

**TorahFax: Parshas Vayishlach**  
**Rabbi Zalmen Marazov**

Monday, Kislev 14, 5784 / November 27, 2023

This Shabbat we will read Parshat Vayishlach. In this Parsha the Torah relates the story of how Yaakov (Jacob) returns, together with his family back to his parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah.

On the way home, Yaakov hears that his brother Eisav (Esau), who is still angry at him for getting their father's blessings, is coming toward him to kill him.

Yaakov sends angels as messengers to tell Esau that he wants peace. However, when the messengers return, they tell Yaakov that Eisav is coming with 400 men to fight him.

Upon hearing this, Yaakov became frightened. He then forms a three-tier plan to counter Eisav's threat. 1) Yaakov prays to G-d to save him and his family. 2) He sends gifts to his brother in the hope of appeasing him. 3) In case that doesn't work, he also prepares for war.

The Torah tells us how, even before meeting Eisav, Yaakov battled with Eisav's guardian angel and won. Now, Yaakov felt more assured that he will be safe with Eisav too.

When they finally meet, Yaakov bows seven times to Eisav. Yaakov's wives and sons also bow to Eisav. When Eisav sees this, he has a change of heart and he hugs and kisses Yaakov. Yaakov and family continue travelling to his parents.

On the way he had to contend with more troubling situations. In the city of Shchem, his only daughter, Dina, was forcefully violated by the prince of the land. Two of Dina's brothers were so angered that, without Yaakov's knowledge, they killed every man in Shchem. Yaakov was very distressed and strongly reprimanded them for this. He then continues on his way to his father's home.

After this Yaakov's beloved wife Rachel gives birth to their youngest child, Binyamin (Benjamin), but Rachel dies. Yaakov buries her in the city of Bethlehem. Rachel's gravesite in Betlehem is visited by tens of thousands of Jews to this day.

On his way home, Yaakov is also notified of the passing of his mother, Rivkah. Yaakov finally comes home after leaving his father-in-law, Lavan. The next twenty years he spends together with his father, Yitzchak. At the end of the Parsha we read about Yitzchak's passing at the age of 180.

Q. How many years was Yaakov away from home?

A. Thirty-six years. He left single and returned with a family of twelve sons and one daughter.

Q. How old was his mother, Rivkah and his wife Rochel, when they passed away?

A. Yaakov's mother Rivkah lived about 120 years. His wife Rachel passed away young at about 36.

Tuesday, Kislev 15, 5784 / November 28, 2023

This week's Parsha is Vayishlach. In this Parsha, we read about many of the trials which Yaakov encountered while returning home from his father-in-law, Lavan.

Yaakov hears that his brother, Esau, who wants to kill him, is coming together with 400 men towards them. The Torah tells us that, "Yaakov was greatly afraid and distressed." Yaakov sends gifts to appease Esau so that he would forgive him for taking their father's blessings, which Esau wanted for himself. At the same time he prepares for battle and prays for G-d's help.

Even though G-d had promised to watch over him and bring him back to the land of Canaan, Yaakov was still afraid. He was afraid that he may have lost this merit of G-d's protection due to the fact that he was away from his parents for so many years. Whereas Esau, who was with his parents all this time, observed the great mitzvah of Honoring his father and mother, by taking care of them.

The Torah describes a battle between Yaakov and "a man" which our sages say was Esau's guardian angel. Although he was slightly injured, Yaakov wins the battle with Esau's angel. G-d tells Yaakov, "Your name shall not be called Yaakov anymore, but Israel shall be your name."

The name Yaakov was given to him at birth because he was holding onto the heel of his brother Esau. Yaakov means "heel" and represents a lower level. "Israel" means master and leader. It is due to this story that the Jewish people are called Israel.

In the end, Esau realized that he wouldn't be able to defeat Yaakov. Yaakov presents Esau with gifts. He tells Esau, "Take my gift that is brought to you; because G-d had been gracious with me, and because I have enough."

Yaakov tells Esau to accept his gifts. "Because G-d had been gracious and because I have enough."

A Chasid once came to Rabbi Meir of Premishlan and complained that someone in town opened the same business as his. "I am very worried I will lose my livelihood," complained the Chasid.

"Did you ever see, when a horse drinks water from a river, he kicks his hoof in the water. Do you know why?" The Rebbe asked. "No," replied the Chasid.

"When the horse looks in the water and sees his own reflection in the water, he thinks there is another horse there. Now he is afraid that the other horse will drink up all the water, so he tries to frighten him away by kicking his hoofs," replied Rabbi Meir.

"It is the same with you!" the Rebbe went on. "You think that if someone else is trying to make a living, it will take away from you. That is not so. G-d has enough for you and for the other person. Whatever is bashert (destined) for the other person will not diminish one bit of that which is destined for you!"

Thursday, Kislev 17, 5784 / November 30, 2023

We are one week from Chanukah. The first Chanukah candle will be lit Thursday night, December 7. Chanukah being an eight day holiday, there is always a Shabbat during Chanukah and sometimes two. When the first day Chanukah is Shabbat then the eighth day of Chanukah is also Shabbat. Otherwise, there is one Shabbat during Chanukah.

The Chanukah candles are lit each night of Chanukah in a place where they are visible, like at a window or door or in public places, in order to publicize the miracle of Chanukah.

Q. What miracle is celebrated on Chanukah? When and where did it take place?

A. The miracle of Chanukah happened during the Second Temple. After the destruction of the first Temple, Jews were exiled from Israel for a period of seventy years. After that Jews were permitted to return and rebuild the Temple.

Unfortunately, during the era of Alexander the Great, Hellenism and Greek culture started making inroads into Jewish life and to many it replaced the ways of the Torah. One of the cruel rulers of the Land of Israel after the death of Alexander was Antiochus. He issued harsh decrees against Jews and forbade them to observe many of the Torah laws. The observance of Shabbat, circumcision, Rosh Chodesh and Jewish festivals were forbidden under the penalty of death. The Holy Temple and its contents were desecrated and defiled. Pagan culture and idolatry was practiced in the land of Israel.

Many adopted the new order, while many chose death and torture rather than accept the culture of the Greeks and the worship of idols. Matisyahu the High Priest and his sons, amongst whom was Yehuda Maccabee, and a small Jewish army, waged war against the Greeks and with G-d's help were victorious.

They rededicated the Holy Temple. However, when they wanted to kindle the Menorah, which was done daily in the Temple, they found that all the oil was defiled by the Greeks. They finally found one cruise of undefiled pure olive oil, bearing the seal of the High Priest. It contained no more than one day's supply. With great faith in G-d, they lit the holy Menorah and a miracle occurred. The one-day amount of oil miraculously lasted for eight days. After which they were able to produce new pure fresh oil.

The sages at that time designated these eight days as days of celebration and a holiday of Thanksgivings, every year. During these eight days we thank and praise G-d for this great miracle with special prayers, reading from the Torah and the kindling our own personal Chanukah lights.

Q. What is the meaning of the name Chanukah?

A. Chanukah means dedication. It commemorates that on the 25th day in the month of Kislev, the Holy Temple, which was in a state of defilement, was rededicated and restored.

Friday, Kislev 18, 5784 / December 1, 2023

Next week, Thursday evening, December 7th, we will light the first Chanukah light and usher in the holiday of Chanukah.

Although other holidays, like Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, in the Diaspora we celebrate one day more than in Israel, Chanukah is celebrated eight days in Israel as in the Diaspora.

On Chanukah we celebrate two miracles: 1) The miracle of winning the war against the Syrian-Greek-Hellenistic forces, as we recite in the Al Hanisim prayer, "Strong fell in the hands of the weak; many into the hands of the few."

2) We celebrate the miracle of the oil in the Holy Temple (Beth HaMikdash), when they found a small flask of oil, which was sealed with the seal of the High Priest. It was enough to last for only one day, which miraculously lasted for eight days.

Q. We can understand how lighting the Menorah celebrates the miracle of the oil. But how does lighting the Menorah commemorate the miracle of winning the war?

A. Our sages tell us that the harsh decrees against the Jewish people at the time of Chanukah were not physical, but spiritual. Jews were prohibited to study Torah and observe the mitzvot which connect us to G-d. Thus, the war which the Macabees fought against the Hellenists was to protect and save the Jewish soul; i.e. for the observance of Torah and mitzvot.

The soul is compared to a candle, as is written, "The candle of G-d is the soul of man." Torah and mitzvot are also compared to a candle and light.

As a result, the sages established to celebrate the miracles of Chanukah with the lighting of candles. It celebrates not only the miracle of the physical oil in the Beth Hamikdash which lasted eight days, it also commemorates the victory of the Jewish soul, which is compared to a candle, and the victory of Torah and mitzvot, which are also compared to a candle and light.

Q. In the prayer recited after the lighting of the Chanukah candles we say, "During all eight days of Chanukah these lights are sacred, and we are not permitted to make use of them." Why aren't we permitted to have any personal use of the Chanukah candles?

A. The Chanukah candles commemorate the lights of the Holy Temple (Beth HaMikdash). One was prohibited from having any personal use from the holy objects of the Temple. Being that the Chanukah candles represent the lights of the Temple we may not derive any personal benefit from them either.