakov continued his journey back home. The journey took longer than expected due to the large family and flock, and Yaakov made camp in a few different locations.

And Jacob traveled to Succoth and built himself a house, and for his cattle he made booths; therefore, he named the place Succoth. And Jacob came “shalem” (safely) to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram, and he encamped before the city (Genesis 33:17-18)

The Torah relates that Yaakov arrived “shalem” to the city of Shechem. The Hebrew word “shalem” is translated by many of the commentaries as “safely”, but the basic, more common definition of “shalem” is “complete” or “whole.” What does the Torah mean that Yaakov arrived in the city of Shechem complete/whole?

Rashi explains:

Heb. שלם, lit., whole, unimpaired in his body, for he was cured of his limp and whole with his money. He did not lose anything because of that entire gift that he had given Esau. [He was also] whole with his Torah, for he had not forgotten [any of] his studies in Laban’s house. [Gen. Rabbah 79:5, Shab. 33b]

Yaakov was finally whole. Physically whole, financially whole, and spiritually whole. He was able to heal from the challenges and difficulties of his past.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt”l points out something fascinating. Yaakov reached the city of Shechem almost 2 years after the ordeal with Esav. Following the encounter with his brother, Yaakov settled in the city of Succos and resided there for eighteen months. Why does the Torah only relate that Yaakov was whole and healed when he arrived in Shechem?

The answer is simple, yet profound – it takes time to heal. Your physical injuries take time to heal, and your emotional scars can cause pain for prolonged amounts of time. Healing can be a long and arduous process. Yaakov was deceived and mistreated by Lavan. He spent over two decades in an environment which was hostile to his views. The soul can heal – but it takes time.

Yaakov fought with an angel and was injured. The body can heal; this is a gift from God – but it takes time.

Yaakov encountered his estranged brother. This meeting must have brought back beautiful childhood memories but also brought back memories of deception, hurt, and pain. The brothers embraced, an embrace that was filled with love, anger, and sadness. The broken heart can be mended – but it takes time.

Yaakov entered into the city of Shechem, whole and healed – but it had taken close to two years for the wounds to heal.

We all suffer life injuries. Of course, there are physical injuries. And like Yaakov Avinu, there can be times when my soul will be wounded. I make poor decisions and wrong turns. There are times when my heart is wounded and broken. At times, it is as a result of wrongs committed against me and hurt visited upon me. But sometimes, my heart breaks as a result of things I do to others. I have hurt my loved ones. I have said things that should have never been said. I have done things that should have never been done. I have visited pain upon those who I should have protected and nurtured. I have broken my heart.



But just as the body heals, the soul and heart can heal as well. Just as my physical injuries will need time to heal, the soul and heart require time to become once again whole. Too often, we want to feel better *now*, put the pain behind us *now* – but it takes time. The little boy who breaks his leg just wants to run outside and play with his friends, but he must first give himself the time to heal. When we hurt people we love, we often think that all it takes is an apology to create an automatic reset. As if, as soon as I say, “I’m sorry”, all of the pain automatically dissipates. You can heal a wounded relationship – but it will take time. And then there are the moments we injure ourselves. So many mistakes, so many misdeeds, so many wrong turns, and then comes the moment when I want to turn things around. I want to change; I want to be and do better. I just want to become the person I always wanted to be, and I want to be him now. But it takes time to mend your broken heart. It takes time to fix your mistakes. It takes time to right the wrongs. It takes time to change. It takes time to fix the things which are broken.

Yaakov Avinu becomes whole, but it was a journey. We can fix the things which are broken in our lives and in ourselves. We just must have strength, courage, and most importantly, patience.