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SHABBAT TABLE

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5786

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Construction Zone

A developer had a longtime contractor he trusted implicitly. For decades, this builder handled every project the developer had — homes, buildings, complexes — always with loyalty and care. One day, after many faithful years of work, the builder approached him and said, "My wife keeps telling me it's time to slow down and be with the family. I'm grateful for everything you've given me, but I'm retiring."

The developer was stunned. "You're my best contractor. I rely on you completely." But the builder held firm — he needed to think about his family and his life. Finally, after a long pause, the developer asked, "Just one last job. One final project — can you do that for me?" The builder hesitated. He wanted to say yes, but he needed his wife's approval. When he called her, she immediately refused. "No more jobs — you're retired! We're moving on."

But the builder couldn't let go so easily. "This man gave us everything," he pleaded. "Let me do this one last job to show my gratitude." After much convincing, she finally agreed. But once the project began, the builder's heart wasn't in it. They had already picked out their condo in Florida; in his mind, he was already on the golf course. The job that should have taken a year was rushed through in seven months. The roof wasn't straight. The tilework was sloppy. He cut corners everywhere he could — just wanting to finish and move on.

When it was finally "done," the builder handed the keys to the developer, thanking him for a lifetime of work. The developer looked at the keys, smiled, and said, "I have one final gift for you..." Then he placed the keys back in the builder's hand.

"This house," he said gently, "is yours."

The builder stood frozen. "What? Mine?" Gratitude washed over him — and then regret. 'Had I known I was building my own house...' he thought. He would have chosen better materials, done careful work, poured his heart into every detail. But now it was too late.

This anecdote is actually the story of our lives. Hashem gives us mitzvot, challenges, and opportunities — not for Him, but ultimately for us. Every test passed, every struggle with emuna, every kindness, every moment of growth — these are the beams, tiles, and bricks of our eternal home. One day, Hashem hands us the keys to the "house" we built.

And the great question is: Are we building it with care, or cutting corners?

If we live with awareness, purpose, and faith, we won't look back wishing we had built differently. Instead, we will gladly receive the beautiful palace we crafted — one choice at a time.

(Based on a dvar Torah shared by R' Yehoshua Zitron, quoting R' Dovid Hoffman)

Breaking the Barrier

This week's parsha opens with the tense buildup to Yaakov's reunion with Esav. Hoping to soften Esav's anger, Yaakov sends messengers ahead with words meant to appease him. But their efforts fail. The messengers return with alarming news: Esav is on his way with 400 men, prepared for revenge. Yet when the two brothers finally meet face-to-face, the outcome is completely different — Esav embraces Yaakov and they reconcile. This contrast raises an important question: Why were Yaakov's messengers unable to calm Esav, yet in person the reconciliation happened instantly? What changed?

A story involving two chassidic leaders, R' Zalman and R' Baruch of Medzhibozh, echoes this theme. The two rabbis had fallen into a dispute, and their students tried repeatedly to resolve it. But despite all the efforts, nothing worked. Eventually Rabbi Baruch realized why: true peace cannot be achieved through intermediaries. Just as in our parsha, the words of appeasement delivered by messengers were ineffective. Only when the two rabbis met face-to-face were they able to dispel the tension and reconcile.

This point explains the dynamic between Yaakov and Esav as well. When people are in conflict, they often hold misconceptions about one another. They imagine motives, exaggerate offenses, and fill in the blanks with negativity. The Yetzer Hara feeds these distortions, making the other person seem far worse than they really are. As long as the two sides remain apart, these false images persist. But once they stand before each other, speak directly, and see one another's sincerity, many of those misconceptions fall away.

This is why the messengers failed, yet the reunion succeeded. Personal presence — honest, respectful, human contact — breaks through barriers that words carried by others simply cannot. The lesson for us is clear: many conflicts in our own lives would dissolve if we stopped relying on assumptions or intermediaries and instead spoke to one another directly. Often, peace is just one sincere conversation away.

As Abraham Lincoln once quipped: "I don't like this man very much; I should start to get to know him better."

(Based on a d'var Torah from R' Eli Mansour in "The Daily Halacha")

"Life is like a camera: just focus on what's important, capture the good times, develop the negatives, and if things don't work out, take another shot."