

Torah Weekly

7"בב

December 8-14, 2019

10-16 Kislev, 5780

Torah: Genesis 32:4-36:43

Haftarah: Obadiah 1:1-21

PARSHAT

VAYISHLACH

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Flight or Fight

Of all the things we Jews observe in order to remember events in our historic past, surely one of the strangest must be what we read in this week's *parshah*. Jacob wrestles with an angel (Esau's spiritual guardian) and in the course of the struggle, his hip is dislocated. *Therefore, says the Torah, to this day, the Children of Israel are not to eat the sciatic nerve (of an animal) by the hip joint—because he struck Jacob's hip-socket at the sciatic nerve.* The sciatic nerve (*gid hanasheh*) and its associated sinews and nerves are located in the animal's hindquarters, and because they are very difficult to properly remove, only cuts from the forequarters are usually available as kosher meat. So if it has always bothered you that you can't get a kosher rump steak, you can blame it on father Jacob and his wrestling match with the angel of Esau. So, tell me, just because 4,000 years ago one of my ancestors had a hip dislocated I must curb my culinary cravings? Is this fair, is it logical? Why remember that—what's the point? The 12th century French sage, Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir ("Rashbam"), a grandson of Rashi and a Biblical and Talmudic commentator of note, offers the following insight. The story of Jacob and the angel occurred just prior to Jacob's impending encounter with his estranged twin brother. Esau was coming with four hundred armed men, and Jacob was actually planning to flee from Esau. That was when the angel attacked him. According to Rashbam, the

reason for the angel wrestling with Jacob was so that he would be forced to stand his ground and not escape via a back route. Destiny itself was compelling Jacob to confront the enemy and overcome him. Only then would he witness the fulfillment of G-d's promise to protect him from harm. It seems that Jacob was coming dangerously close to developing a pattern of escapism. He fled Beer-Sheva when Esau threatened to kill him. He fled from Laban in Haran in middle of the night when he worried that Laban wouldn't allow him to return to his homeland. And now he was preparing to flee from Esau. At any moment now there would be yet another nocturnal escape. Apparently, G-d wanted Jacob to learn that a philosophy of escapism is not the Jewish way. So the angel dislocated his hip, preventing him from running away. Now Jacob had no choice but to fight. In the end, he defeated the angel and was blessed with the name "Israel," signifying a superior stature, victory and nobility. *No longer shall it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have fought with the divine and with man and you have overcome.* Every son and daughter of Jacob must learn this lesson. Every one of us must become a child of Israel. The quality of fearlessness and courage, of strength and sacrifice, these are the hallmarks of Israel. When we stop running away from our problems and face up to them with guts and fortitude, we enter that higher state of consciousness. We move up from the Jacob Jew, who is still struggling, to

Israel mode, where we finally emerge triumphant. When we are prepared to take up the challenge and go for the fight rather than flight, we move from being wrestlers to becoming winners, from humble Jacob to dominant Israel. Of course it's never easy. Escape is usually the path of least resistance. Nor am I suggesting that we go looking for a fight. But the fact is that there will be times when we know that we really need to have that confrontation. We need to square up to a particular problem or individual in order to deal with our situation effectively. We shouldn't be confrontational people. But often we know in our heart of hearts that if we don't engage a problem honestly it will continue to plague us. If we can move from meekness to courage, then the story of Jacob's wrestling match will live on and continue to inspire us to become the stronger personalities we really can be. The dislocated hip joint thus becomes worthy of eternal remembrance because it makes us better people. And the small sacrifices we make in avoiding those unkosher cuts of meat around the animal's hip socket are well worth the effort. *By Rabbi Yossy Goldman*

Wrestling with a Torch The Hebrew language, also called "the Holy Tongue," has a significantly smaller vocabulary than the English language. Yet it contains deep mystical insights. Every Hebrew word has a root word of two or three letters, which can then take different forms. And so, two words that seem unrelated often have similarities at the root level.

These connections between seemingly unrelated words often express deep mystical truths. In this week's Torah portion, there is a beautiful example of a connection between two seemingly unrelated words. The Torah tells the story of Jacob returning to the land of Israel, traveling to meet his brother, Esau, after a 20-year stay in Haran. The night before he meets his brother, Jacob encounters a mysterious man, and they wrestle all night long: "Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn." (Genesis 32:25.) Who is this man? What is the meaning of this encounter? A closer look at the words used to describe the event allow us to see what is happening on a deeper level. First, let's examine the meaning of the Hebrew word used for "wrestle." The Hebrew word is V-Y-A-V-K (ויאבק). The root of the word is A-V-K (אבק), which is also the root of a seemingly unrelated word, "torch" (A-V-U-K-H אבוקה). What possible connection can there be between "wrestle" and "torch"? There are many forms of battle. In the modern era, battles are fought from great distances. Soldiers sitting at computers in Nevada are operating drones that conduct warfare over the skies of the Middle East and Africa. Wrestling, however, is a completely different form of battle. To wrestle is to come up close to the enemy. Two people wrestling are literally hugging each other. Let's return to the story of Jacob wrestling with the mysterious man. The sages teach that the man wrestling with Jacob was no ordinary man. He was Esau's guardian angel disguised as a man. Before Jacob could reconcile with his brother, Esau, he first had to wrestle with Esau's guardian angel. The Kabbalists elaborate, explaining that Jacob and Esau represent conflicting aspects of life: spiritual and material, body and soul. Body and soul are in constant warfare, each trying to draw the other towards what they appreciate and enjoy. The body tries to pull the soul towards materialism, while the soul tries to pull the body towards spirituality. This struggle between body and soul is not fought via intercontinental ballistic missiles. Body and soul are not waging warfare from different continents. Body and soul are literally hugging each other; they are as close to each other as two entities can possibly be. Body and soul are wrestling. With its use of a single root word for "wrestle" and "torch," the Holy Tongue teaches us about the goal of this wrestling match between body and soul. The goal is not to obliterate material concerns and pleasures from one's life. The goal is to create a torch. A torch is not a single candle, but many points of combustion merged together. To create spiritual light, the soul must not retreat from the world; it must embrace the material world and fuse it into a torch of light. It must use the objects and pleasures of the material world as a tool to spread spiritual light. It must use the material blessings it has and fuse them into a torch, producing light, warmth and inspiration to illuminate the world. We wrestle with the material, we embrace it, we elevate it. We weave it into our soul's torch. (*Based on the teachings of the Rebbe, 19 Kislev 5721.*) By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

****Passover order forms have been sent to the Chaplains and Rabbis. Please begin speaking with your Chaplain about Passover.***

December 8, 2019- 10 Kislev, 5780

Liberation of R. DovBer (1826)

In 1826, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch was arrested on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar, but was subsequently exonerated. The date of his release, Kislev 10, is celebrated amongst Chabad Chassidim as a "festival of liberation." Tachnun (confession of sins) is omitted from the day's prayers, farbrengens are held, and Rabbi DovBer's teachings are studied.

December 10, 2019- 12 Kislev, 5780

Passing of R. Shlomo Luria (1573)

R. Shlomo Luria, known by his acronym Maharshal, was an eminent scholar in sixteenth-century Poland. He headed a yeshiva in Brisk and Lublin and wrote many works, including Yam Shel Shlomo and Chachmas Shlomo. An independent thinker, he did not hesitate to criticize his colleagues when he felt they had erred in their method of Talmudic study and halachic analysis. At the same time, he was an extremely humble person and was the teacher of many great Torah scholars of his generation. It is related that one night, R. Shlomo sat down to study to the light of a small candle. Miraculously, the candle did not extinguish, allowing R. Shlomo to continue his studies for many hours (Shem Hagedolim).

December 11, 2019- 13 Kislev, 5780

Talmud completed (475 CE)

In the first decades of the 5th century, Rav Ashi (d. 427) and Ravina I (d. 421) led a group of the *Amoraim* (Talmudic sages) in the massive undertaking of compiling the Babylonian Talmud -- collecting and editing the discussions, debates and rulings of hundreds of scholars and sages which had taken place in the more than 200 years since the compilation of the Mishnah by Rabbi Judah HaNassi in 189. The last of these editors and compilers was Ravina II, who passed away on the 13th of Kislev of the year 4235 from creation (475 CE); after Ravina II, no further additions were made to the Talmud, with the exception of the minimal editing undertaken by the Rabbanan Savura'i (476-560). This date thus marks the point at which the Talmud was "closed" and became the basis for all further exegesis of Torah law.

December 12, 2019- 14 Kislev, 5780

Reuben Born (1568 BCE)

Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob and Leah, was born in Charan (Mesopotamia) on the 14th of Kislev of the year 2193 from creation (1568 BCE). As Jacob's firstborn, he was initially entitled to the leadership of Israel and to a double portion in the Holy Land, but these privileges were taken from him (and given respectively to Judah and Joseph) because he sinned by "violating the bed of his father." Reuben unsuccessfully tried to prevent the persecution of Joseph by his brothers in 2216 (1545 BCE) and subsequently berated them for selling him into slavery (Genesis 37:21; 42:22). In 2238 he relocated to Egypt together with his father, brothers and their children, where he died on his 125th birthday in 2318 (1443 BCE). **December 12, 2019- 14 Kislev, 5780**

Rebbe's Marriage (1928)

On the 14th of Kislev, 1928, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, married Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneersohn (1901-1988), the middle daughter of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), the sixth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch. The wedding was held in Warsaw, Poland, at the Lubavitcher Yeshivah, Tomchei Temimim. Upon Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak's passing in 1950, Rabbi Menachem Mendel succeeded his father-in-law as the Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch. On the 14th of Kislev of 1953, at a *farbrengen* (Chassidic gathering) marking his 25th wedding anniversary, the Rebbe said to his Chassidim: "This is the day that bound me to you, and you to me."

December 14, 2019- 16 Kislev, 5780

Noah's Ark Comes to Rest (2104 BCE)

On this day, the bottom of Noah's ark, submerged 11 cubits beneath the water's surface, touched down and came to rest on the top of Mount Ararat. (This follows the opinion of the Talmudic sage Rabbi Joshua, who maintains that the Flood began on Iyar 17.)