

Introduction to Parsha #8: Vayishlach¹

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach***²: Genesis 32:3 – 36:43
 Haftarah: The Book of Obadiah
 B'rit Chadasha: Matthew 26:30 – 56



And a man wrestled with him.
[Genesis 32:24]

This Week's Amidah prayer is Petition # 5, *Rofei* - the Petition for Healing

Vayishlach Ya'akov mal'achim – *And Ya'akov sent out emissaries ... lefanav el-Esav achiv* – *unto the face of his brother Esav ...* . Genesis 32:3a.

Is that Ya'akov the prodigal ... the outcast ... the exiled deceiver ... going home? Yes, Beloved, it is. Seasons change. Pages turn. Chapters conclude – and then fresh new ones begin. Paradigms shift. The sun sets – then rises – then sets again. Seedtime leads to harvest; harvest to seedtime; heat turns to cold; summer fades to winter; day slips into night; and exile transitions to redemption. Redemption, however, is not an *event*, but a step-by-step *progression* – and often an intricate, lengthy, and messy one at that. People who were once content to serve strangers as slaves awaken to their true identity, break free, and embark on the long journey 'home' – but that journey is not – cannot be – easy. Resistance comes from within; backlash from without. As new challenges arise, old identity issues resurface. Nerves frazzle. Tensions flare. Flash points erupt. Battle lines get drawn. Emotions overwhelm. In the course of every redemption drama, a lot of sensitive, sensuous, and sentimental flesh always winds up on the cutting room floor. So it was for Ya'akov, Rachel, Leah and their little band of returning exiles – and so it is for us, their progeny. Redemption is a beautiful concept - but it is often an ugly process.

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² *Vayishlach* is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase spelled *vav, yod, shin, lamed, chet*, pronounced *vah-yeesh-lach*'.

Welcome to the eighth parsha of Torah –*Vayishlach*. Welcome to a season of *shaking off mental and emotional chains* and *forging new beginnings*³. Each year this week of the Torah cycle is programmed to be a *week of dark-night-of-the-soul redemption processing* for us. This is a week for watchmen to keep vigil, and for warriors to adhere strictly to the King’s rules of engagement while ambassadors to exhaust all reasonable diplomatic options. This is our appointed season *to awaken to, and get in position - and of the proper mindset - to deal effectively with, the daunting challenges of detoxifying from years of immersion in foreign culture, returning to our true covenant identity, worldview, and lifestyle, and starting over.* Old things in our lives that have become stale and unfruitful - if not toxic - are about to pass away. Old habits, old relationships, and old attachments will become stale and unfulfilling. Old perspectives and old limitations will begin to feel ... well, OLD! Old comfort zones, old grudges, old walls of separation, old defense mechanisms, and old ways of dealing with challenges and people – indeed everything that is familiar and comfortable and stagnant in our lives – will be challenged to the core this week. This is to be a week of *breaking free, shaking loose, disentangling ... and moving on.* It is a week for discontinuing *counter-productive patterns* of thought, reaction, and behavior, and leaving *destructive soul-ties*. Our hearts – if not our bodies - will take some hits. We will sometimes wonder if we’ve gotten out of the frying pan only to fall into the fire. We will have to put amazing levels of trust in our Covenant Partner in Heaven, and do exactly what He says - or the dark night of the soul that awaits us will be our undoing. Are you up for the challenge? Are you ready to embrace this appointed season of new beginnings in Messiah? Are you hungry to start closing the gap between who, what, and where you are and who, what, and where you were born to become? Are you ready for the Holy One to awaken you to a fresh new season of growth, learning, and more intimate and satisfying relationship with the Bridegroom King? Are you ready to AWAKEN THE LION in your soul, and let Him out of the cage of exile to run and roar as He was meant to?

A Vayishlach Travelogue

This is our appointed season to turn our hearts - and plot our course - back home. The five chapters that make up parsha *Vayishlach* will chronicle Ya’akov’s travels from the time he and Laban parted ways at Gilead all the way up to his long-delayed reunion with his father. Can you believe it? After over 20 years of self-imposed exile in Charan our ancestor Ya'akov is finally *on his way back to Be'er-sheva*. Ah, quite an obstacle course stands between Ya’akov and the ancestral camp.

³ In Hebraic thought the number 8 is indicative of both new beginnings and the footprint of the Messiah.

The Holy One does not intend for Ya'akov to waltz back home the same man as he was when he left. Before he returns to whatever is left of the family he left behind the Holy One wants Ya'akov to be a new - and vastly improved - man. The Holy One knows that if Ya'akov is to become the man he was created to be – the man who will be known by the name *Yisrael* - he must be forced to deal with his unresolved issues. The Holy One knows Ya'akov has unresolved IDENTITY issues. He knows that Ya'akov has unresolved TRUST issues. He knows that Ya'akov also has some unresolved AUTHORITY issues, some immediate RESTITUTION issues, some important INHERITANCE issues, and unexplored DESTINY issues. In *Vayishlach* therefore the Holy One intends to challenge Ya'akov at the deepest levels of his mind, his will, and his emotions. He will therefore visit Ya'akov three more times – once for the mind, once for the will, and once for the emotions.

The Holy One Breaks the 'Finiteness Barrier' Multiple Times!

In last week's parsha, *Vayashev*, Ya'akov had two God-encounters. The first was the dramatic 'stairway to Heaven' dream sequence at *Beit-El*. See **Genesis 28:10 ff.** The second was a much simpler – yet equally soul-stirring - directive:

Shuv el-eretz avoteicha ul'moladeteicha
Return to the land of your father and to your family

v'ehyeh imach
and I will be with you.

[Genesis 31:3]

In other words: '***Let's Go Home', Ya'akov!***'

Each of the God-encounters Ya'akov will have in *Vayishlach* will take place in a different place along the path Ya'akov took on the resulting journey. The first such God-encounter will transpire at *Penei-El*. The second will occur at *Sh'chem*. The third will take place at *Beit-El*, where Ya'akov's personal relationship with the Holy One began many years ago.

In connection with the first God-encounter this week – the one at *Penei-El* - Ya'akov will receive a *blessing* and a *new name* – *Yisrael*. In connection with the second God-encounter of the parsha Ya'akov/Yisrael will be visited in *Sh'chem* and told to return to the place he first met the Holy One, i.e. *Beit-El*. In connection with the third encounter - at *Beit-El* -the Holy One will renew with Ya'akov/Yisrael the identical covenant He made with Avraham and with Yitzchak. As part of this renewal of covenant ceremony, the Holy One will promise to *bless Ya'akov*, to *make him fruitful*, to *empower him to produce a multitude of descendants* who

would develop into *a nation*, a *company of nations*, and *melachim* [kings]. He will also confirm His promise to give to Ya'akov and his descendants the right to possess - and the responsibility to sanctify - *the land of Eretz Kena'an*.

Ten More Character-Shaping Trials on Ya'akov's Horizon!

The 'wallpaper' for the three life-changing God-encounters of *Vayishlach* will be a series of ten dramatic trials the Holy One will choreograph for Ya'akov. As the scenery changes for a son of the Covenant, so do the challenges. Here are the ten trials Ya'akov will face in this appointed *season of forging new beginnings*:

1. The Disheartening Report of the Messengers at *Machanaim*;
2. The Night of Intense Wrestling at the Brook *Yabbok*;
3. The long-dreaded face-to-face confrontation with *Esav*;
4. The Trial at *Sukkot*;
5. The Abduction and Violation of Dinah at *Shechem*;
6. The Making of His Name a Stench in the Land;
7. The Death of his nursemaid, Devorah, at *Beit-El*;
8. The Death of Rachel near *Beit-Lechem*;
9. The Rebellion of Reuven near the tower of *Edar*;
10. The loss of his father Yitzchak at age 180.

The Three Prophetic Deaths of Parsha Vayishlach

Vayishlach also contains the Biblical accounts of three deaths. Let us now look at those three deaths – and their prophetic significance - in the order in which Torah presents them.

1. The Death of Devorah

First of all, the *Ruach HaQodesh* interrupts the narrative of the significant spiritual experience of Ya'akov and family at Beit-El to inform us of the death of a woman we have hardly met. Here is how Torah records the event:

Vatamot Devorah meyneket Rivkah

Rebecca's nurse Devorah died,

vatikaver mitachat l'Veit-El tachat ha-alon

and she was buried in the valley of Beth El, under the oak.

vayikra shmo Alon Bachut

It was named Weeping Oak (Alon Bakhut).

[Genesis 35:8]

Have you ever wondered why the writer of Torah wants us to know that, in the midst of the crucial *teshuvah* narrative, a lady we know only as *Rivkah's nurse* died? Has anyone besides me ever asked the reason for this quirky literary

parenthesis? Considering the fact that the writer of Torah completely ignores the death of Rivkah, focusing instead on the death of this relative stranger, let us consider who this woman was, and what her legacy to us might be. We have not been formally introduced to this woman by name heretofore, but we should be familiar with her nonetheless. Way back in Genesis 24:59, when Torah was describing the details surrounding the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah, Ya'akov's parents, we were told that Rivkah's family... *sent away Rivkah their sister, and her nurse, and Avraham's servant, and his men.* Was Rivkah sick, that she should need a nurse? No, Rivkah was very, very healthy. Had she not been healthy, there is no way she could have done the hard physical labor of watering the camels of Avraham's servant. The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'nurse' is *mayanqot*⁴, a noun derived from the Hebrew verb root *yanaq*⁵ [meaning 'she breast-feeds'] This is sometimes referred to in English as a 'wet-nurse' – one whose employment or service to a family is to breast-feed and be a 'nanny' and 'governess' to the family's children. Devorah was therefore not sent along with Rivkah on her way to the marriage with Yitzchak to take care of Rivkah – she was sent to breast-feed, nurture, and train up Rivkah's children.

Who were Rivkah's children? There were only two – their names were Ya'akov and Esav. Do you now understand? Devorah, the woman whose death is being reported in Genesis 35:8, is none other than the woman at whose breasts Ya'akov and Esav suckled. Devorah is the woman who served as these men's 'nanny', and who nurtured and trained them as a governess. Now perhaps we can understand why though we have not heretofore known this woman by name the Holy One honors her by rather rudely interrupting the narrative of Torah to note her passing.

But is there more here? Could the mention of the death of Devorah at this very strategic point in the narrative of Torah be more than the Holy One's way of honoring a faithful servant who has quietly, without fanfare or applause, done a great thing? Torah tells a very real story about very real people – but its Author picks and chooses the details that are given, and arranges those details, for their prophetic import. We should understand therefore that the reference of Torah to Devorah's death is not just a polite reference to a veiled woman who lived a long time ago in Rivkah's tents and suckled and nannied Yitzchak and Rivkah's rowdy twin boys. While Devorah definitely was that, she is mentioned at this strategic point in Torah, I believe, because she is a prophetic symbol as well.

⁴ *Mayanqat* is a transliteration of the Hebrew phrase spelled *mem, yod, nun, kof, tav*, and pronounced *mah-yan-qawt*'.

⁵ *Yanaq* is *yod, nun, qof*, Strong's Hebrew word #3243, pronounced *yaw-nawk*'.

What clues does the Torah give us to the prophetic aspect of this mention of Devorah's death? First of all, consider the etymology of the name Devorah itself – which seems to be mentioned quite *'out of the blue'*. The verb root of this name is *dabar, dalet, beit, resh*, which means to speak, to declare, to converse, to prophesy, to teach, to promise, or to otherwise communicate verbally. The addition of the *hey* ['h' sound] suffix at the end of the *dalet–beit-resh* shoresh merely means that the actor (in this case the speaker) is of the feminine gender. The literal meaning, therefore, of the name Devorah would be a word, speech, prophecy, or teaching spoken by a woman. Perhaps now you understand why another Jewess, who was one of the deliverers raised up by the Holy One to lead Israel in the time of the Judges, is called Devorah the prophetess. See Judges 4.

Secondly, consider the pictographic message that comes with the name *Devorah*. The Hebrew letter *dalet* ['d' sounding consonant] is a pictograph of a doorway, or portal. The Hebrew letter *beit* ['b' or 'v' sounding consonant] is a pictograph of a household or kingdom. The Hebrew letter *resh* ['r' sounding consonant] is a pictograph of a king off of his throne, or the head of a household outside his home. The Hebrew letter *hey* ['h' sounding consonant] is a pictograph of the window of a shepherd's tent, the source of light and fresh air, symbolizing revelation and inspiration. Putting all these images together in order to form a flowing pictographic mural, the image one sees is of *a doorway of a kingdom or household, through which the king or head of the household gives or receives revelation and inspiration.*

Thirdly, consider the message of the description Torah gives of Devorah. Torah describes her as Rivkah's *mayanqot* – *i.e.* wet nurse, nanny, and/or governess. Perhaps it will help your understanding to consider the relationship between the Hebrew noun *mayanqat* [wet-nurse, nanny and governess] and the Greek word *paidagogos*. The latter word refers to trustworthy servants who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to rich families. Boys of such a station were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without their pedagogue before arriving at the age of manhood.

Do you recall Shaul of Tarsus' teaching in his letter to the Galatians:

... before pistin [our English Bibles translate this as 'faith'⁶] came we were kept under protection by nomos [our English Bibles translate this as 'law']- kept for the pistin that would afterward be revealed. Therefore nomos was our paidagogos [i.e. nanny, educator] to bring us to Maschiach,

⁶ The reader should always keep in mind the relationship of 'faith' with 'hearing'. *Pistin* is not an intellectual exercise such as 'believing'. It is not even 'trusting'. It is, instead, making a *sh'ma* response of total submission to the word and will of the Holy One.

*that we might be justified by pistin.
But after pistin has been made manifest
we are no longer under paidagogos.*

[Galatians 3:23-25]

What was the *nomos* that Shaul is saying was given to us to serve as a *paidagogos/mayanqat*? Traditional Christian theologians have sought to identify the *nomos* in question – *i.e.* that which Shaul says serves only a *paidagogos/mayanqat* – as the mitzvot of Torah. But the mitzvot of Torah cannot be what Shaul is talking about here. Why? First of all, because Shaul plainly says that what he is speaking about is something that is ‘*of men*’ [see Galatians 1:10-12]. He further describes what he is talking as being ‘*prescribed by messengers*’ [our English Bibles say ‘angels’, but the Greek term, *aggelon*, just means ‘messengers’]. Galatians 3:19. The mitzvot of Torah however were neither ‘of men’ nor ‘commanded by messengers’; they were, instead, spoken directly from the mouth of the Eternal God Himself.

Moreover, what Shaul is referring to as *nomos* in this passage and calling a *paidagogos* is identified clearly in Galatians 1:13-14 as *Judaismo* – *i.e.* the form of religious observance prevailing in that day’s Pharisaism – particularly Pharisaism of the school of Shammai. This invokes an intricate matrix of traditions and halakah designed to build a ‘fence around the Torah’. This is what today would be called ‘Judaism’ or ‘*Yiddishkeit*’. Shaul tells us plainly what he means by this term in Galatians 1:14[b], describing it as *patrikon mou paradoseon* [traditions of my fathers]. Shaul makes it clear he is speaking of that which ‘*pleases men*’ [Galatians 1:10] and which is ‘*received of men*’ [Galatians 1:12]. In other words, what Shaul is saying is that the man-made traditions taught by the sages of his day about how Torah’s mitzvot were to be implemented in individual, family, and community life, could and did serve him and others as a *paidagogos/mayanqat* – nurturing and training us until Messiah *broke the finity barrier* and began to unveil the deeper Spiritual meanings of, and release the higher levels of atmosphere-shifting energy inherent within, those mitzvot.

If you want to understand the difference between the Torah revelations of the Messiah and the traditions of the Pharisaic and Sadducean Sects of First Century Judaism, simply take a look at Yeshua’s discussion concerning the true meaning of the Torah found in Matthew 5:16-48. He made it clear that the level of Torah understanding and halakah of the P’rushim [Pharisees] and Sadducees [i.e. the *nomos* they espoused] was not the fullest meaning of the Torah of the Holy One – but was only a set of man-made traditions that related to the Holy One and His mitzvot as ‘*through a lattice*’. See **Song of Songs 2:8-9**; compare that to Messiah’s call, represented by **Song 2:10-14**.

When the rabbinical traditions do not contradict or render the actual mitzvot of Torah void of meaning, they serve a useful purpose. Much the way a wet nurse/governess creates a safe environment for the children placed in her care to learn and practice being who they were created to be, rabbinical traditions can help create and maintain a safe environment for people who are seeking to learn and do the will of the Holy One,

Whew, that was a lot of information, I'll grant you! But what, pray tell, does it have to do with the prophetic message found in today's aliyah relative to the death of Devorah? Think about it. What was Devorah but the *paidagogos/mayanqat* of Ya'akov. After Ya'akov led his family in *t'shuvah*, returned to submit his life and his household to the Holy One at Beit-El, The Holy One appeared to him, re-affirmed the covenant, and officially recognized his new name of Yisrael. At this point Ya'akov no longer needed a *mayanqat*. He was receiving revelation directly from the Holy One. Hence, his *mayanqat* died and was buried.

Will something that occurs at the end of days spiritual correspond to the death and burial of Devorah, the *mayanqat*? What could that be? Could it be that Ya'akov's descendants as a nation will, in the end of days, have a *Beit-El*-like experience, and that as a consequence of that experience they will no longer walk according to the teaching of the *paidagogos/mayanqat* of rabbinical Judaism or institutional Christianity, but will instead begin to walk in the true mitzvot of Torah as taught by Moshe, the prophets, and Yeshua ha-Maschiach? Is it possible that is what Shaul was talking about in I Corinthians 13:9-11 when he said:

*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, and I thought as a child;
but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face.*

Do not make the mistake of the Christian theologians who say Torah has passed away. Yeshua made it clear that the Torah of the Holy One endures forever, and **that no part of it will in any wise pass away**. But I strongly suspect, Dear Reader, that in the end of days all the traditions of men that both rabbinic Judaism and Christian theologies have sought to superimpose upon the Torah most definitely will. I suspect they will die, and be buried. And the milk the Holy One's people drink will no longer be the milk of a *mayanqat* – a feminine form of the Word - but will be the true milk of the masculine form of the Word – the D'var [Hebrew] and Logos [Greek] that was in the beginning and by which all things were created, as described in Yochanan [John] 1:1-3.

2. The Death of Rachel

Secondly, we are told of the death of Rachel, which occurred in connection with her giving birth to Binyamin. **Genesis 35:18-20**. Rachel, we find out, is the only one of the matriarchs not buried in the tomb of patriarchs at *Machpelah*. Because she died while Ya'akov and family were 'on the road', Rachel was buried in a tomb near where Binyamin was born – at Efrat [near *Beit-Lechem*]. Here is how Torah describes for us one of the most traumatic events of Ya'akov's life:

Vateled Rachel vatekash belidetah

and Rachel's contractions began, and her labor became extremely difficult.

Vayehi b'ha-k'shotah belidetah vatomer lah ha-meyaledet

When her labor was at its worst, the midwife said to her,

al-tire'i ki-gam-zeh lach ben

'Don't be afraid. This one will also be a son for you.'

Vayehi betzet nafshah ki metah

And as she was dying, and breathed her last,

vatikra sh'mo Ben-Oni v'aviv kara-lo Binyamin

*she named the child Ben-oni, but his father called him **Binyamin***

Vatamot Rachel vaticaver bederech Efratah hi Beit Lachem

Rachel died and was buried on the road to Ephrat, now known as Bethlehem.

Vayatzev Ya'akov matzevah al-k'vuratah

Jacob set up a monument on the site of her interment.

hi matzevet kevurat Rachel ad-hayom

This is the monument that is on Rachel's grave to this very day.

[Genesis 35:16(b) –21]

There is no question that Rachel's death and interment at this location is an event of prophetic significance. It is recognized as such in both the TaNaKh and in the B'rit Chadasha. In Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] 31, Rachel's burial at this location is viewed as a prophetic event relative to the captivity of the covenant nation, as Yirmayahu describes Rachel as breaking forth into weeping from her grave at the sight of the Jews being driven in chains from Ramah to Babylon:

*The Holy One says: **A voice was heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping - it is Rachel weeping for her children.
She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.***

And the Holy One says:

***"Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;
For your work shall be rewarded, says the Holy One;
And they shall come back from the land of the enemy.
There is hope in your future, says the Holy One,
For your children shall come back to their own border.***

[Jeremiah 31:15-16]

This was one of the passages from the TaNaKh that was cited by Mattitiyahu [known to English speakers as *Matthew*], the talmid of Yeshua of Natzret who was once a collaborator with and tax collector the Idumean governors of Judea, as a prophetic precursor of the coming of the Messiah. Mattitiyahu wrote that, shortly after the miraculous sign in the heavens that announced the birth of the Messiah in c. 4 BCE:

... Herod ... issued a decree calling for the death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time that he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning – it is Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted, because they are no more."
[Matthew 2:16-18]

The intense grief and loud wailing of Jewish mothers is thus shown to be a partial prophetic fulfillment of the ‘*birth pangs of Messiah*’. As Rachel wailed and travailed as she was giving birth to Binyamin, so the mothers in Israel wailed in travail as Israel was led off to captivity, and so the mothers of male children under two years of age wailed and travailed when Herod issued his diabolical order to the Roman legions in a maniacal attempt to kill the Messiah-child.

3. The Death of Yitzchak

And finally we are told in today’s aliyah of the death of Yitzchak, who died in Hebron ‘old and full of years’ [he was 180] and was ‘gathered to his people’.

Vayihyu yemei Yitzchak me'at shanah ushmonim shanah
Yitzchak lived to be 180 years old⁷.

Vayigva Yitzchak vayamot vaye'asef el-amav
He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people,

zaken us'va yamim
old and in the fullness of his years.

vayikberu oto Esav v'Ya'akov banav
And he was buried by his sons, Esav and Ya'akov.
[Genesis 35:28-29]

With Yitzchak gone the future of mankind will now rest squarely on one man’s shoulders – the man the Holy One now calls *Yisrael*.

⁷ Yitzchak thus outlived his father by 5 years. Avraham lived 175 years, Yish'mael lived 137 years. Yitzchak lived 180 years, and Ya'akov would apparently live 147 years.

Lessons from the Name/First Word of the Parsha

As we have discussed previously in these studies, the sages selected names for each parsha from its opening lines that they felt expressed the essence of that parsha's content. The name that the sages selected to give the parsha we study this week is the phrase with which the parsha opens, *Vayishlach* – *i.e. and he sent* The 'he' in the phrase, *i.e.* the one who did the 'sending', is our ancestor Ya'akov. Here is the opening verse:

Vayishlach Ya'akov malachim lefanav el-Esav achiv

Ya'akov sent messengers [or angels] ahead of him to his brother Esau,

ar'tzah Se'ir sadeh Edom

in the land of Seir, to Edom's field.

[Genesis 32:3]

How does the name *Vayishlach* express the essence of the content of all we will read about this week? The verb at the root of the phrase *Vayishlach* is *sh'lach*⁸. This word can mean either 'he sent', or 'he reached out'. The first Biblical usage of this verb root can be found in the Garden of Eden narrative, in Genesis 3. There in back-to-back verses the Divinely inspired narrative employed the verb root *sh'lach* twice - in classic Hebrew parallel form:

And the Holy One God said,

“Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know tov v'ra:

*and now, lest he **sh'lach** [reach out, send forth] his hand,*

and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever

*Therefore will the Holy One God **sh'lach** [send (him) forth]*

from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

[Genesis 3:22-23]

Following this parallelism we can suppose that if indeed the phrase *Vayishlach* accurately describes the essence of the parsha what we can expect to see in passages we will read this week will be a series of *outreaches* by human beings followed by a series of *marching orders* being given by the Holy One. In other words, we should expect to see that each time a person reaches out to another human being, he or she winds up being Divinely directed [verbally in some cases, circumstantially in others] away from the location where the interaction occurred and away from the very relationship which his or her reaching out was intended to facilitate.

Let's take a peek and see. *Vayishlach* begins with Ya'akov and his family in the area of East of the Jordan River near the river Yabbok, reaching out to Esav.

⁸ *Sh'lach* is shin, lamed, kaf sofit. Strong's Hebrew word # 7971, it is pronounced shaw-lawkh'.

Act 1: The Sending of Messengers

First Ya'akov will reach out to Esav by sending *malachim* [some interpret this to mean human messengers, others interpret it to mean angels] to his brother Esav in the land of *Se'ir*. Ya'akov is not going to try to sneak back into the patriarchal camp. He knows he cannot just 'show up' as a long lost prodigal and be welcomed by his older brother with open arms. And so, he sends messengers to Esav to 'test the waters' of Esav's heart. The response he gets from the messengers will not be encouraging. Esav will muster an army even larger than Laban's, and head out to cut him off before entering the Land of Promise.

Act 2: The Dark Night of Ya'akov's Soul

That news will bring about the dark night of Ya'akov's soul. Before Esav arrives, while Ya'akov is on one side of the river Yabbok and his family on the other, Ya'akov will *reach out* his arms to Heaven – and find himself wrestling with an angel. Ya'akov will cling to the shadowy figure fiercely, refusing to let go all through the night. At the break of day however Ya'akov will be stricken and made to let go. The angel to whom Ya'akov reached out so passionately will then depart, and Ya'akov will cross the Yabbok and proceed toward a reunion with Esav.

Act 3: The Confrontation With Esav

When Esav approaches with 400 men armed for battle, Ya'akov will *send forth* extravagant gifts of livestock to Esav in several waves to try to appease him. He will then *send forth* his wives and children to go before him to Esav in another series of waves. He will then in humble submission personally *reach out to and even embrace* Esav. What will happen next? Ya'akov will go his way, toward Kena'an, and Esav will go his way, back to Se'ir.

Act 4: The Sojourn At Shechem

Next we will see Ya'akov establish his family's residence amongst the Kena'ani, near the village of *Shechem* [now *Nablus*]. Ya'akov and his family will *reach out* to the people there, seeking to establish mutually beneficial relationships. Ya'akov's daughter Dinah will reach out in a dangerous way, venturing forth alone to see the 'daughters of the land'. She will then be ogled, abducted and molested by the prince of the Kena'ani. A series of negotiations for her return will follow, but the marriage bargain struck by Ya'akov with the king of Shechem will prove unsatisfactory to at least two of Ya'akov's sons, *Sh'mon* [Simeon] and *Levi*. Those two will proceed, without their father's knowledge, to incite their brethren to exact a bloody vengeance upon the residents of the area through treachery and violence, returning the evil done to Dinah many times by killing all the men and taking captive all Shechem's women and children, and thereby making the name of Ya'akov 'a

stench among the inhabitants of the land'. The Holy One will respond by directing Ya'akov to *leave Shechem*, the place where all the reaching out had occurred, and go to the place Ya'akov called *Beit-El*.

Act 6: The Introduction of T'shuvah

At Beit-El the covenant family will *reach out* to the Holy One, building a stone altar on the spot where Ya'akov had seen angels ascending and descending over 20 years before, and making *teshuvah* by putting off all the idols and Kena'ani adornments and ways they had taken upon themselves while residing in Shechem. Beit-El will thereby become the birthplace of the Covenant Protocol of ***making teshuvah***.

Act 7: The Introduction of Beit-Lechem

Ya'akov's family will not, however, be permitted to establish residence at *Beit-El*. They will journey on Southward in the direction of the patriarchal estates located in the area of *Be'er-sheva* and *Hebron*. *En route* to the patriarchal estates, however near what would become the village of *Beit-Lechem*, Rachel went into labor and eventually died giving birth to Binyamin. Ya'akov buried her there, and moved on.

Act 8: Casting Off Restraint – A Blatant Act of Rebellion Within the Household

Next, at the area near *the tower of Edar* Ya'akov's oldest son Reuven *reached out* and dishonored his father by taking up an illicit relationship with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. As you will recall, Bilhah had been given by Rachel to Ya'akov as a concubine and surrogate mother, was therefore the birth mother of Reuven's brothers Dan and Naftali. This act of rebellion on the part of Reuven would create a rift between him and his father that would last for the rest of Ya'akov's life.

Act 9: The Prodigal Returns Home at Last!

Then, Ya'akov and his family would finally reach the patriarchal estate at Hebron and be reunited with Yitzchak, only to have Yitzchak die very shortly thereafter. The final activity of the parsha will be the burial of Yitzchak in the cave at Machpelah – an activity in which Ya'akov was reunited with Esav one last time.

Act 10: Epilogue - The Generations of the Esavians, Our Ultimate Antithesis People

Then, just as *Chayei Sarah* concluded with a recitation of the lineage of someone outside the chosen race – the lineage of our first-generation nemesis, *Yish'mael*, and the many kingdoms that would come forth from him, so will *Vayishlach* conclude with a recitation of a lineage other than that of the chosen people – the lineage of our second generation nemesis, *Esav*. The most notorious enemy of the Holy One who will come forth from Esav lineage is *Amalek*. **Genesis 36:12.**

A Prophetic Week For Facing All Our Greatest Fears And Dealing With the Core Issues of Life

It appears the sages were correct in their assessment of the essence of this parsha. This will be a week of *reaching out* to establish relationships, of seeing those relationships rise and fall apart, and of thereafter being *sent forth* by the Holy One to face a new set of challenges and try to establish a new set of relationships. To whom will **you** reach out this week? The time of *Vayetze* – of running and hiding from those who hate you - is past. The time of *Vayishlach* – of confrontation of your deepest darkest fears, and coming face-to-face with your worst enemies - is come. If you are in Messiah you are not only a descendant of Avraham; you are also a descendant of Ya'akov/Yisrael. That being the case, you should be prepared to deal with what Ya'akov/Yisrael dealt with. Prepare therefore to *confront and wrestle with an angel*, as did Ya'akov at *Penei-El*. Prepare as well to *confront an angry adversary and his cronies*, as did Ya'akov on the banks of the River *Yabbok*. As Dinah did at *Shechem* you may well encounter *the seductive sensuality of a person or group of people who does not even try to contain their urges, appetites, and desires*. And you may also have to *confront the subtle forms of idolatry and pagan-influenced ways that have crept into your own life*, and to lead your family in *heartfelt teshuvah* after the pattern Ya'akov established for us at *Beit-El*.

Prepare also to *confront multiple devastating betrayal*, as Ya'akov did when Reuven sought to usurp his role in the family by sleeping with Bilhah, the mother of two of his brothers. Prepare as well to *face a barrage of bereavements* as did Ya'akov when three very important people in his life died in rapid succession. Prepare to confront your destiny. Prepare to embrace your God and the covenant He made with your forefathers more tightly than you ever have before. And prepare to be reborn ... as an overcomer.

Haftarah Vayishlach

The Book of Obadiah

We supplement our study of parsha *Vayishlach* this week with readings the prophetic work of *Ovadiyah* [Obadiah]. As we begin the week we do well to consider two questions:

1. Who was *Ovadiyah*?
2. What does *Ovadiyah*'s prophecy have to do with the events of *Vayishlach*?

Who Was Ovadiyah?

Very little is actually known about the man whose prophecies are recorded in the shortest book of the TaNaKh. The Hebrew phrase “Ovadiyah” is a generic term

meaning merely ‘*Servant of Yah*’, and may well, therefore, just have been a *pen name*. The Talmud declares him to have been a descendant of Esau [i.e., an Edomite] by birth who had become a *ba'al t'shuvah* [a proselyte to Torah]. Almost all scholars believe him to have lived during the time of the Divided Kingdom, and to have been a resident of the Southern Kingdom, Y'hudah [Judah].

What does Ovidayah's Prophecy have to do with the events of Vayishlach?

Parsha *Vayishlach* begins and ends with dramatic interactions between Ya'akov and Esav. The interactions described in the parsha seem to end peacefully enough [they bury their father Yitzchak together], but without any foundation for a real substantive relationship between the brothers or their families. One is left to wonder, after reading *Vayishlach*, what will happen between these two men and their progeny in the future.

Ovadiyah is chosen as the haftarah for *Vayishlach* because Ovadiyah's prophecies address that very subject. Ovadiyah, who probably lived in the ninth Century BCE⁹ [after the kingdom of Israel was divided, but before either the Assyrian or Babylonian captivity], will look far into the future. He will prophecy how the descendants of Esav, who will become the nation of Edom, will in the future act very treacherously against the descendants of Ya'akov/Yisrael, and will thereby earn the wrath - and the harsh judgment - of the Holy One.

Ovadiyah's prophecy indicates that in what was at least *to him* far, far in the future, The Holy One is going to send an “ambassador”, or messenger to all the nations of the world, calling them to take up arms against the descendants of Esav and to enforce a devastating judgment on Edom. Specifically, Ovadiyah will tell us:

... an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying,

"Arise, and let's rise up against her in battle.

Behold, I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised.

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock,

whose habitation is high, who says in his heart,

'Who will bring me down to the ground?'

Though you mount on high as the eagle,

and though your nest is set among the stars,

I will bring you down from there, says the Holy One.

⁹ Ovadiyah's prophecies are among the most difficult writings in the TaNaKh to assign a date to. A number of traditional scholars believe them to be from about 845 BCE, during a period of time when Jerusalem was being repeatedly attacked, terrorized, and plundered by a confederation of *Ph'lish'tim* [Philistines], Arabians, and Edomi conspirators. Other traditional scholars believe the oracles of Ovadiyah to have been delivered in 585 BCE, the year after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Still other, primarily liberal, scholars, place the prophecy as late as 400 BCE.

How Esav will be ransacked! How his hidden treasures are sought out!

Why will this judgment be enforced on Esav's descendants? The prophet tells us:

***For the violence done to your brother Ya`akov, shame will cover you,
and you will be cut off forever.***

* * *

As you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head.

Ovadiyah's prophecy is not however all 'doom and gloom' - for Ya'akov's descendants Ovadiyah's prophetic message includes the following words of comfort and encouragement:

But in Mount Tziyon, there will be those who escape, and it will be holy.

The house of Ya`akov will possess their possessions.

***The house of Ya`akov will be a fire, the house of Yosef a flame,
and the house of Esav for stubble. They will burn among them, and devour them.***

There will not be any remaining to the house of Esav." Indeed, the Holy One has spoken.

* * *

***Saviors will go up on Mount Tziyon to judge the mountains of Esav,
and the kingdom will be the Holy One's.***

What future events do you think Ovadiyah foresaw? Are they perhaps unfolding even now, before our very eyes?

The Corresponding B'rit Chadasha Readings

Matthew 26:36-46

To correspond to the parsha of Ya'akov's 'dark night of the soul' experiences I have selected the passages in Matthew 26 describing Yeshua's 'dark night of the soul' – i.e. the night preceding His atoning death on the stake of execution.

***And then Yeshua accompanied them to a place called Gat-Shemanim,
and He said to His talmidim:***

Sit here, while I go and pray over there.

[Matthew 26:36]

On the night preceding His death, after delivering what has become known as the 'Upper Room Discourse', Yeshua led His *talmidim* [disciples] on a trek through the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys, then up the Mount of Olives to a place where olives were pressed¹⁰. There, in anticipation of his imminent arrest, trial, flogging, and

¹⁰ On the Southern end of the Kidron Valley is an area sometimes called the 'Valley of Jehoshaphat' which constitutes the low place that separates the Mount of Olives from Mount Moriyah (Temple Mount). Jehoshaphat means "God will judge", and it is anticipated by the sages that the Last Judgment will take place in this location. Interestingly, this is also the Muslim belief. According to one line of prophetic interpretation Messiah will cause a rope to be extended from the battlements of the Temple across the Valley of Yehoshafat to a place on the Mount of Olives. The Judgment will then occur, and those found 'righteous' will cross over, supported by their guardian angels, while those found to be unrighteous will be cast down into damnation. This belief is taken, in part, from prophecies of *Zechariah* [Zechariah] and of *Yoel* [Joel]. In the words of the Holy One as revealed through His prophet Yoel: ***Behold, in those days, and***

crucifixion, Yeshua endured a ‘dark night of the soul’. What the Master experienced that night will, it turns out, make even Ya’akov’s ‘dark night’, as traumatic as it was, pale in comparison.

After what I believe was Yeshua’s version of a *seder* at the sundown which began the 14th day of Nisan – the ‘first seder’ of His perfect example of how to observe the Biblical festival of *Pesach* – Yeshua warned his talmidim that the night ahead of them all was going to be a traumatic night. *Kefa* [Peter] responded by swearing that he would *never leave* Yeshua. Yeshua rebuked him, assuring him that he would indeed leave and forsake him before the cock crowed thrice. Then they adjourned to the Mount of Olives, to the place of olive presses [*gat-shemanim*]. There, in the place of extreme pressure, where pure oil is produced, Yeshua, the “son of Yosef”, in the Garden of travail will call out, saying: ***My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me.***"

Though we will hear Yeshua’s call us to be His *shomer* [guard, watch-keeper], and to *daven* [pray] with Him, alas, our eyes will grow heavy – and though we wish it were not so, He will be left to press on - and to press in - completely alone.

*May the Holy One protect and defend you, hiding you in the shadow of His wings.
And may you overcome all your fears through the awesome power of His Word.*

The Rabbi’s son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week of Parsha Vayishlach

Petition #5, Rofei -the Prayer for Healing and Health

Rofeinu Adonai v’nerofe

Heal us, Holy One, and we will be healthy

hoshieinu v’nivosheyah

Rescue us, and we will be saved

v’halay r’fuah sh’layma l’chol makoteinu

Bring complete healing for all our afflictions

ki El Melech rofei ne’aman v’rachamon atah

for You, God and King, are a Faithful and Compassionate healer

Baruch Atah Adonai rofei cholai amo Yisrael

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Healer of the Afflicted among His People Israel

in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, and Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.