

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

December 4-10, 2022
10-16 Kislev, 5783

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.

Can You Really Have Everything

After 20 years of separation, the twin brothers were reunited.

Upon hearing that Esau was traveling toward him with 400 men, Jacob prepared for their meeting by readying himself and his family for war, praying, and sending large gifts of livestock to appease his brother.

In one of the most emotionally charged scenes in the Torah, Jacob and Esau reunite and embrace. Esau tells Jacob that he does not need his gift, while Jacob implores him to accept it. As the [Torah](#) describes:

But Esau said, "I have plenty, my brother; let what you have remain yours."

Thereupon Jacob said, "Please no! If indeed I have found favor in your eyes, then you shall take my gift from my hand, because I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of an angel, and you have accepted me. Now take my gift, which has been brought to you, for G-d has favored me [with it], and [because] I have everything." He prevailed upon him, and he took [it].

Esau and Jacob seem to be saying the same thing. They both have an abundance of possessions and they don't need the gift of cattle. Yet upon careful analysis, we discover a slight difference in the way the brothers describe their possessions. Esau says "I have plenty," while Jacob says "I have everything".

Esau's perspective is the perspective of the natural soul and is the reason that, so often, accumulating possessions does not lead to a feeling of joy. Esau says "I have plenty," but having a lot does not mean that he does not want more. The Talmud says that human nature is such that "one who has one hundred wants two hundred, and one who has two hundred wants four hundred." Having a lot is no guarantee for happiness; in fact,

it can actually make happiness more elusive because the more one has, the greater his appetite for more.

By contrast, Jacob's attitude toward his wealth is "I have everything." Jacob does not need more. He has everything he needs to be able to live his life and fulfill his purpose with meaning. If he does not have something, then he is certain that that is not necessary for him to achieve the purpose of his creation. As Ethics of our Fathers teaches: "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his lot." Jacob is joyous because he has everything.

There is a deeper dimension to Jacob's statement. To understand this, we must first ask the question, how can Jacob state that he has everything? He can say that he has all he needs, but how can he say that he has everything if, in reality, he does not have everything? The Sfat Emet, the 19th century chassidic commentator, explains that Jacob does indeed have everything, because Jacob is connected to [G-d](#), who is the source of all existence.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

Actual Angels

Which is the greater test of faith, affluence or poverty? Is it harder to be a good Jew when you're rich or when you're poor, when you're successful or when you're struggling? No doubt, we would all much rather accept upon ourselves the test of affluence, wouldn't we? But let's not be subjective about it. Let us rather take an objective historical approach.

Back in the early 19th century, Napoleon was conquering Europe and promising liberty and equality for all. When he squared up against Russia, many Jewish leaders sided with him, hoping he would finally bring an end to Czarist persecution and

enable Russian Jewry to enjoy full civil rights. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad, thought differently. He actively opposed Napoleon and even had his Chassidim assist in intelligence gathering for the Russian army.

When his colleagues challenged him and questioned his apparent lack of concern for the well-being of his own people, he argued that while Napoleon might be good for the Jews materially, his victory would result in spiritual disaster. History proved him correct. Minus the Little Emperor, Russian Jews remained staunchly Jewish, while French Jewry virtually vanished. How many Jewish Rothschilds are left in the world? G-d knows we could have used them. Most of French Jewry today hails from North Africa. The originals are few and far between.

There is a fascinating Midrashic interpretation in this week's *parshah* about the dramatic encounter between Jacob and Esau.

The Torah says, "And Esau ran towards him (Jacob) and embraced him... and he kissed him." The Hebrew word for "and he kissed him" is *vayishakayhu*. In the [Torah](#), this word is written with a line of dots above it. Says the Midrash *Yalkut Shimoni*: these dots are there to indicate that the word should be read differently; not *vayishakayhu*, he kissed him, but rather *vayishachayhu*, he *bit* him!

How can we understand a [Midrash](#) which seems to change the entire meaning of the word? A kiss is an expression of love and a bite is the opposite! Says the *Sfat Emet* (Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter, 1847-1905, the second Rebbe in the Chassidic dynasty of Ger), "When Esau kisses, Jacob is bitten!"

The American experience confirms beyond a shadow of a

doubt that freedom, democracy and equal rights, while a wonderful blessing for Jews for which we should be eternally grateful, also present a profound challenge to our Jewish identity and way of life. In the melting pot of the United States, Jews have integrated so successfully that they are virtually disappearing! Success and affluence are wonderful gifts of opportunity, but we don't seem to be passing the test of faith with flying colors.

The French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, argued that anti-Semitism has been good for the Jews. It has kept Jews Jewish! While no one wants to be oppressed, and we reject anti-Semitism categorically, the man does have a point. When antisemitism bites, we intuitively know how to respond. But when the world is in a kissing mood, we don't quite know how to handle it.

I remember as a young rabbi working with university students in Johannesburg in the late 1970's. At that time, they were completely apathetic to Judaism. My colleagues and I were struggling to elicit any meaningful response to Jewish programs on campus. During one particular meeting, we seriously contemplated getting up in the dead of night to spray-paint some swastikas on the Student Union building. Surely, that would get some reaction! Of course, we never did it. But the fact that the thought actually crossed our minds demonstrates how external threats have a way of making Jews bristle with pride and righteous indignation.

May we never again face the test of poverty or persecution. Please [G-d](#), we will be proud and knowledgeable Jews successfully meeting the spiritual challenges of the good life.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Sunday, December 4, 2022 --- 10 Kislev, 5783

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, December 6, 2022 --- 11 Kislev, 5783

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, December 7, 2022 --- 13 Kislev, 5783

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, December 8, 2022 --- 14 Kislev, 5783

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, December 9, 2022 --- 15 Kislev, 5783

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.