

Back Home Again - Vayishlach

♪ There's a storm across the valley clouds are rollin' in the afternoon is heavy on your shoulders. There's a truck out on the four lane a mile or more away the whinin' of his wheels just makes it colder. He's an hour away from ridin' on your prayers up in the sky and ten days on the road are barely gone. There's a fire softly burning; supper's on the but it's the light in your eyes that makes him warm.

Hey, it's good to be back home again. Sometimes this old farm feels like a long lost friend Yes, 'n, hey it's good to be back home again

After all the news to tell him: how's you spend your time? And what's the latest thing the neighbors say and your mother called last friday; "Sunshine" made her cry and you felt the baby move just yesterday. Hey, it's good...

And oh, the time that I can lay this tired old body down and feel your fingers feather soft up-on me the kisses that I live for, the love that lights my way the happiness that livin' with you brings me. It's the sweetest thing I know of, just spending time with you it's the little things that make a house a home. Like a fire softly burning and supper on the stove. And the light in your eyes that makes me warm ♪ (John Denver, 1974)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO6FhSzGyvg&feature=PlayList&p=F833FE78D85EB7EF&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=5

After the Battle – Come Home

Yaakov has endured a lot: His twin brother *Esav* vowed to kill him at the first opportunity; his uncle and father-in-law *Lavan* tricked him again and again; he built a family over the course of twenty difficult years; an all night until dawn wrestling match with the “Angel of *Elohim*”; and *Esav* marched towards him accompanied by four hundred men as *Yaakov* and his family advanced toward *Eretz Yisrael*. Nevertheless, *Yaakov* has survived. Despite all the years and the obstacles placed in his path, and despite the threats on his life, *Yaakov* finally returns to Canaan:

[יח] ויבא יעקב שלם עיר שכם אשר בארץ כנען בבאו מפדן ארם ויחן את-פני העיר

¹⁸Having traveled from Paddan-Aram, Ya'akov arrived safely at the city of Sh'khem, in Kena'an, and set up camp near the city. ¹⁹From the sons of Hamor Sh'khem's father he bought for one hundred pieces of silver the parcel of land where he had pitched his tent. ²⁰There he put up an altar, which he called El-Elohei-Yisra'el <El, the Elohim of Isra'el>.” (Genesis 33:18-20)

The Hebrew phrase in Genesis 33:18 SHALEM IR SHECHEM has traditionally posed a challenge of translation into English. IR means *city*, but what is the meaning of SHALEM? What, or who, is SHECHEM? The Commentator *Rashi* heads a considerable list of commentaries who understand SHECHEM as the name of a city north of Jerusalem. We have encountered this city before. SHECHEM was *Avraham's* first place of entry to the Promised Land, where it is also known by another name:

Avram passed through the land to the place called Sh'khem, to the oak of Moreh. The Kena'ani were then in the land. (Genesis 12:6).

Yaakov, like *Avraham*, makes SHECHEM, situated between Mount *Gerizim* to the south and Mount *Eval* to the north, his first encampment. Later, when the Children of Israel would reclaim the land, they would stand in this same place to hear *Yehozah's* blessings and admonitions (see *Devarim* 11:29-30, 27:12-13 and *Yehoshua* 8:30-35) It is interesting to note that throughout these verses, the place between Mount *Gerizim* and Mount *Eval* is never called SHECHEM! *Rashi* sees SHECHEM as the place to make a formal *first stand* in The Land. *Rashi* is thus faced with the problem of translating the word SHALEM, which seems to interrupt the description of *Yaakov's* arrival in SHECHEM. His solution is to understand this as a modifier meaning *whole, complete, safe, intact* to describes *Yaakov's* condition upon his long-awaited return to the land. *Rashi* might thus translate our verse: “And *Yaakov* came intact to the city of Shechem...” *Rashi* writes:

Whole in his body, for he was healed from his limp [after his encounter with the angel, (32:32)]; whole in his money, for nothing was lost as a result of all that gift [he had sent to Esav (32:14-16)]; whole in his Torah, for he did not forget his learning while in the house of Lavan.

Ramban notes that as long as *Yaakov* remained in *Sukkot* (see 33:17), he was constantly afraid that *Esav* might come north from *Se'ir* and attack him. *Ibn-Ezra*, on the other hand, sees *SHALEM* as modifying the verb *VAYAVO* which means *And he (Yaakov) came*. His translation might be: “*And Yaakov came safely to the city of Shechem that is in the land of Canaan...*” This agrees with both the CJB and the NASB.

The safe and unharmed manner in which *Yaakov* arrived to *SHECHEM* is in contrast to the upcoming tragic episode of *Dinah* (chapter 34). *Rashi*, in a later comment, accepts this understanding as well, but emphasizes that the verse is contrasting *Yaakov's* safe entry to all that preceded it: “*And Yaakov came safely...*”

Rashbam understands *SHALEM IR SHECHEM* very differently. To him, *SHALEM* is the name of the city of *SHECHEM*, the *prince of the land* who in chapter 34 attacks (rapes) *Dinah*. Thus, his translation would read: “*And Yaakov came to Shalem the city of Shechem that is in the land of Canaan...*” This agrees with the KJV: “*And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city.*” *Rashbam* makes a two strong arguments against *Rashi's* reading. Firstly, cities are often called by the name of their rulers. [Although, even in chapter 34, the city is never called by the name *SHECHEM*.] The city might later be called *SHECHEM* in commemoration of its vanquishing by the sons of *Yaakov*. Secondly; it is not the way of the *Torah* to say that *Yaakov* arrived *whole in his money*; what purpose does it serve to point out that, after sending a few gifts to *Esav*, he was still financially secure?

When you get “home,” go all the way and defer not to pay your vows (promises) to יהוה

A careful reading of *Ramban's* commentary leads one to believe that he felt that *Yaakov's* security was primarily emotional. Still, *Rashbam's* point is well-taken, especially in light of *Rashi's* full comment: “*why should the Torah see fit to emphasize that Yaakov was now ‘Whole in his body, . . . whole in his money . . . and whole in his Torah?’*” To respond to this, *Malbim* (1809-1877) refers to the vow *Yaakov* made to יהוה in *Beth-El* before leaving *Canaan* which we spoke about in last week's message: “²⁰*Ya'akov took this vow: If God will be with me and will guard me on this road that I am traveling, giving me bread to eat and clothes to wear, ²¹so that I return to my father's house in peace, then ADONAI will be my God; ²²and this stone, which I have set up as a standing-stone, will be God's house; and of everything you give me, I will faithfully return one-tenth to you.*” (vvs. 28:20-22).

Now that he has arrived intact *SHALEM* in the city of *SHECHEM* that is in the land of *Canaan*, the Promised Land, when he came from *Paddan Aram*, he should make good on his vow. But don't stay in the border, get back to the *House of G-d!* *Yaakov* does not do either, and peradventure, the tragedy of *Dinah* is the result.

Yaakov returns to *Beth-El* only after יהוה commands him to (Genesis 35:1). The truth is that only in *Eretz Yisrael* did *Yaakov* and his family feel safe. The time has come for *Benei Yaakov (Benei Israel)* to acknowledge their indebtedness to יהוה in bringing them back to their homeland. We, who have been privileged to witness our people's return to *Israel*, should do the same. “⁴*When you make a vow to G-d, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! ⁵It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.*” (Ecc. 5:4-5, NASB) Have we not also entered into our Land of Promise. Thusly, we are advised: “*to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to G-d the things that are G-d's*” (Luke 20:25)