

Torah Weekly

November 14-20, 2021
10-16 Kislev, 5782

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.

"Fight or Flight?" 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-Sheba 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 Yossi Goldman

Actual Angels

They say that "you can't dance at two weddings at once." But according to a teaching of the Maggid of Mezeritch, the leading disciple of the saintly Baal Shem Tov, you can.

The Torah reading of Vayishlach begins, "And Jacob sent angels before him to Esau his brother" (Genesis 32:4). A frightened Jacob struggles to reach conciliation with his wild brother Esau, who is determined to punish Jacob for sneaking away with the Patriarchal blessings.

Commenting on the words, "And Jacob sent angels," Rashi states, "Actual angels." Says the Maggid of Mezeritch, "Only the 'actual' aspect of the angels did Jacob send to Esau, but the spiritual component of the angels remained at all times with Jacob."

Just a minute—something seems not quite right here. It would seem that Jacob's goal in sending the angels was to have them wield their immense spiritual powers to neutralize the animosity of his brother Esau. So why would the Magid propose that in sending the angels, Jacob

withheld these very spiritual powers, dispatching a more ordinary version of the angels instead?

But the Maggid's words can be understood in another, more magical way.

The angels bring all of themselves along for the journey to Esau. They are fully equipped, actually as well as spiritually, to face this formidable challenge. Yet, while struggling to realize their mission, they never fail to realize that hanging out with Esau is not where they are meant to be. They race to wrap up their mission and rejoin the righteous Jacob. Thus, while the angels are with Esau in actuality, they remain spiritually linked with the one who sent them.

And it is this unyielding bond that yields the angels their success. Only by remaining firmly connected with their source, the virtuous Jacob, can the angels be sure of success in their effort to refine Esau. Were this bond ever to be severed, the angels would face the risk of falling in with the very entity they arrived to elevate. So goes the story of our lives.

We too, are on a mission. Our souls have been dispatched from a lofty port, to be clothed in a coarse body and a crude world. At the same time, we have been imbued with the tools required to master, refine and elevate our surroundings.

It is imperative that in facing this challenge, we master the art of dancing simultaneously at two weddings. While sending forth the messenger-angel in our soul to conquer, we must hang firmly onto our very own "Jacob," the pristine source of our divine soul, which can never be tainted or tarnished.

By Rabbi Dovi Scheiner

Sunday, November 14, 2021 --- 10 Kislev, 5782

Liberation of R. DovBer (1826)

In 1826, Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch (see calendar entry for yesterday, Kislev 9) 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.

Tuesday, November 16, 2021 --- 11 Kislev, 5782

Rabbi "YY" Kazen (1998)

Kislev 12 is the yahrtzeit (date of the passing) of Chabad.org's founding director, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Kazen ("YYK," 1954-1998), widely acclaimed as the "father of the Jewish internet."

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).

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 --- 13 Kislev, 5782

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.

Thursday, November 18, 2021 --- 14 Kislev, 5782

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."

Friday, November 19, 2021 --- 15 Kislev, 5782

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 very the first time, in the form of the Mishnah.

He passed away around 188 CE; some say it was around 219 CE.

Although he was extremely wealthy and on friendly terms with the Emperor Antoninus, in his dying hour he lifted both his hands to Heaven, swearing that he had not benefited from his wealth even with his little finger. Instead he had labored in the study of Torah with all his strength.

On the day that Rabbi Judah died, a heavenly voice went forth and announced: Whosoever has been present at the death of Rabbi is destined to enjoy the life of the World to Come.

The Talmud (Ketubot 103a) relates that even after his passing, for a time, Rabbi Judah would still visit his home every Friday evening at dusk. Wearing Shabbat clothes, he would recite the Kiddush, and thereby discharge his family members from their obligation to hear Kiddush.