



## Parshas Vayishlach

For the week ending 16 Kislev 5759  
4 - 5 December 1998

### Overview

**R**eturning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav. That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be "Yisrael," signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement — however, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *bris mila*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. Hashem commands Yaakov to go to Beis-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beis-El. Hashem appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beis Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

### Insights

#### TWO DOLLARS A JEW

#### "...An offering to Esav his brother" (32:14)

**W**hen we remember the fanatical hatred of the Nazis, we would imagine that nothing could have stopped their desire to kill every last Jew in Europe. There is considerable evidence, however, that even their blind insane hatred was susceptible to good old-fashioned bribery.

During the height of the war, Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandel managed to stop the deportation of 25,000 Rumanian Jews by bribing Adolf Eichmann's second-in-command. The price: \$50,000. Two dollars a head. Two dollars a Jew. About the price of an evening at the cinema.

Encouraged by this success, Rabbi Weissmandel conceived an incredibly bold plan. If the Nazis were susceptible to bribery on this relatively modest scale, why not on a grand scale? Why not try and buy the life of every Jew in Europe? The Europa plan, as it was called, was an attempt to rescue every remaining Jew by giving the Nazis a massive bribe.

Rabbi Weissmandel saw that the tide of the war was turning. He surmised that those Nazis who still hoped to win would want to use the Jews to put pressure on the Allies. Others, who feared future Allied retribution if they were defeated, would view such a deal as a way to curry favor after the war. In any event, Rabbi Weissmandel's intention was simply that the Nazis should start to appreciate that live Jews were more useful than dead ones.

Rabbi Weissmandel's "Working Group" again made contact with Eichmann's aide. After protracted negotiations, the word came through from Berlin that the highest echelons would agree to stop all deportations everywhere except from Poland, for a price. How much? Two million dollars. For two million dollars, literally millions of lives would be saved. With the receipt of the first \$200,000 the Nazis

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would halt the transports for two months. After that, the next payment would be due.

Money isn't what it used to be. Two million dollars in 1943 is the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars today. In spite of almost superhuman efforts, Rabbi Weissmandel was unable to raise the first \$200,000 dollars, and negotiations broke down in September 1943.

Would the Nazis have kept their word? No one can know for sure. However, there is evidence that they would have. Two Jews who escaped from Auschwitz reported that during the time of the negotiations, the trains with their relentless flow of human cargo had suddenly stopped. Even the gas chambers had lain idle. Also, a special transport of Jews from Theresienstadt who had arrived at Auschwitz were treated with abnormal respect. Perhaps these Jews would have been the first released if the bribe had been paid. When the negotiations foundered, they were sent to their deaths.

Why couldn't Rabbi Weissmandel raise the money? The reasons are complex. One reason is that there was an underlying attitude that it was anathema to have any dealings with the Nazis, let alone give them vast sums of money. Legally, too, the Americans would not have taken kindly to pumping millions into the Nazi war machine. All these considerations pale into insignificance when faced with the overriding imperative of the Torah to ransom captives.

Before setting out to deal with the powers in Rome, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi (the codifier of the Mishna) and the great Sages of the Talmud would always study the encounter between Yaakov and Esav in this week's Parsha. Once, the Sage Rabbi Yannai neglected to do so and his mission was a dismal failure.

Why was it so important to study this chapter before dealing with the super power of the day?

The book of Bereishis is a road-map for the Jewish People for all time. The actions of the fathers are a sign to the children. The deeds of the Patriarchs carved out a perpetual reality. When Yaakov met his brother Esav, he was creating a reality, he was "writing the book" of how the Jewish People are to behave towards Esav and his spiritual heirs in every generation. Yaakov prepared for war. He prayed for mercy and help from G-d. And he sent a bribe to his brother Esav.

## Haftorah: Ovadiah 1:1-21

**T**he entire book of Ovadiah, the shortest in all of the *Tanach*, is this week's Haftorah. Ovadiah was a convert to Judaism from the nation of Edom, a descendent of Esav. Esav lived among two *tzaddikim*, Yitzchak and Rivka, and failed to learn from them — Ovadiah lived among two of the wickedest people, Ahav and Jezebel, yet he remained a *tzaddik*. His prophecy follows Esav/Edom through various periods of history until its eventual downfall in the times of the *mashiach*.

Even though Esav had 400 soldiers and could have taken everything from him, the bribe worked. Even though Esav had a fanatical hatred of his brother, Yaakov bought him off.

The Torah is the road-map of the Jewish People throughout history. It teaches what to do when we are at peace in our own land and it teaches us what to do in the blackest night of exile. When we ignore its directions, we do so not only at our own peril, but at the peril of millions.

### TWO CAMPS

***"I have been diminished by all the kindness and by all the truth that You have done; ...and now I have become two camps." (32:11)***

**T**here are two camps in our lives. A camp of darkness, and a camp of light.

Few of us can grasp anything in absolute terms. Our whole frame of reference is relative. We only understand what light is because every night it gets dark. If the sun always shone, not only would we have no word for dark, but we would also have no word for light. Our perception of the world is based on this principle. Therefore to the extent that we remember the darkness, so will be our rejoicing in the light.

There is a camp of darkness in our lives. A time when we dwell in the midst of difficulty, trial and tribulation. And there is a camp of light. Times when we dwell in security, physically and emotionally. When we are living in the camp of light, our happiness, our perception of the light, will be to the extent that we remember the camp of darkness. By remembering the camp of darkness, feelings of gratitude to G-d will well in our hearts and we will give thanks to Him for bringing us to a time of light and joy.

### Sources:

*Two Dollars A Jew - Midrash Rabba 78:15; "To Save A World" David Kranzler and Eliezer Gevirtz;*

*Two Camps - Rabbeinu Bachya*

***"On the day you (Edom) stood aloof...while foreigners cast lots on Jerusalem, you too were like one of them." (Ovadiah 1:11)***

**A**lthough it was Babylon, not Edom, who destroyed the First Temple, nevertheless, Edom shares the blame. As Yaakov's brother, Esav/Edom should have come to Israel's aid.

*Metzudas David*

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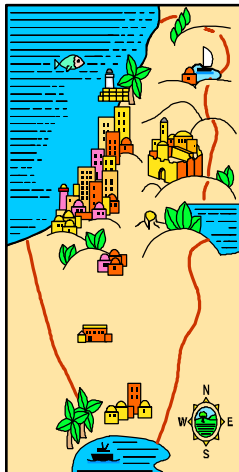
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# LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



## BEIT LECHEM (BETHLEHEM)

*"Rachel died and was buried on the way to Efrat, which is Bethlehem. And Yaakov placed a monument on her grave which is the monument of Rachel's grave unto this day." (Bereishis 35:19)*

Although Beit Lechem achieved fame in later years as the birthplace and early home of King David, it is principally associated with the Tomb of Rachel.

Our Sages tell us that Yaakov buried her there on Divine orders so that when Nevuzradan, the Babylonian conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael*, would lead her children into exile past her tomb, Mother Rachel would rise from her grave to pray to Heaven for their return.

Bethlehem is today populated exclusively by Arabs, but the Tomb of Rachel continues to attract Jews from all over the world who revere it as a prayer site second only to the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron.

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