

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 16 Kislev 5786, corresponding to December 6, 2025.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 122 Hz) (p. 195 S) (p. 148 Hi) (p. 170 AS)

VAYISHLACH וישלח

Bereishit 32:4

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis]

1. MAL'ACHIM. Messengers. Yaakov sent messengers ahead of him to Esav... (32:4). The Hebrew word Mal'achim can mean human messengers or angels. Rashi claims that here it means angels, but he doesn't explain why. The Midrash Yalkut Shimon comments that Yaakov tried to send human messengers, but when he asked for volunteers for the job, no one wanted to go. This makes sense, since who would want to go and meet up with a man filled with hate for your boss. Yaakov had no other choice but to send angels. But who can say that Yaakov had the ability to send angels. Rabbi Steinsaltz wrote in a book that we all can create angels. When I say a Berachah, I create an angel to transport the Berachah to Hashem. So therefore Yaakov could create an angel to do the mission.

2. "Save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav." (32:12). Both mean an adversary. If it is my brother, he could shower me with love, as a means to "love" me to death. He would want that we should combine our families together: unite and we would lose our Jewish identity. Or if it is Esav, who would want to physically kill me. These two threats represent the two threats to our Jewish way of life today. In the historical America, there is a threat that America, the non-Jewish World will want to love us to death. With the alarming rate of intermarriage and assimilation, we could be embraced into a non-Jewish way of life. In the historical Russian threat, there is a gentile entity that can seek to kill us. Both threats exist as the reality of the current threats to our existence. Both threats are represented by the Esav of old!

3. Yaakov was a very wealthy man. His gifts to Esav were quite large, but the Midrash stated that the gifts were about 10% of his total flock. And now he built Sukkot to shelter his flocks from the elements of the weather. The locals were very surprised by this maneuver; they had never seen anyone care for their animals in such a way. And then Yaakov purchased a section of land in the Shechem area. This was a surprise move that no one attempts to explain. Yaakov had no intention to reside in that area of Canaan. His real home was in the Chevron area, closer to the patriarchal cemetery. There is a Midrash that states that Yaakov discovered prophetically that Yosef was to be buried in the She-

chem area. Therefore Yaakov bought land there. Without this Midrash there is no explanation for this purchase.

4. In this next narrative Yaakov's daughter Dinah was kidnapped and raped by a local Canaanite prince, Shechem, which ultimately scarred Dinah for the rest of her life. Yaakov could not handle the disaster and turned the horrible affair to his sons, who were young adults at the time. The sons brilliantly negotiated a deal with the Shechemites that necessitated the circumcision of all the males of the city, that weakened them to the degree that the sons could rescue their sister easily, without any bloodshed. But two of the sons, Shimon and Levy, took matters into their own hands and annihilated all the Shechemite males. Yaakov was quite upset over this development, for he expected a retaliatory attack from neighboring Canaanites. The Kli Yakar wrote an insightful reason why there was no retaliation. When the Shechemites circumcised themselves, the neighboring tribes felt that they had converted to Judaism. They were not going to war to save Jews!

5. This horrible event of the kidnapping and violation of Dinah is the first of the events that show the declining control and influence that Yaakov had in his family. The event ends with an undecided discussion between the patriarch and two of his sons. But Yaakov will get the last word in the matter when he delivered his final speech to his family on his death bed. (Chapter 49). After the Shechem matter is settled, Hashem told Yaakov to rid his family of the idols they took in the looting of Shechem. Who took idols? Certainly not the sons! It must have been some of the non-Jewish servants. But again, it displayed Yaakov's lack of control on the ever growing tribal presence. After Yaakov takes care of the matter, the narrative will take us to the next real issue: the lack of family peace in the tribe. Yaakov's control of family matters has definitely waned.

6. In the Torah's recap of Yaakov's family (35:23-26), the Torah mentions that all the sons were born in Paddan Aram, which is not true. Binyamin was born in Israel! Rashi is silent on this statement. However the Chizkuni raises the question. And he offers two answers. One is that Rachel prayed for an additional son in Paddan Aram, and that prayer was considered answered yet before returning to Israel. The second answer is that since almost all of the sons were born outside of Israel, the Torah considers them all born outside the Promised Land. I favor the second answer. Yet Rashi's silence is the best answer. The family is permanently whole, with addition of Binyamin and the loss of Rachel.

7. The end result of twelve sons is very important, for twelve is the next step in moving the family into tribal

status. And the raising Yosef into two tribes (Ephraim and Menasheh) raises Rachel's status to having three sons in the mix, raising her above the status of Bilhah and Zilpah in the ranking of the wives contributing to the mothering of the tribal sons. I believe that this was an important consideration even though it happens after Rachel's death. The ranking and changes within the family is worthy of noting. Reuven loses all ranking as the oldest. Levi is raised above the others and had earned a unique position as the religious leader. Yosef earned a double portion. And Shimon will lose ranking among his brothers. It will take decades for these changes to occur, but the story is beginning to shape upon these stories.

8. Midrash. Esav leaves the Promised Land. He was embarrassed to live together with Yaakov. Everyone could see that Esav's own children were wild and corrupt. Yaakov's children were honest and decent. (Bereishit Rabbah ch. 22).

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT VAYISHLACH 5786

I. From the Text

1. Yaakov sent "messengers" to Esav. (32:4). What are the two interpretations of the word "messengers"?
2. As a result of Yaakov's battle with a man (the angel for Esav), which food became prohibited to the Jewish people? (32:37)
3. Who were the two sons who killed the people of Shechem? (34:25)?
4. After the annihilation of Shechem, what did Yaakov do with the idols that his tribe took from the city? (35:4)
5. Name the two other names that Yaakov had? (35:10...and elsewhere)

II. From Rashi

6. Confronting Esav caused Yaakov much fear and distress. (32:8). Why fear and distress?
7. Yaakov approached Esav with eleven children. Who was missing and why? (32:23)
8. Who else died near the same time as Devorah, the servant Rivkah had sent to Yaakov? (35:8)
9. What are the two interpretations of the name Binyamin? (35:18)
10. Why did the Torah refer to Basmat (daughter of Yishmael) as Machalat? (36:3)

III. From the Rabbis

11. Why didn't Hashem appear to Yaakov and tell him how to prepare for confronting Esav? (Radak)
12. Why did Yaakov suffer an injury when he fought the angel before confronting Esav? (Seforno)
13. How old was Rachel when she died? (Seder Olam)

IV. Midrash

14. After the warm reunion of Yaakov and Esav, Esav went to Seir. How did Yaakov stay in contact with his brother?

V. Haftorah. Ovadiah

15. Which of Yaakov's sons does Ovadiah mention to fight Esav?

VI. Relationships

- 16.
- a) Esav - Adah
- b) Elifaz - Reuel
- c) Timna - Amalek
- d) Mupim - Rachel
- e) Lavan - Nachor

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT VAYISHLACH 5786

1. Either human messengers or angels.
2. The Gid HaNasheh, the displaced sinew in the hip socket of an animal.
3. Shimon and Levi.
4. He buried them beneath a tree near Shechem..
5. Yisrael and Yeshurun.
6. He was afraid that he would die. And he was distressed that he would kill others.
7. Dinah was missing because Yaakov was afraid that Esav would want her as a wife. Binyamin was missing because he wasn't born yet.
8. Yaakov's mother Rivkah died.
9. 1) The son of the right. Binyamin was the only son born in Israel. 2) The son of my days. Binyamin was born when Yaakov was older.
10. That one's sins are forgiven on the day of his marriage.
11. The righteous people must rely on themselves on how to meet an enemy. Hashem will see that and decide what He shall do.
12. Throughout our history, the Jewish people will suffer some losses before ultimately prevailing.
13. 36.
14. He continued sending him gifts.
15. Yosef.
- 16.
- a) Husband - Wife
- b) Half Brothers (sons of Esav)
- c) Mother Timna
- d) Grandmother Rachel
- e) Grandfather Nachor