

פרשת וישלח

Yaakov Avinu: A Man of Wisdom

There are two instances in our parasha that we tend to get frustrated with Yaakov and his passivity. The first occurrence takes place after the rape and abduction of his daughter Dinah. Yaakov waits for his sons to come from the field—he is nervous to react without them. His sons then lead the negotiations with Shechem and his father, while Yaakov seems to be on the sidelines. Only after Shimon and Levi take action does Yaakov finally speak for the first time in the whole episode, to attack their actions and lack of passivity. Reading the parasha, we are left bewildered—Yaakov you didn't do anything! What right do you have to critique those who actually took action, albeit flawed as it was? How passive can one person possibly be?

The second occurrence of Yaakov's passivity occurs after the incident with Reuven and Bilhah. Once again the Torah lets us know that Yaakov heard of a situation, and once again he is absent a response. Here the lack of response seems quite shocking because it is a direct affront from within his family on his leadership of the family. The reader of the Torah wants to scream—act! Do something! Say something! Anything but being so passive! What was Yaakov thinking in both of these situations?

Haza"l point out the wisdom of Yaakov. In truth Yaakov does respond. He levies consequences on all three of his children who acted in a way that displeased him—Reuven, Shimon, and Levi. At the end of his life upon his deathbed, Yaakov harshly rebukes and penalizes his children. The Rabbis point out the wisdom of Yaakov—feigning passivity, but waiting for the right moment to respond. They emphasize that had Yaakov responded immediately and harshly to his adult children with severe consequences, he would have lost them. The children would have left the family to seek their own fortunes. Am Yisrael would not have existed as we know of it today. Therefore, Yaakov is patient, biding his time, allowing his children to find their own way. They are already aware of the values Yaakov instilled in them. He doesn't need to criticize them immediately to inform them of the errors of their ways. Their mistakes are obvious. He allows them to find their way and correct themselves, and waits until his deathbed to rebuke them, when it is obvious it stems from love and not anger.

As adults responsible for the education of children, we all need to learn from the wisdom of Yaakov Avinu. Being silent and not responding immediately is not a sign of weakness. It is an inner strength of refusing to respond from anger, properly biding our time to educate the child out of love in its proper time. May Hashem continue to give us the strength to emulate the educational methods of our great forefather, Yaakov Avinu.