

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

26-30 November, 1/2
December 2023
13-19 Kislev, 5784

Torah: Vayishlach:
Genesis 32:4 - 36:43
Haftorah: Obadiah 1:1-217

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.

Tehillim

Unfortunately, as we all follow the war, the threat to our brethren continues in the Holy Land. I have chosen not to be your news source, I am sure you find that elsewhere, however we are affected by their pain and suffering. Our saying of Tehillim is our artillery and makes all the difference in the world. Please continue saying Tehillim and doing good deeds and together we will win the war.

Kiss or Curse?

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 Yossy Goldman

Your Soul Can be in Two Places at the Same Time

Once upon a time there was a great and mighty king who had a wise and talented son. One day, the king summoned the prince to him. "My dear child," said the king, "I must send you on a difficult and dangerous mission. In the far reaches of my kingdom there is an uncivilized land inhabited by a barbaric people. The ways of wisdom are alien to them, nor do they know kindness or justice or compassion. It will be your task to teach them and educate them, to uncover the spark of humanity that lies buried deep within their coarse existence. You must excavate that spark, cultivate it and feed it, so that their lives are transformed and their land is redeemed and restored to my enlightened kingdom."

"But father," objected the prince, "if I go to that horrible place, then I, too, shall become like them. My soul will be tainted by their grossness. My light will be overwhelmed by their darkness and succumb to it."

"That is why, my child," said the king, "you must leave your soul here, in the royal palace, for safekeeping. We will guard it and nourish it with wisdom and light until you return from your mission."

"How, then," persisted the prince, "shall I fulfill my mission? What can a soulless You soul shall remain here," explained the king, "even as it ventures forth with you to the land of darkness. For also in that debased place, your soul will always know its true home. Your body may forget, your heart may wander, even your mind may blunder in the caverns of folly. But your soul will always remember..." Rabbi DovBer, the famed "Maggid of Mezeritch" who succeeded the Baal Shem Tov as the leader of the Chassidic movement, passed away in 1772, on the 19th day of the Hebrew month of Kislev. The Shabbat before his passing was Shabbat Vayishlach — the Shabbat on which the Torah portion of Vayishlach (Genesis 32:4-36:43) is read. On that Shabbat, Rabbi DovBer's disciples

gathered around his bed to hear words of Torah from the mouth of their master. Vayishlach begins by

relating that "Jacob sent angels to his brother Esau." Rashi, in his commentary on the verse, states that these were malachim mamash, "actual angels." (The Hebrew word malachim means both "messengers" and "angels"; thus, the verse could also have been more prosaically translated, "Jacob sent messengers...") The Maggid, speaking to his disciples on the last Shabbat of his physical life, revealed a deeper meaning in Rashi's words. Rashi is saying — said the Maggid — that it was only the mamash of the angels, their

"actuality," that Jacob dispatched to Esau. The spiritual essence of the angels, their souls, remained with Jacob.

Two hundred years later, at a farbrengen (chassidic gathering) held on Shabbat Vayishlach of 1972, the Lubavitcher Rebbe probed the meaning of the Maggid's enigmatic teaching.

body possibly achieve?" Asked the Rebbe: Isn't the entire point of sending angels to Esau that this was a mission that required a great infusion of spirituality to accomplish? Indeed, the Chassidic masters explain that this was a mission of cosmic proportions. Esau was the embodiment of the primordial world of Tohu, a world of such boundless divine energy that its "vessels" shattered, scattering sparks of holiness to the farthest, lowliest, most debased stratum of creation — our own physical and material world. This is why our world contains such volatile energies — energies more lofty, but also more corruptible, than anything else in G-d's creation. It was Jacob's aim to excavate and redeem these "sparks of holiness" from their exile and imprisonment within the coarseness of Esau. No ordinary messengers could be equal to this mission. Jacob sent his angels, the most lofty and spiritual forces at his disposal, to attempt the redemption of Esau. Why, then — asked the Rebbe — would Jacob keep the loftiest and most spiritual part of his angels with himself? But the fact that the angels' souls remained with Jacob — explained the Rebbe — does not mean that they did not participate in the mission to Esau. Your body can only be in one place at a time: if it's in Kansas City, it can't be in Seattle. If it wants to be in Seattle, it has to get on a plane and fly there, and having done so, it won't be in Kansas City anymore. Your soul, however, is a spiritual being, which means that it is not confined to the grid of spacetime. Your soul can be in two places at the same time. Your soul can go to Seattle without ever leaving Kansas City. So only the "actuality" of Jacob's angels were sent off. The souls of Jacob's angels remained with their master. And it was precisely because they remained with Jacob even as they engaged Esau that they could fulfill their mission.

We are on a mission. Our master has dispatched us to the farthest, most forsaken lands of his kingdom to search out sparks of holiness, to dig them out of the coarseness in which they are buried, to raise them up and restore them to his crown.

Our body, being a body, must leave its father's home to go to these faraway lands. For such is the law that governs our actual self: to be somewhere else you must go there, which means that you can't be here anymore.

Our soul, however, remains in the royal palace. It descends into the physical world, it enters material life, it engages and grapples with the coarseness and the darkness and the folly, but it remains in the royal palace. And it is precisely because it remains with its sender that it can venture forth and accomplish its mission.

By Yanki Tauber

Sunday, November 26, 2023-13 Kislev, 5784

Talmud completed (475 CE)

This date thus marks the point at which the Talmud was "closed" and became the basis for all further exegesis of Torah law.

Monday, October 30, 2023- Monday, November 27, 2023-14 Kislev, 5784

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).

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

Tuesday, November 28, 2023-15 Kislev, 5784

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.

Wednesday, November 29, 2023-16 Kislev, 5784

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

Pulver Purim (1804)

"Pulver Purim" was established by Rabbi Avraham Danzig (1748-1820) author of the halachic works Chayei Adam and Chochmat Adam, after he and his family were miraculously saved from a fire on the eve of the 16th of Kislev. The inferno engulfed many homes, including his own home and the very room where all of his family members were, causing some of the walls to collapse. Rabbi Avraham Danzig then established the 16th of Kislev as a day of celebration for all of his future descendants.

Thursday, November 30, 2023-17 Kislev, 5784

Ezra Cries and Prays (348 BCE)

On this day, Ezra the Scribe went up to the Holy Temple and fasted, prayed, and cried in public. While he prayed and confessed, weeping and prostrating himself in front of the Temple, a large assemblage of men, women, and children gathered around him. At that time, all of the assembled priests and Israelites swore to send away their non-Jewish wives. Ezra then issued a proclamation that all Jews residing in Israel should assemble in three days' time in Jerusalem (see Today in Jewish History for the 20th of Kislev)

Friday, December 1, 2023-18 Kislev, 5784

R. Abraham Maimuni (1237)

Rabbi Abraham Maimuni HaNagid (also called "Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam") was the only son of Maimonides. Born in 1185, Rabbi Abraham succeeded his father as the leader of the Jewish community in Fostat (old Cairo), Egypt, at the tender age of 19. He wrote many responsa and commentaries explaining and defending his father's writings and Halachic rulings. Rabbi Abraham passed away on the 18th of Kislev of the year 4998 from creation (1237).

R. Baruch Mezhibuzher (1811)

Rabbi Baruch was the son of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's daughter, Adel, and her husband, Rabbi Yechiel Ashkenazi. He was born in 1753 in Mezhibuz. He was one of the pre-eminent Rebbes (Chassidic masters) in the 3rd generation of Chassidism.

Shabbat, December 2, 2023-19 Kislev, 5784

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.

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.