

Torah Weekly

November 29- December 5, 2020
13-19 Kislev, 5781

Torah reading:
Vayishlach: 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).

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

Jacobs Lament In this week's *parshah*, the dreaded encounter between Jacob and Esau finally materializes. After decades of separation, the twin brothers who are anything but identical square up. Jacob, who fled the wrath of Esau 34 years earlier, is returning home with a large family and much wealth. Esau is fast approaching with four hundred desperados armed to the teeth. Will it be all out war or will they make peace? Jacob prepares for all eventualities and also sends a message to his hostile brother:

"*Im Lavan garti*," Jacob declares, "I have sojourned with Lavan." Rashi interprets Jacob's message to mean that though he lived with a notorious trickster for more than 20 years, he "did not learn from his evil ways" and remained a righteous Jew committed to the G-dly way of life. This is indicated by the *gematria* (numerology) of the Hebrew word *garti* ("sojourned") which equals 613 — the number of mitzvot in the Torah.

But wasn't this rather boastful of Jacob? The same man who will soon be praying for deliverance and claiming that, "*kotonti*" ("I have been humbled") by all G-d's kindnesses to him, now seems to be pointing proudly to his piety, telling Esau how religious he has been?

The *Chofetz Chaim* (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, 1838-1933) offers a novel interpretation. He explains that Jacob's words should not be understood as a boast but rather as a lament. "I sojourned with Lavan, but did not learn from his evil ways" means that Jacob is bemoaning the fact that he did not learn from the way Lavan did evil. How did Lavan do evil? Enthusiastically! With vim and vigor. His wicked ways were embarked on with a passion and energy, and Jacob regrets that his own *good* deeds were not

performed as passionately as Laban's evil deeds.

If the good guys were as incentivized as the bad guys, crime would be dramatically down. If the security forces were as passionate as Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts, we would have found him long ago. If the police and justice systems of the world operated with the same commitment and drive as the drug lords and the hijacking syndicates, we would all be better off. The trouble is that the forces of evil are enthusiastic and highly motivated while the forces of good often depend on civil servants who are overworked and underpaid.

Nikita Khrushchev (of United Nations shoe-banging fame) was once addressing a large public meeting in Russia during the anti-Stalinist period. He was blasting Stalin's cruel and unforgivable atrocities, when a voice in the crowd suddenly spoke up and asked, "If Stalin was such a villain, why didn't *you* do anything about it then?"

"Who said that?!" thundered Khrushchev. There was absolute silence in the hall. Not a sound, not a movement. People froze in fear.

"Now you understand why I didn't do anything," was Khrushchev's convincing answer.

This interesting interpretation of Jacob's lament reminds us that the voice of morality must be at least as loud as the voice of evil. Too often the voice of justice is soft and still while the voice of corruption and degeneracy is loud and bombastic.

Who will amplify the sweet, silent sound of goodness?

Let us strive to become as passionate and assertive for the cause of G-dliness and goodness as the other side is for evil and injustice. The world will be better balanced, much nicer and a

lot safer.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

A Woman's Persuasion

"*And [Jacob] arose during that night, and he took his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok [stream].*" — Genesis 32:23

"*But where was [Jacob's daughter] Dinah?* (Benjamin was not yet born, but Dinah seemingly should have been counted.)

"*[Jacob] put her into a chest and locked her in, so that Esau should not set eyes on her. Therefore, Jacob was punished for withholding her from his brother — [because had he married her,] perhaps she would cause him to improve his ways — and she fell into the hands of Shechem.*" — Rashi's commentary on the verse

Esau was reared in the most ideal household imaginable. His earliest childhood memories were of life together with his illustrious grandfather Abraham, the paradigm of kindness and purity, who personally oversaw the education of his twin grandsons and gave them the foundations for a meaningful spiritual life. With Abraham's passing when Esau was fifteen years old, life for the young lad continued in the presence of Isaac and Rebecca and his brother Jacob. Seeing a *tzaddik* (righteous person) even once has an intense impact on a person, and Esau spent decades with none other than the three Patriarchs! One would be hard-pressed to find another person throughout the course of history who had a comparable upbringing, yet this had very little effect on a very thick-skinned Esau.

But that which saintly parents and brother couldn't accomplish, Dinah could conceivably have achieved. Despite the fact that she was a young girl, she could

have inspired Esau- a man who had incredible unrealized potential- to mend his ways. This is a compelling demonstration of the influence a woman wields in her home. Our sages refer to the woman as the "*akeret habayit*," the foundation of the home, for she sets the tone of her home — not through preaching or the power of persuasion, but by establishing the environment of the household.

There are many ways to influence others. The teacher/student dynamic is certainly a vital contributor to the making of a person, yet it is widely recognized that the imparting of information is the least effective way to inspire a person to change. Parents play a much greater role in the formation of their children's character. They serve as their children's primary role models, teaching by example rather than indoctrination. The values they live by will always be deeply embedded in their children's psyche. Nonetheless, children have a natural propensity to rebel, to explore the world on their own in order to arrive at their own code of ethics and values. The innate tendency of children to discard the conclusions reached by previous generations allows the world to steadily progress and uncover new "truths" — many of which will be disproved by subsequent generations — but also limits the influence the older generation exerts over the younger ones.

The ultimate influence is exerted by the woman who sets the tone of her household. No one is immune to the atmosphere which pervades his very own home. The man might be more vocal about his opinion, but the values which dominate the home will slowly sink in.

Obviously, Dinah had extraordinary soul-powers, for it certainly isn't recommended for the average woman to marry an Esau in order to reform him! However, the story of Dinah sheds light on the enormous role every woman plays in shaping the characters of the members of her household.

By Rabbi Yossi Goldman

Sunday, November 29, 2020 --- 13 Kislev, 5781

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.

Monday, November 30, 2020 --- 14 Kislev, 5781

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).

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."

Tuesday, December 1, 2020 --- 15 Kislev, 5781

Rabbi Judah the Prince (188 CE)

Rabbi Judah the Prince -- also known as *Rabbeinu Hakadosh* ("our holy master"), or simply as "Rabbi" -- was elected *nasi* -- spiritual and civil head of the Jewish community at large -- after the death of his father, Rabbi Simeon ben Gamliel. Foreseeing that due to the tribulations of the Exile which the Jewish nation was about to endure it was likely that many of the sacred laws would be forgotten, Rabbi Judah decided to gather, record, edit, and organize the statements of the earlier sages, setting the Oral Law down in writing for the first time, in the form of the Mishnah. He passed away around 188 CE; some say it was around 219 CE.

Wednesday, December 2, 2020 --- 16 Kislev, 5781

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.)

Shabbat, December 5, 2020 --- 19 Kislev, 5781

Passing of Maggid (1772)

Rabbi DovBer, known as "The Maggid of Mezeritch", was the disciple of, and successor to, the founder of Chassidism, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi DovBer led the Chassidic movement from 1761 until his passing on Kislev 19, 1772.

Liberation of R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1798)

On the 19th of Kislev of the year 5559 from creation (1798), Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi -- a leading disciple of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch (see previous entry) and the founder of Chabad Chassidism -- was released from his imprisonment in the Peter-Paul fortress in Petersburg, where he was held for 53 days on charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar. More than a personal liberation, this was a watershed event in the history of Chassidism heralding a new era in the revelation of the "inner soul" of Torah, and is celebrated to this day as "The Rosh Hashanah of Chassidism."

Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel born (1798)

On the very day that Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi was liberated from prison (see above), a granddaughter was born to him -- the daughter of his son Rabbi Dovber and his wife Rebbetzin Sheina. The girl was named Menuchah Rachel -- "Menuchah", meaning "tranquility" (Rachel was the name of a daughter of Rabbi Schneur Zalman who died in her youth). In 1845, Rebbetzin Menuchah Rachel realized her lifelong desire to live in the Holy Land when she and her husband, Rabbi Yaakov Culi Slonim (d. 1857), led a contingent of Chassidim who settled in Hebron. Famed for her wisdom, piety and erudition, she served as the matriarch of the Chassidic community in Hebron until her passing in her 90th year in 1888.