

5782 - Genesis 32-36 - Vayishlach (And he sent)

^{32:3}Jacob **sent** messengers (*malachim*) ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

1. 4. וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב—*Then Jacob sent.* The aim of this passage is to remind us that the righteous must never rely on their rectitude (integrity, goodness, morality), **but must always do whatever is in their power to assure their well-being.** It also serves as an example to future generations of how to conduct themselves in their struggles with the descendants of Esau: Jacob prepared a triple defense of “gifts, prayer and combat.” Tradition tell us the R' Yanai¹ used to read these chapters carefully when he was going to the Roman authorities to intercede on behalf of the Jews. He did so in order to be imbued with the same spirit that moved Jacob when he confronted his enemy brother (*Ramban*² to 33:15).³

a. Luke 22:35-38

³⁵Then Yeshua asked them, "When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Nothing," they answered. ³⁶He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and **if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.**" ³⁷It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment." ³⁸The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That's enough!" he replied.

1) Matthew 10:5-17

⁵These twelve Yeshua sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. ⁹Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—¹⁰no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹Whatever town or village you enter, search there for some worthy person and stay at their house until you leave. ¹²As you enter the home, give it your greeting. ¹³If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. ¹⁴If anyone will not welcome you or

listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet ... ¹⁵it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

¹⁶"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore **be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.** ¹⁷**Be on your guard ...**

2. אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר שָׂדֵה אֱדוֹם—*To the land of Seir, the field of Edom.* Jacob

could have returned to his father's house in the south of Canaan via another route, thus avoiding his brother ... Consequently the Sages apply the following verse in *Proverbs* to Jacob. *As one who takes a dog by the ears is he who meddles in a dispute which is not his* (26:17). There was no need for Jacob to rekindle the old hatreds and to have to humble himself before Esau.

The Zohar, however, gives us insight into the patriarch's intentions: Jacob felt that the reconciliation he wanted with his brother could only take place while their father, whom Esau loved dearly, was alive. Now Isaac was already about 157 years old. **Jacob decided to attempt a reconciliation with further delay, even before returning to his father's house.**

a. Genesis 33:1-11

¹Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. ²He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and **Rachel and Joseph in the rear.** ³He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

⁴But **Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.** ⁵Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked. Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant." ⁶Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. ⁷Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down. ⁸Esau asked, "What do you mean by all these droves I met?" "To find favor in your eyes, my lord," he said. ⁹But Esau said, "I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰"No, please!" said Jacob. "If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. **For to see your face IS LIKE**

1 Rabbi Yannai was an *amora* who lived in the 3rd century, and of the first generation of the *Amoraim* of the Land of Israel.

2 Moses ben Nachman (1194–1270), commonly known as Nachmanides and also referred to by the acronym Ramban, was a leading medieval Jewish scholar, Sephardic rabbi, philosopher, physician, kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

3 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Bereishis*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 434-494.

seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably.

¹¹Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

^{32:22}That night (i.e., before he encountered Esau) Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." ²⁹Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I SAW GOD FACE TO FACE, and yet my life was spared." ³¹The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

1. 24. וַיִּבְרַח אִישׁ עִמּוֹ—*And a man wrestled with him.* According to *Rambam*,⁴ the struggle and the ensuing dialogue took place **only in a prophetic vision**, since "it states clearly at the end of the passage that an angel was involved" (Guide 2:42; **whenever we are told that an angel appears it can only be in a prophetic vision**). But *Ramban*, noting that as they fought, **Jacob's thigh was strained so that he became lame, cites this as proof that the struggle did in fact take place and was not at all imagined** (Gen18:1). His opinion is shared by *Radak*⁵ and *Ibn Ezra*.⁶ On the other hand, *R Levi ben Gershon*⁷ (*Ralbag*,⁷ quoted by *Abarbane*⁸) comes to *Rambam's* defense. He holds that **the thigh injury**

was caused by auto-suggestion,⁹ an aftermath of the prophetic vision.

This divergence between the literal and symbolic meanings of the episode is reflected in the many interpretations given to this passage. To be sure, the Torah never loses its literal meaning ... It remains valid under all circumstances. But in this account the Sages of the Midrash, as well as later scholars and commentators, also see a more general meaning. Some take it as symbolizing the righteous person's inner struggle against the forces of evil. Jacob had sent everything he owned to the other side of the river. Now he stood alone in the vastness, in the profound silence of the night, a mortal human being, defenseless in the anguish of darkness. The Divine messenger struggles with Jacob—he who has already clashed so often with his fellowmen, who has fought and won thanks to his will, his courage, and his intelligence. The prophet Hosea evokes the patriarch's struggle: He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him ... (12:5). This prayer for mercy, forgiveness, and protection is fulfilled. Jacob the supplanter becomes Israel the prince of God. **The patriarch's mysterious encounter thus becomes a symbolic representation of the fights and struggles taking place on the eve of the approaching ordeal** (cf. *R' Bachya*¹⁰ and *Malbim*¹¹).

But the struggle in the night has also been taken as a kind of forerunner of the decisive combat which is to occur on the morrow, in broad daylight. It is in the silence of the preceding night that man is judged. It is then that his moral value must assert itself in the struggle against the angel of evil. **If he prevails, he will be Israel—who has "striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome."** Then, the angel of evil himself will give him his blessing for the imminent trials awaiting him. In the great crises in our lives, our destinies are readied in advance, in the dark night and in the secret recesses of the human conscience ...

Several Midrashim identify Jacob's opponent as Esau's "guardian angel" in the celestial spheres. In this interpretation, also reported by *Rashi*,¹² the fight between them symbolizes the historic struggle between Jewry and the nations, and the trials and hurts which Jewry will have to endure until the dawn freedom. When he perceived that he could not

4 Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), commonly known as Maimonides and also referred to by the acronym Rambam, was a medieval Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages. In his time, he was also a preeminent astronomer and physician.

5 David Kimchi (1160–1235), also known by the Hebrew acronym as the RaDaK, was a medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

6 Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (c. 1090–c. 1165), also known as Ibn Ezra, was one of the most distinguished Jewish biblical commentators and philosophers of the Middle Ages.

7 Levi ben Gershon (1288–1344), better known by his Graecized name as Gersonides, or by the acronym *RaLBaG*, was a medieval French Jewish philosopher, Talmudist, mathematician, physician and astronomer.

8 Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437–1508), commonly referred to as Abarbanel was a Portuguese Jewish statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier.

9 The influencing of your physical or mental state by thoughts and ideas that come from yourself rather than from other people.

10 *Bachya* ben Asher ibn Halawa (1255–1340) was a rabbi, scholar of Judaism and a commentator on the Hebrew Bible.

11 Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Wisser (1809–1879), better known as the Malbim, was a rabbi, master of Hebrew grammar, and Bible commentator.

12 Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105), today generally known by the acronym *RaSHI*, was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Hebrew Bible. *Rashi* is acclaimed for his ability to present the basic meaning of the text in a concise and lucid fashion.

overcome him, means that the enemy cannot separate Jewry from God. He struck the socket of his hip is an allusion to the region of circumcision and to the mitzvah which the nations will one day forbid Jewry to carry out. So Jacob's hip-socket was dislocated alludes to those descendants of Jacob who will forsake Judaism (*Midrash Lekach Tov* ["Good Lesson"]).

Thus, Jacob's struggle is a forerunner of those which his descendants will be involved in all through their turbulent history ...

And so the Torah insisted on keeping the memory of this event alive by **prohibiting the consumption of the sinew**¹³ which was injured in the struggle with the angel.

2. 27. וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי בִּי עֲלֵה הַשָּׁחַר—*Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn has broken" ...* **Jacob realized that his opponent in this tough struggle was none other than the personification of his worst enemy, Esau, his dreaded brother whom he was to meet that very day.** And Jacob was aware of his own weak point in facing his brother: his father's blessing which he obtained with guile. Esau still denied the legitimacy of his right to this blessing. And so Jacob said to Esau's guardian angel: "I will not send you away unless you bless me," meaning, "**acknowledge my right to my father's blessings which Esau disputes**" (*Rashi*) ... The angel answered, "Your name is Jacob, which means *the supplanter*—he who took the place of the other (27:36) or he who takes crooked paths ... But now your name will no longer be Jacob. This name will be part of what was past and is no more. Your name will be Israel, for you have fought and won, **and this name means that you have obtained the blessings openly and with dignity**" (*Rashi*; cf. *Rashi* on 35:10; יִשְׂרָאֵל means *prince* or *noble* (שָׂר) and also יִשָּׂר, *one who walks upright with God*). Continued the angel, "God will reveal Himself to you at Beth-El, **where He will change your name and bless you. I will be there too and will confirm the blessings.** Let me go until He speaks to us there." But Jacob refused (for he was to meet his brother that same day) and the angel, who had only tried for one last reprieve, had to acknowledge the blessings despite himself. This is what is meant by *and he blessed him there* (verse 30). [Taken from *Rashi*, the *Zohar*, and *Chullin* [Ordinary Things] 91b; cf. our commentary to 27:33.]

R Bachya concludes the above passage by emphasizing its historical importance. After refusing throughout his life to pay homage to the integrity and sincere piety of his brother as a "fighter for God

יִשְׂרָאֵל" the angel of Esau finally gives him his blessing and so acknowledges the words of his father, גַּם בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה (ibid.). **So, too, in messianic times, the nations which have struggled for so long against Jewry will come to pay homage to Jewry's ideal and historic mission, as the prophet Isaiah proclaims** (49:23): *Kings will be your foster fathers and their queens your nursing mother; they will prostrate themselves to you with their face to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet; and you will know that I am God, for they who await Me will not be ashamed.*

3. 29. יִשְׂרָאֵל—*Israel.* R' Yanai said, "God associated His Name with Israel's. This is like a king who has a small key to open the door of his palace. He says to himself, 'I'll lose the key if I leave it as is, so I'll attach a string in order to find it more easily if it gets lost.' God did the same for Jewry: If I leave Jewry alone,' He said, 'this people will become lost among the nations. But I shall attach My name to Jewry, so that this people can survive'" (*Yerushalmi, Taanis* [Fasting] 2:6).
- a. John 10:27-30
²⁷My sheep listen to my voice ... ²⁸I give them eternal life, and **they shall never perish**; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one."
4. כִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וְתוֹכַל—*For you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome.* Onkelos¹⁴ interprets the angel's words: "for you have fought before God **with man** and have succeeded." Consequently, Israel means "fighter before (or for) God," but no indication of the fight with men is to be found in the name יִשְׂרָאֵל, Israel. And this is very significant for its mission. **Jewry's millennial struggle is within society and its goal is to establish the kingdom of God on earth.** But in this struggle Jewry fights only with spiritual weapons. It fights for ideals and principles. **Jewry's fight is never directed against human beings.**
5. 31. כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים—*For I have seen the Divine (Heb. Elohim) face to face.* How could Jacob, a human being of flesh and blood, grapple with an angel who is, the Torah tells us, nothing but pure spirit" (e.g., Psalms 104:4). In its reply to this question, the Zohar states that the **angels are capable of adopting a corporeal form when**

13 The "sinew" is the sciatic nerve, removed from meat, based on the biblical story of Jacob's struggle at Jabok, where he was injured in the thigh (Genesis 32:22): "Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle."

14 Onkelos, possibly identical to Aquila of Sinope, was a Roman national who converted to Judaism in Tannaic times (c. 35–120 CE). He is considered to be the author of the Targum Onkelos (c. 110 CE).

they enter the realm of men ... Accordingly, Jacob stresses here that his encounter with the angel **depended only on his sense of vision**.

a. Psalm 104:2-4

²The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent ³and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. ⁴**He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.**

b. וַתִּנָּצַל נַפְשִׁי—*yet my life was spared (saved).*

c. Obviously the “man” that Jacob wrestled with was NOT a “man”—²⁵*When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched ...* ²⁶Then the man said, "Let me go, **for it is daybreak.**" But Jacob replied, "**I will not let you go unless you bless me**" (Gen 32:25-26).

d. Exodus 33:11 (cf., Num 12:8; 14:14; Deu 5:4; 34:10)

¹¹**The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.** Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

1) Exodus 33:20

But, (God) said, "**you cannot see my face, for NO ONE MAY SEE ME AND LIVE.**"

e. Judges 6:22

When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! **I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!**"

f. Judges 13:21-22

²¹When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD.

²²**"We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!"**

g. 1Corinthians 13:12

¹²Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; **then we shall see face to face.** Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

h. John 1:14-18

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth ... ¹⁶From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Yeshua the Messiah.

¹⁸**No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.**

³⁴¹Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. ²When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, **he took her and raped her.** ³His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

1. שָׁכַב (*shachav*)—*to lie down, to lie down (of sexual relations), to lie down (in death), to rest, relax (fig), to be lain with (sexually).*

a. The expression “he took her and raped her” would probably be better translated, “he seduced her and had sex relations with her.”

b. Whenever the derivatives of *shachav* are used in a context of sexual relationships, those relationships are illicit (Gen 30:15-16; 2Sam 11:11 may be exceptions). This is no less true with the verb *shachav* itself. In one instance it is used in legal statements that forbid certain types of sexual liaisons. Exodus 22:16 [H 15] outlaws fornication: "If a man seduce a virgin who is not betrothed and **'sleep/lie'** with her he shall pay her price and make her his wife." Deuteronomy 22:22 advocates the death penalty for two people caught in adultery: "If a man is caught **'sleeping/lying'** with another man's wife both must die." Leviticus 18:22 and Lev 20:13 use *shachav* in the statement that prohibits homosexual relationships: "The man who **'lies'** with a man... they must die." Finally in Deut 27:21 **"lying"** with animals is cursed by the Law.

1) Genesis 30:15-16

¹⁵But (Leah) said to (Rachel), "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "**he can sleep (lit. lie) with you tonight** in return for your son's mandrakes." ¹⁶So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes."

2) 2Samuel 11:11

¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink **and make love to (lit. lie with) my wife?** As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"