

**Parashat Vayishlach**  
**November 26, 2004**  
**by Arlan Wareham**

Shabbat Shalom!

Ya'akov was worried. It had been many years now since he had seen his twin brother. In the mean time, he had taken two wives and two concubines, had had at least twelve children, and had become quite rich. He really didn't know much about what had happened to his brother, Esav. What he did know, though, was that they had NOT parted on good terms, to say the least. Ya'akov had tricked their father, Yitzhak, into giving him instead of Esav the best blessing. And Esav had vowed to kill him for it. Was Esav still mad at him? There was certainly every reason to believe he could be.

So Ya'akov makes plans, multiple plans. First, he sends messengers ahead to let Esav know what has been happening with him, to tell him that he has plenty of belongings and wants to find favor with Esav.

The messengers return with rather disturbing news: Esav is coming to meet Ya'akov, with 400 men with him! Now Ya'akov is REALLY afraid! His second plan is to split his whole company into two camps. That way, if Esav should attack and destroy one of them, perhaps the other could escape.

Next, he prays to G-d to help him. It's worth noting, I think, that he takes concrete, positive steps to defend himself BEFORE praying. He knows that he needs G-d's help, but he doesn't leave it all to G-d.

Now he also implements another plan: he sends five herds of five different kinds of animals ahead of him as presents to Esav. He gives the herdsmen specific instructions to go as separate groups and tells them exactly what to say to Esav.

Next, Ya'akov sends everyone across the stream and remains all alone. Strangely, though, it turns out that he's not alone after all. Here's how the Torah describes what happens next:

"Ya'akov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the socket of his hip; so Ya'akov's hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.'

"And he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'

"He said to him, 'What is your name?'

"He replied, 'Ya'akov.'

"He said, 'No longer will it be said that your name is Ya'akov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with G-d and with men and have overcome.'

"Then Ya'akov inquired, and he said, 'Divulge, if you please, your name.'

"And he said, 'Why then do you inquire of my name?' And he blessed him there."

Now Ya'akov sees that Esav is approaching, so he divides his concubines and wives, together with their respective children and sends them ahead. He puts his beloved wife, Rachel, and her son, Yosef, last. This

is his final plan. He obviously hopes that Esav will at least be decent enough not to attack unarmed and defenseless women and children.

He didn't have to wait long to find out how Esav would respond. We read, "Esav ran toward him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; then they wept." Can you imagine how relieved Ya'akov must have felt? Decades of fear, anxiety, and guilt must have begun to melt away. The Torah does tell us a little more about these two twin brothers, but this is really the denouement, the resolution of the long drama between them that began even before they were born.

Are there lessons for us in this story? I think so. Here are some that occurred to me.

First, even family fractures where serious wrongs have been committed are not always forever. Sometimes, time really does heal things.

Second, sometimes our worst fears actually are NOT realized. Sometimes, things that we dread for years turn out much better than we ever thought they could. It might also be noted here that Ya'akov was not really ready to meet Esav until he had confronted and conquered his own fears.

Third, when we feel threatened, we shouldn't rely on G-d alone to save us. It's certainly appropriate to ask for help, but we need to take concrete actions, as well.

Fourth, it's not enough to have only Plan A. We also need to have Plan B, and maybe even Plan C and Plan D, too.

With the increasing turn to the right that our country has been taking lately, we LGBTQI people, and our allies, have certainly begun to feel increasingly threatened. Of course, we all have been taking many actions to deal with this situation, and we will continue to do so. Let's remember to keep our minds open to many different plans. There are many ways to try to change our world, and there are many alternatives that we have as we see things unfold. We must always be ready for whatever may confront us. We must always have plans, and back-up plans.

As most of you know, David & I have been planning for several months now to move to Israel. Although our plans originally had absolutely nothing to do with events in the U.S., we now see this as an appropriate way for us to deal with the dangers that confront us. In fact, after the recent election, we decided to accelerate our plans. We now hope to make our aliyah by the end of 2005, instead of in 2007, as we had planned at first.

Aliyah is probably not the best option for most people, but it may be a good choice for some. We believe that all queer Jews in the U.S. should at least consider it as one possible way to confront the ever-increasing right-wing control of this country. Surely a valid passport and some money stashed outside the country would be prudent things for all queer people in the U.S. in these perilous times.

So, I would encourage you to look at your own individual situations and make your own plans. And, as you do this, don't forget the back-up plans. Ya'akov certainly didn't!

Shabbat Shalom!