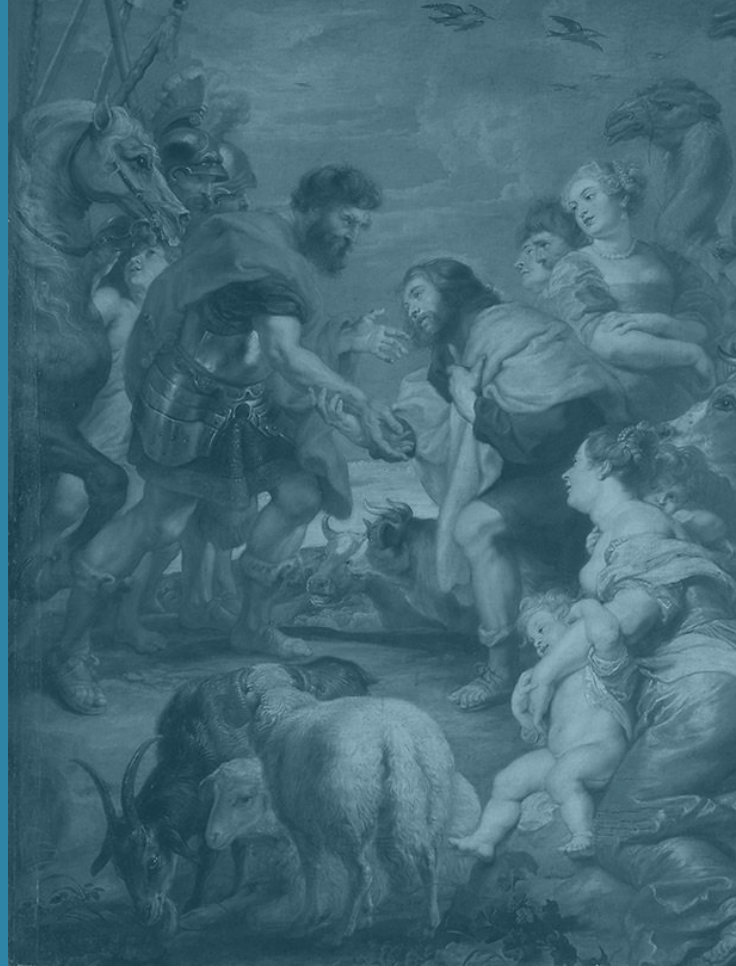


Purity of Arms

Parashat Vayishlach



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Shabbat Shalom, I am currently located in northern Israel doing my military reserve duty. I'd like to share a few brief points with you about this week's Torah portion, Parashat Vayishlach.

I want to focus on two different points and verses, which complement one another. These points elaborate the idea of perfect faithfulness and gratitude as well as its application in a military sense. Further, I'd like to touch on how we live in the delicate balance between our faith life and the physical reality before us.

An incomprehensible gift

The first verse I want to discuss is about Jacob's prayer to God, before his encounter with Esau, his brother. The prayer itself begins from Genesis chapter 32:10:

I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this

Jordan, but now I have become two camps. – Genesis 23:10
[NIV]

I particularly love this verse as well as this entire section of the Bible. This is due to the fact that this particular passage is also a famous Israeli song. Jacob fled empty-handed and endured many trials and hardships. On his way back to the Promised Land, he remembered the one who protected him, sustained him, and even made him wealthy.

How long do we remember a favor that someone has done on our behalf? In order to be grateful from the bottom of our hearts, we must first admit the truth, which is that we would not have succeeded without their help.

We are people who need assistance and the gift we have received from Yeshua is incomprehensible. This was exactly how Jacob felt in the moment that he remembered all the blessings that God had bestowed on him. As it is written, "I am unworthy of all the kindness..." that God keeps giving to us. Furthermore, do we remember and recognize often enough our Messiah Yeshua, the One who gave us a gift that is unfathomable?

I repeatedly find myself stopping to ponder what wonderful works God is doing among us, especially while I am engaged in reserve military duty. Without a doubt, it was because of God's promises that we were able to return to the Promised Land.

We reestablished the State of Israel, and now I am part of the army of Israel, fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible. It is not always easy to comprehend the full amount of blessings and gifts that God has given to us here.

Purity of Arms

Genesis 32:8 mentions that Jacob was in great fear and distress. Rashi interprets this verse in a fascinating way,

He was frightened lest he be killed (Gen. Rabbah 75:2, Tanchuma, Vayishlach 4), and he was distressed that he might kill others.

"He was frightened" means that Jacob was afraid of death. Whereas, "he was distressed" means that Jacob might kill others (if indeed a war had

broken out between him and Esau).

I think that this interpretation gives added value to the concept of an army. A healthy, moral, and quality army must take into consideration this point.

On the one hand, there should be a desire for life, while at the same time the unwillingness to kill. Soldiers must be afraid of death, with the desire of returning home after the battlefield.

There should be something to which we want to return, something that's worth fighting for. God gave us the gift of life, and it is holy and good. Furthermore, we must internalize the sanctity of life towards others. A soldier who is bloodthirsty is degenerate. He seeks after quarrels, wars, and even death.

In place of this corrupt ideology, we must strive towards peace, quietness, and togetherness. However, even with bearing this in mind we realize that there is a real need for self-defense.

A soldier who acts out of preservation for life is considered ideal. He is a man who fears death and aims to prevent it from reaching his family, friends, people. At the same time, it must be kept in mind that there is an obligation to prevent unnecessary destruction and harm.

We believe and treasure the sanctity of life. For instance, no Syrian child would dare stand in front of a Syrian army tank and throw stones at it, but a Palestinian child does this against an Israeli tank because he knows the ethical difference between the two.

There is an extensive use of human shields by terrorist organizations found in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon. They do so by positioning their headquarters and their rocket launchers within a civilian population, such as inside schools and hospitals. It is in itself indicative of their own belief in the high level of morality of the IDF. Otherwise, there would be no purpose in their use of human shields.

I am proud to be part of the Israeli Defense Forces. We strive to guard our homes and stop terror, while at the same time internalize the sanctity of life and apply the "purity of arms".

**The Teachings of
Messiah Yeshua
*in a Jewish Context***

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