Parshat Toldot 5787 Don’t go it alone

Last week in *Parshat Chayei Sarah*, we met Rebecca at her most independent. When asked if she would leave everything behind to marry Isaac, she gave a bold, single-word answer: *Elech: I will go.* She was the picture of human agency—confident, decisive, and open to anything she might face in her journey ahead.

This week in *Parshat Toldot*, her story shifts. During a complicated, painful pregnancy, her self-reliance hits a wall. She seems to intuit that sheer willpower and inner strength are no longer enough. Instead of *elech* ("I will go"), the text uses the same root, paired with a very different action: *Vatelech lidrosh et Adonai*—"She went to seek God." She’s still *going,* but she’s not going alone.

Commentators offer a few possibilities for what "seeking God" actually looked like for her: some suggest she turned inward in direct prayer; others suggest she consulted a local prophet. Most famously, *Genesis Rabbah* explains that she traveled to the *Beit Midrash* (study hall) of the elder sages, Shem and Eber. Either way, she models how confidence includes knowing when to ask for help. When the pain is too great, she looks beyond herself.

In the Talmud (*Megillah 14a*), the Rabbis assemble an official list of the Seven Prophetesses of the Bible—naming figures like Sarah, Miriam, and Deborah. Glaringly, Rebecca is left off that formal list, even though she is the only matriarch who initiates an inquiry directly to God.

On the one hand, it’s frustrating that this beautiful moment of reaching out for God doesn’t make the cut. Certainly Rebecca’s connection to God feels holy. On the other hand, by being left off the list, Rebecca teaches us something even more important. If she wasn’t seeking God to preach a public prophecy to the people, then she sought God because she reached her human limits and needed private and direct help, *like any one of us might do at our hardest moments.* Her story proves that drawing close to God—whether through a study hall, a trusted leader, or quiet personal prayer—doesn't require a pedestal, a title, or the perfect steadfastness of faith. Reaching beyond ourselves when we are overwhelmed isn't a weakness; it might be the very thing we need to access the Divine.