



Parshas Vayishlach

For the week ending 14 Kislev 5758
12 & 13 December 1997

Overview

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching him with an army of 400 men. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending a tribute to mollify Esav. That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Although Yaakov emerges victorious, he is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be "Yisrael," signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural realm (the angel). The brothers, Yaakov and Esav, meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dinah, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dinah's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement — however, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *bris mila*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. Hashem commands Yaakov to go to Beis-El and build an altar there. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beis-El. Hashem appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Yisrael. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beis Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

Insights

S-MORE-GASBORD!

Esav: "I have plenty..." Yaakov: "...I have everything." (33:9-11)
A buffet is not a Jewish invention.

Have you noticed whenever you eat at a buffet, you always end up eating about twice as much as if you'd been served a meal? The Torah says "And you will eat and you will be satisfied, and you will bless Hashem your G-d." Eat. Be satisfied, and then thank the One who provides food for the whole world.

What does a buffet say? "Don't look at what you've eaten. **Look at what's left!** How can you possibly walk away from this gorgeous spread, these tables groaning under their load of delights? Have you no conscience? Get over here and fill up another plate immediately! (Have you tried the smoked salmon yet?)"

Esav says "I have plenty." Yaakov says "I have everything."

What's the difference between someone who says they have plenty and someone who says they have everything?

Someone who says they have plenty is telling you that *they could have a lot more!* Their focus is not what's on their plate. It's on what's left on the tables of life's buffet.

Someone who says that he has everything is saying that he's happy with what he has, even though he may have but little. His focus is on the portion that the Creator has provided for him. For only He knows the exact size of the helping needed to preserve our individual spiritual health and fitness.

BURNING SOUL

"Please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav." (32:12)

"Then Yaakov looked up and saw Esav coming in the distance; immediately he looked heavenward, cried, and begged for mercy ... until G-d promised to save him from every tribulation by the merit of Yaakov." (Bereishis Rabba 75:13)

Can we ever erase from our minds the terrible frightened faces of the six million? Standing in lines on railway platforms. Dressed in drab European grays and browns.

We will never know how close we came to seeing those ranks of holy martyrs swelled by the gold kaftans of Yerushalmi Jews and the khaki shorts and blue hats of *kibbutzniks*.

In 1942, Rommel and a huge tank-force stood at the gates of Palestine. Nothing was between him and the *yishuv* (Jewish settlement). The British forces prepared to evacuate Palestine. They started to burn documents.

At this very moment, Rabbi Kahanaman purchased a lot near Tel Aviv and laid the cornerstone for a new Yeshiva. People thought he was crazy. He responded that G-d hadn't brought him to Israel to be murdered by the Nazis. (Rabbi Kahanaman went on to build the Ponevezh Yeshiva, one of the largest in Israel today.)

In the desert in 1942, the only thing holding the Germans back was a lack of drinking water. They discovered that the British had laid a water pipe through the desert. The British had just finished this pipeline and they were checking it for leaks. Instead of wasting valuable drinking water, they were pumping sea-water through they pipeline to check its integrity. The Germans guzzled the sea-water from the pipes and surrendered in terrible agony.

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Parshas Vayishlach — 14 Kislev 5758, 12 & 13 December 1997

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A miracle, or a coincidence?

We live in an era where it's very difficult to see Hashem's hand in the world. When you see a wall, you know that something is blocking your view. When there is no wall you can think that you see everything.

The Torah itself tells us that Hashem will "hide His face from us." That we won't see Him. The expression the Torah uses is "*hasteir astir*" — "I will **surely** hide My face." The verb is doubled. It is as though Hashem is telling us that He will hide even the fact that He is hiding.

The greatest concealment is that *the concealment itself* is concealed.

Yaakov Avinu saw our generation some three and a half thousand years ago. He saw "*Esav coming in the distance.*" He saw Esav executing "the Final Solution." And he saw him fail.

He also saw the other face of Esav, when he pretends to be our brother. Yaakov Avinu saw that Esav would try to smother us with a brotherly embrace. A brotherly embrace that wants to tell the Jewish People that three thousand years of miraculous survival is merely coincidental; that there is no One behind the wall, because there really is no wall at all and we can see everything. We have the technology!

Yaakov Avinu saw this silent holocaust of Jewish souls "*coming in the distance.*" He looked heavenward. He cried and begged Hashem for mercy for his children; that whether Esav would try to burn our bodies or our souls he would ultimately fail.

THE HOUSEWIFE AND THE CAT

"And Yaakov was very frightened and distressed." (32:7)

Rashi comments that Yaakov was *frightened* lest he or members of his family be killed, and he was *distressed*, that he might be forced to kill others.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein asks: Why was Yaakov distressed that he might be put in a position of having to kill Esav or one of his four hundred wicked companions? Wasn't this an opportunity to rid the world of evil — a reason to rejoice, and not to be distressed? Reb Moshe answers with the words of Beruria to her husband Rabbi Meir (Berachos 10a): "Better to pray that evildoers repent than to pray that the wicked die."

Yaakov was distressed that he might have to kill to remove evil from the world. There is an inherent danger in using undesirable methods to achieve desirable goals — *that one can become tainted by the means.*

Rabbi Chaim Brisker pointed out that there are two kinds of zealots in the world, comparable to a housewife and a cat. Both the housewife and the cat want to rid the house of mice. The only difference is that the housewife hopes that there will never be another mouse to eliminate, whereas *the cat hopes there will be many more.*

Before we are zealous to attack the evils of the world, let us make sure that we are acting as housewives and not cats.

Haftorah Ovadiah 1:1-21

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The entire book of Ovadiah, the shortest in all of the *Tanach*, is this week's Haftorah. Ovadiah was a convert to Judaism from the nation of Edom.

Esav lived among two *tzadikim*, Yitzchak and Rivka, and failed to learn from them. Ovadiah lived among two of the wickedest people, Achav and Jezabel, yet he remained a *tzadik*. His prophecy follows Esav/Edom through various periods of history until its eventual downfall in the times of the *Mashiach*.

Our Sages understand ancient Rome as the personification of Edom. There is no historical information of any actual relationship by descent, but if we look into the inner kernel of Rome, we will see the most brilliant realization of the Esav/Edom principle.

Esav was a hunter — "*trapping was in his mouth*" (*Bereishis* 25:28). He was a hunter not just with a bow and arrow, but "with his mouth." He knew how to feign innocence to entrap others in his net. Esav's father Yitzchak saw prophetically that Esav would live by his sword (27:40). Rome was a society built on the sword, military bravery and strength. Ultimately Rome crumbled because it was rotten within: The twin pillars of its foundation — deception and might — can never form the basis of a lasting civilization.

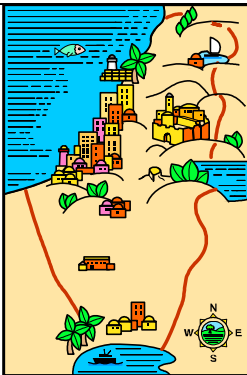
Rome has always been the implacable enemy of Israel, and the instrument of Israel's Divinely decreed fate. And it is Israel who eternally stands in stark contrast to Rome. For Israel's mission is to carry the G-d given principles of justice, brotherly love and morality down through the ages.

Sources:

Burning Soul - *Devarim* 31:18, *Baal Shem Tov*, *Imrei Shefer*,
Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman
The Housewife And The Cat - *Rabbi Zev Leff in Shiurei Binah*
The Rise And Fall Of The Roman Empire - *Rabbi*
Mendel Hirsch

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



KISSING THE EARTH

"For Your servants hold dear her stones and cherish even her dust." (*Tehillim* 102:15)

The touching scene of Jews kissing the earth upon their arrival in *Eretz Yisrael* has its roots in the words of King David and in the actions of our Talmudic Sages. Rabbi Abba kissed the rocks at the port of Acco. Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda rolled in the dust of the land. Rabbi Chanina went even further by repairing the roads so that his beloved country would not have a bad reputation with those who traveled upon them.

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