



## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS  
RCA ISRAEL REGION

### PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Yaakov returns to the Land of Israel. He is fearful of a confrontation with Esav. He prepares by dividing his entourage. A man fights him through the night, changing his name to Yisrael from Yaakov at dawn. Yaakov sends gifts to Esav to appease him. Esav runs, hugs Yaakov, kisses him and cries. Yaakov spurns Esav's request that they settle together. Dinah is raped by Shechem in Shechem. Shimon and Levi kill the men of the city. Yaakov arrives at Beit El, the place of his ladder dream and builds an altar. Rachel dies giving birth to Binyamin. Reuven lies with Bilha. Yaakov is reunited with Yitzchak. Esav's lineage is outlined.



#### 1ST ALIYA (32:4-13)

Yaakov sends messengers to Esav: Tell Esav that his servant Yaakov has been with Lavan. We have much flock. Word comes back that Esav is approaching with 400 men. Yaakov is afraid; splits his entourage, so at least half will survive. And he prays: While I am undeserving, You promised

that my progeny would be numerous.

The story of Breishit is the story of Divine promises. Yaakov received a promise in the dream with the ladder that G-d would return him to the Land of Israel. And he also was instructed by G-d in the middle of last week's parsha to return to the Land and He will be with him.

While Yaakov believes these promises, the devil is in the details. Ok, G-d will return me safely to the Land, but then what? My brother Esav wanted to kill me. That is why I fled. And I had an informant back in the Land who was keeping an eye on Esav, promising to me that she would send me word when the coast was clear to return home. My mother. She promised that when Esav mellowed and no longer wanted to kill me then the coast was clear to return.

But, I never heard from her. Did she switch allegiance? Maybe Esav never mellowed after all and still has every intent to kill me.

So, while I believe G-d's promise that He will bring me back to the Land safely, what happens after that?

He is scared. He sends word to Esav. Esav is coming with 400 men. That is not a welcoming party. He means war.

Yaakov prays.



#### 2ND ALIYA (32:14-30)

Yaakov prepares gifts of his livestock for Esav with the message: from your servant Yaakov. A man fights Yaakov overnight, wounding his thigh. At dawn the man tells him his name is Yisrael,

In Loving Memory of

**Louis Denkerberg ז"ל**

**אליעזר בן בן ציון וגיסל דנקברג ז"ל**

**Husband, father, grandfather  
and great-grandfather  
on his 8th yearzeit**

**He is greatly missed - יהי זכרו ברוך**

**The Denkerberg and Bar-Lev families**

for he fought G-d and man and prevailed.

Yaakov attempts to appease Esav with gifts. Why does he think livestock gifts with a gift card attached, “from your servant Yaakov” will cool Esav’s murderous intent?

Perhaps Yaakov is sending a message: the blessing I stole from you was a dud. Never happened. So, no reason to be angry.

What was that bracha? “G-d will give you of the fat of the Land, much grain and wine. And you will rule: your brother will bow to you.” A 3-part bracha: agricultural success, political power and dominance over your brother.

None of it happened. No agricultural success; all I have are animals. No land. Certainly, no fat of the land.

And power? I have been a migrant worker with Lavan.

And who is bowing to whom? “From your servant Yaakov”.

3 strikes – no fat of the land. No power. And you are the master, not me. So, no need to fuss over a bracha that was a blank.



### 3RD ALIYA (32:31-33:5)

Yaakov wakes with a limp, hence the prohibition of eating the sciatic nerve. He sees Esav. Divides his family. Esav runs to him, hugs, kisses and cries.

The struggle with the man ends with a limp. This struggle is immortalized by the prohibition of the sciatic nerve.

This is the only mitzvah from the epoch of the Avot besides brit mila. Any story immortalized by a mitzvah demands attention.

Why would we immortalize Yaakov’s fight over night with a man, or maybe angel, resulting in the change of his name to Yisrael and also with a limp?

The lesson is perhaps a sober one. The

name Israel, the people Israel, will live a confronted life, a life of opposition, of struggle. Oh, we will emerge, persevere, survive the night. But with a limp. Divine promises are not of Gan Eden, of a history of sunny days. The promises are broad, undefined, open ended. Like “I will be with you”. “You will inherit the Land”. Wonderful assurances. But broad. What do they mean? We will persist. Fine. But how? Unscathed? Limping.

It is crucial to read all of the stories of Bereshit in light of the promises. The promises were all well known. However, understanding what Divine promises mean, how they will play out in real life, when they will occur? And at what price? That preoccupies the minds of the Avot. They live with uncertainty. Faith in the promises; uncertainty as to what they mean.



### 4TH ALIYA (33:6-20)

Esav is urged to accept Yaakov’s gifts. Esav offers that they live in brotherhood. Yaakov demurs, sending Esav ahead, hinting he will catch up. He turns instead toward the Land of Israel. He dwells in Sukkot and then in Shechem. He builds an altar and calls in the name of G-d.

Yaakov is undoubtedly relieved with Esav’s embrace. But he insists on a complete separation from Esav. Perhaps Esav’s kisses are sincere. Today. What will tomorrow bring?

And while Yaakov may have tried to convince Esav that the bracha of Yitzchak did not come to be, he does not believe that himself. He is convinced he is the heir to the Jewish legacy. He goes to Shechem and builds an altar.

Why doesn’t he go immediately to Beit El? Didn’t he make a vow when he had the dream with the ladder that he would return to that spot? And why didn’t he immediately

reunite with his mother and father? Why go to Shechem and not Beit El or Chevron?

The Jewish people will enter the land of Israel 3 times. Avraham. Yaakov. Yehoshua. Each time the first stop is Shechem.

Yaakov is following in Avraham's footsteps – literally. Avraham journeyed from Charan; first stop in the Land of Israel was Shechem, where he built an altar. Yaakov has just journeyed from Charan to the Land of Israel, stopping first at Shechem and building an altar. He sees himself clearly as the heir of Avraham, walking in his footsteps.



#### 5TH ALIYA (34:1-35:11)

Dina is raped by Shechem in Shechem. The brothers claim they will only ally with people who are circumcised. While the men are recovering Shimon and Levi kill them all. Yaakov is upset. But they counter; “can they make our sister a harlot?” G-d tells Yaakov to go to Beit El and make the promised altar. He does. G-d appears to him and tells him his name is Yisrael not Yaakov. And that nations and Kings will come from him.

The story of the rape of Dina is the first story of the next generation. And the brother's rhetorical comment will be a clarion for the rest of the book. “Can they make our sister a harlot?” meaning, and we, her brothers stand idly by? No. Brothers stand up for siblings.

What an ironic statement. We must stand up for Dina. And then we sell our brother Yosef. That is rather selective standing up.

Yaakov's reaction to the slaughter of Shechem is also instructive. He criticizes the violence for it will impede good relations with the people of the Land.

Yaakov may think that the Divine promise

of the Land is about to unfold in his time. A promise was made to Avraham at the Brit bein habetarim: your children will be strangers in a foreign land, enslaved, oppressed and only after a long time will return here. Yaakov was kind of a slave in a foreign land, was oppressed there – perhaps then the promise of the Land is to unfold in his time. And for that, bad relations with the people are a bad thing.



#### 6TH ALIYA (35:12-36:19)

G-d affirms the promise of the Land to Yaakov. Yaakov builds altars, traveling south. Rachel dies while giving birth to Binyamin. Reuven lies with Bilha. Yaakov goes to Chevron, to Yitzchak. Yitzchak dies at age 180, buried by Esav and Yaakov.

Yaakov continues walking in Avraham's footsteps, traveling south and building altars. But Yaakov's life differs, tragically, from Avraham and Yitzchak's.

Women have played a dominant role in our history. More than dominant; they steered history. Sarah insisted on the banishing of Yishmael and G-d concurred. Rivka orchestrated Yaakov's receipt of the bracha and that decision was borne out by history.

But Rachel dies. Rachel's death deprives Yaakov of the wise feminine voice that Avraham had with Sarah and Yitzchak had with Rivka. Would Yosef have had that special coat had Yaakov had Rachel's counsel?



#### 7TH ALIYA (36:20-43)

Esav's descendants are enumerated: nations and kings.

As with Yishmael, Esav's family is detailed. This is the end of the story of who is in the Jewish people and who out. The rest of the Torah is the story of Yaakov and his family, all of whom are the Jewish people.

## HAFTORAH OVADIAH 1:1-21

This week's Haftorah taken from the book of Ovadiah describes the punishment that will ultimately be brought upon Edom, the descendant of Esav. This theme relates directly to Esav's conflict with Yaakov which is highlighted in the Torah reading.

The navi Ovadiah is a convert to Judaism and had his own roots in the Edomite people. The Edomites did not offer to help Judea when they were attacked by the Babylonians. Many years later the Edomites, who are associated with the Roman Empire, were responsible for destroying the Second Beit Hamikdash and caused untold suffering and pain upon the Jewish nation.

Although the Roman Empire was one of the most formidable and powerful nations to rule the world, the prophet of Israel reveals the following: "The house of Yaakov shall be fire and the house of Yosef a flame, and the house

of Esav shall become stubble, and they shall ignite them and consume them..."

The Haftorah then describes the division of Esav's land amongst the returning exiles. This memorable haftorah ends with the well known verse: "And saviors shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav, and the Lord shall have the kingdom." ■



### STATS

8<sup>th</sup> of 54 sedras; 8<sup>th</sup> of 12 in Bereshit.  
Written on 237 lines; rank 11<sup>th</sup>.  
9 Parshiot - 6 Petuchot; 3 Setumot.  
153 pesukim - 4<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> in Bereshit), tied with Noach, but more words and letters.  
1976 words - 6<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> in Bereshit).  
7458 letters - 6<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>th</sup> in Bereshit).



### MITZVOT

One mitzvah in Vayishlach, one of 3 in the book of B'reishit. The only prohibition of the Torah's 365 in Bereshit - Gid HaNasheh.

## A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES  
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

ואת לאה וילדיה אחרנים ואת רחל ואת יוסף אחרנים (לג:ב)

"And he put Leah and children last, and Rachel and Yosef last." (33:2)

How can Leah and her children be placed "last" if the pasuk describes Rachel and Yosef being placed also "last"?

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) explains here that the Pasuk is stressing the beloved endearment for Rachel and Yosef by Yaakov. "Acharon Acharon Chaviv". The ones mentioned last of all are the ones most beloved.

Tosefot Yom Tov (Rabbi Yom-Tov Lipman Heller 1579-1654, Poland) (Dmai 7:3) asserts that in the Prophets the word "Acharon" does not always mean "the last" but instead has the meaning of "next". This can be seen in the prediction of Chaggai, the prophet (2:9) where it states, "The glory of this FINAL Beit Hamikdash will be greater than that of the first." Chaggai was referring to the Second Temple and still relates to it as the "Final" Temple, misleading people to believe that the Second Temple would be the last Temple. Therefore, "last" really means "the next". This can also be seen in Shemot (4:8) when Moshe is assigned the task of bringing "three" miracles before Pharaoh, and yet, the second miracle of turning the water into blood is also referred to as the "last" sign.