

SIDRA OF THE WEEK: וישלח

1. Almost thirty-six years have passed since Yaakov left his father's house. For fourteen years he was in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ayver and for nearly twenty years he was in Chorrion at the house of Lovvon, his mother's brother. He has married the daughters of Lovvon and HaShem has blessed him with a large family and exceedingly great wealth and now he is returning to his father's house. But he is apprehensive about his brother Aysov. When Aysov finds out that Yaakov is still alive, and even prosperous, will his feelings of outrage be rekindled — or has the passage of time cooled Aysov's anger? Yaakov prays to HaShem, invoking His promise that HaShem would shield him from harm, and then he prepares two lines of action: appeasement and flight.
2. He sends messengers to Aysov, to the land of Sayyir, seeking peace. They are to inform Aysov of Yaakov's coming and at the same time ascertain Aysov's feelings towards Yaakov his brother. But when the messengers return it is with the information that Aysov is already aware of Yaakov's return (Lovvon had told him) and that he is coming towards Yaakov with an army of 400 fighting-men. But Yaakov does not know whether the army is to honour him — or to annihilate him.
3. Fearing the worst, Yaakov divides up his camp into two. He positions them far apart from each other so that even if Aysov should attack, at least one of the camps will be able to flee and will survive. He then sends to Aysov a great present of jewels and precious stones and many herds of animals and flocks of sheep, together with messages of peace and reconciliation. Yaakov prepares to spend the night on the bank of the River Yabbok as his messengers go ahead of him with the present to Aysov his brother.
4. As soon as they are out of view, Yaakov rises up and moves his whole camp over to the other side of the River Yabbok. He is clearing up the last traces that would be evidence of his having camped there, when he is suddenly attacked by a stranger in the night. Thinking that the man is a scout from the camp of Aysov, Yaakov dares not let him go and report his new position to Aysov and they wrestle mightily, neither being able to overcome the other. In the struggle, the hip of Yaakov is dislocated. (In remembrance of this, the Jewish People are forbidden to eat the sinew of the thigh in animals.) But towards dawn the stranger reveals himself as the Guardian Angel of Aysov and he informs Yaakov that Aysov has been pacified by his gift and that he has no need to fear him. The angel then salutes Yaakov as his superior and bestows upon him the name "Yisroel," meaning "Prince of G-d."
5. As day breaks, Yaakov raises his eyes and sees Aysov coming with his 400 men and he arranges his wives and their sons to greet Aysov his brother. Yaakov himself passes ahead of his family and he bows down to Aysov in acknowledgement of the greatness of his brother who was so determined to destroy Yaakov but who has now allowed his anger to be pacified. Aysov, too, embraces and kisses Yaakov and the two brothers are at peace with each other.

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וישלח

6. Yaakov declines the offer by Aysov that a troop of his fighting-men should march with him to protect him and they both part in peace and brotherliness, each to his own way.
7. Yaakov sets up his camp outside the town of Shechem — it is Friday and with the coming of Shabbos he must break his journey home. He acquires the tract of land there and, finding the local people receptive, he decides to stay a little while and proceeds to teach about HaShem to the inhabitants of the area.
8. The peacefulness of his stay there is shattered, however, when the Lord of Shechem abducts Dinah, the daughter of Yaakov. Afterwards, he sends his father Chammor to ask Yaakov for his permission to marry her. Yaakov is incensed by the horrid crimes of Shechem against his daughter and he allows his sons to step-in and deal with the situation. Yaakov's sons stipulate that such a marriage cannot be considered unless the entire male population of the town is circumcised and after some persuasion by Shechem ben Chammor they all agree to accept this condition. Three days later, Shi'mon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, strike against this immoral people and kill all the men of the town while they are in their weakened state after their circumcision and they rescue Dinah their sister. Yaakov, however, is angry with Shi'mon and Levi: although it is they who avenged the honour of their sister and freed her from Shechem, he condemns their wrath as too fierce and cruel.
9. HaShem appears to Yaakov and commands him to return to Beis-El. On the way, the news comes to Yaakov that his mother Rivkah is no longer alive and HaShem comforts Yaakov with the restatement of the blessings of Avrohom and Yitzchok. He is told also that the Twelve Tribes of the Jewish Nation shall be from his sons.
10. Rochel gives birth to her second son, Binyomin, but she dies in childbirth and Yaakov raises up a monument over her grave. (This is the monument over our mother Rochel's grave to this day.) With the birth of Binyomin the family of Yaakov is now complete and so Yaakov arrives back at the house of Yitzchok his father.
11. The death of Yitzchok, although it occurred many years later, is reported in this week's Sidra.
12. The Sidra finishes with the lists of the Chiefs of Aysov and of the kings that rose up in the land of Sayyir, the country of Aysov, later known as Edom.

The events reported in this week's Sidra are a portent of the interaction between the People of Yaakov, the Jewish People, and the peoples of Aysov, that is, between the two great forces of moral leadership on the one hand and of material superiority on the other, right through the ages. Our Chachommim, of blessed memory, tell us that, "מַעֲשֵׂה אֲבוֹת קִיְּמֵן לְבָנִים", that is, what happened to our Forefathers (Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov) is an indication of what will happen to their children, the Jewish People. In the same way that spoken prophecy foretells the future, so too do certain events in the life-story of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov indicate future events in the life-story of us, their descendants. The one is prophecy by speech; the other is prophecy by deed.

The way that Yaakov prepared to meet Aysov, the strategies that he employed, and more important, perhaps, the strategies he did not employ; the courage and bravery of Yaakov to persevere and not be overcome even by a sudden attack in the dark, and to

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וישלח

steadfastly hold his own even though he be painfully injured; the acknowledgement of a certain greatness in Aysov's character and the respect due to him when he exercises that greatness; the quiet determination that Yaakov shows to go his own way without the company, or the influence, of Aysov or his people — all these are signs to the future Jewish People on its march down the centuries of history.

Because it is Yaakov more than any of our אבות הקדושים who is the personification of the Jewish People, therefore what happened to Yaakov in particular is to be a sign and an indication of the future of the Jewish People. Certain points will be more relevant at some times than others, but eventually his descendants, the Jewish People, will arrive again at the place called "Beis-El," "the House of G-d," and from there will shine out the knowledge of HaShem to all mankind in all the corners of the world.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra וישלח please go to HAFTORAS.