

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 Israel 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.

Yaakov is worried about a confrontation with Esav. So, he sends messengers ahead to Esav to test the waters.

He is nervous for good reason. Esav wanted to kill Yaakov after he stole his blessing. Rivka told Yaakov to flee for his life and that she would send word when the coast was clear, when Esav's anger abated. He never heard from her. Is the coast clear? Or is Esav still so upset that he will come after me to kill me?

Yaakov sends messengers. And gets the word that Esav is preparing for a confrontation.

Yaakov is worried for good reason. The coast is not clear. He prepares for the confrontation. He splits his entourage so at least half will survive. And he prays.

But his concern is a bit surprising. If he was waiting to hear from his mother that the coast was clear but never got word from her, why then is he returning to the Land of Israel and the inevitable confrontation with Esav?

Well, because he was told by G-d that He will be with him and that it is time to return to the Land. No word from his mother, but he has Divine assurance. That should set his mind at ease.

Yaakov's fear, in spite of Divine assurance, is surprising. Why is he worried? In facing Esav's possible murderous intent, isn't Divine assurance enough? Do you need to split the camp, to pray, to take necessary steps for confrontation? Trust

In Loving Memory of
Louis Denkberg ז"ל
אליעזר בן בן ציון וגיטל דנקברג ז"ל
Husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather on his 9th yahrzeit
He is greatly missed - יהי זכרו ברוך
The Denkberg and Bar-Lev families

in G-d.

Yaakov's actions are a lesson. Divine assurance is wonderful. But not sufficient. I am still doing whatever I can to deal with this possible violent event. Split the camp. Prayer. Gifts.

Man does not live by Divine assurances alone. We need strategy, preparation, negotiation. And an army.

Perhaps Divine assurances only work when we do all we can. May He Waits for us to do all we can. Isn't that what Yaakov is teaching us.

Yaakov prepares for war.



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, 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." I received a 3-part bracha: agricultural success, political power and dominance over your brother. Let's see what happened with that bracha.

Well, 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, that resulted in two things: a change of his name to Yisrael and 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; our history is not 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.

Condolences to
Beverly & Julian Aron and family
on the passing of her

FATHER z"l

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

But how? Unscathed? No. Limping.

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.

Esav's overtures for reconciliation are tepidly welcome by Yaakov. He is undoubtedly relieved with Esav's embrace. But he totally deflects Esav's desire to dwell together. As if to say: I am happy to not be killed by you. But we are on different paths. You go your way, I'll go mine.

A clear and definitive separation is what was advocated by Sarah with Yitzchak and Yishmael and now by Rivka with Yaakov and Esav. And they were right. They determined Jewish history.

Both Yishmael and Esav will be great nations. But our destiny is different.

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. "Do you expect us to allow them to make our sister be 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's life contrasts dramatically from that of Avraham and Yitzchak. His life is one confrontation after another. With Esav. Then with Lavan. Then with Esav again. Now with the people of Shechem.

He dealt with the confrontations with guile. Not violence. He bought the birthright. He co-opted the bracha intended for Esav. He dealt with Lavan on his terms, orchestrating his own great wealth. He successfully avoided a violent confrontation with Esav.

He is not happy with this violence in Shechem. But the brothers get the last word. They stood up for their sister.

Yaakov serves as a paradigm of Jewish history. Our history will face confrontations. Many and varied. We will need to be wily, will need to be of guile to endure, to survive. There is no illusion that a



covenant with G-d ensures an unconfronted life.

But, Yaakov, while favoring crafty, resourceful solutions, is left speechless when confronted by the brothers. Sometimes words do not suffice and taking up arms is the way to protect our sister. Yaakov has no adequate response.



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.

Rachel dies in childbirth. She is buried where she died, on the road. Not in Chevron. Yaakov, many years later, in Egypt, confesses to Yosef that he buried Rachel quickly, not in the place of the other patriarchs and matriarchs, in Ma'arat Hamachpela. Yaakov's life, besides being one of persistent confrontation, is one of personal tragedy. Another paradigm of Jewish history; our history will be one of confrontation and of tragedy.



7TH ALIYA (36:20-43)

Esav's descendants are enumerated: nations and kings.

As with Yishmael, Esav's family is listed in great detail, a total of 44 verses. Perhaps to establish its prominence. Yishmael and Esav are great nations. Great kings and nations.

And to establish a contrast.

Esav's greatness is of this worldly nature. Great kings, great nations. Jewish greatness will lie in its covenant, its relationship to the Creator and in its spirit. ■

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95th Birthday

Her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren
at the Inbal Hotel this weekend

Izzy & Goldie, Hillel & Shirley
Zvi & Nina, Noam & Amy, Aliza & Alan

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