Where Was Yaakov's Army?[1]

Why Yaakov prepared to flee and the Chashmonaim chose to fight

Parshas Vayishlach • Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz • 8:00 and 8:50 a.m.

0–3 MINUTES

Where did Rashi see a war?

Good Shabbos. **Look at source 1 on your sheet.** Let's read the pesukim. Yaakov hears that Esav is coming with four hundred men. What does he do? Vayachatz — he divides the people and the livestock into two camps. Now read what Yaakov says: "If Esav comes against one camp and strikes it, the remaining camp will escape."

Here's question number one. Rashi says Yaakov prepared for war. Look at his words in **source 2**: "He prepared himself for three things — for a gift, for prayer and for war." What did that third preparation involve? Let's hear how two contemporary rabbanim read this Rashi.

Rav Dov Begon, the founder of Machon Meir and a talmid of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, asks which preparation the Torah records first. Before Yaakov davens and before he sends the gift, he divides his camp. Rav Begon applies that order to Jews returning to Eretz Yisroel and writes, **"we must strengthen the Israeli Defense Forces."** He calls for tefillah and trust in Hashem as well.

Rav Shlomo Aviner, author of the responsa She'eilat Shlomo, was asked whether Jews facing repeated attacks should confine their response to tefillah. He cites this very Rashi and writes, אלא יש גם להילחם נגד אויבי נפשנו — "we must also fight those who seek our lives." He is speaking about an obligation to defend people under attack. Now look at the last words of Rashi in source 2. Which words does Rashi bring as his proof for milchamah? What do those words establish about Yaakov's plan?

Give the room fifteen seconds to find, in source 2, the words Rashi quotes for milchamah. Have someone read the whole pasuk before continuing.

1 Sources 1–11 correspond to the accompanying Shabbos source sheet. References to Bereishis use the verse numbering in the Hebrew Chumash.

3–6 MINUTES

Four hundred men and one household

Please look at **Sources 1 and 2**. If I ask you to find the gift, nobody here has any trouble. The Chumash even lists how many goats Yaakov sent. If I ask you to find the tefillah, you can put your finger on *hatzileini na miyad achi* — please save me from my brother. Now show me the equivalent for the war. Where are the men he mustered? How long had they been training? Had they spent years getting ready for the day they would face Esav?

Think back to what Yaakov actually told Lavan about those twenty years. He could tell you what happened to the sheep, what he lost to the cold at night, and what it cost him personally when an animal went missing. The Torah gives us a working life in considerable detail. We hear about shepherds, servants, mothers, nursing animals and young children. Where in that account do we meet an army Yaakov had trained to defeat Esav? Consider the force Esav brought with him. The messengers have counted four hundred men. The pasuk calls them men. The Midrash calls what the messengers saw **גיבורים מזוינים** — armed warriors. On any ordinary reckoning, what prospect did this travelling household have of winning a pitched battle against them?

We know how the Torah sounds when a man does set out to fight. When Lot was captured, Avraham mobilized his household and pursued the captors. Bereishis 14:14 says that Avraham pursued them as far as Dan. Even if you knew nothing about the campaign, the verb "he pursued" would tell you what Avraham was trying to do. Now come back to Yaakov. What is the verb here? **ויחץ** — he divided. And for precisely what purpose? Yaakov says it himself. **והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה** — the remaining camp can get away.

Read the sentence once more, only this time stop before the last word. "If Esav comes upon one camp and strikes it, then the other camp will …" What would we expect if we thought this was a plan to win a battle? The other camp will come to its brothers' aid? We might have supplied those words. Yaakov supplies *lifleitah*. The reason for making two camps was that one would still have somewhere to run.

6–10 MINUTES

If Yaakov would fight, why does the Ramban teach us to flee?

Compare the two Rashis on your sheet, sources 2 and 6. On **32:9**, where the second camp can escape, Rashi says **כי אלחם עמו**, "for I will fight him." Then, in **33:2**, Yaakov places the mothers and children in order. In **33:3** he himself walks ahead of them. There Rashi says **ילחם בי תחלה**, "let him fight me first." The first Rashi tells us why a camp will survive. The second tells us where Yaakov himself will stand. Now look at **Source 3**, because the Chevroner Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Simcha Zissel Broyde, has a question for us.

Let's grant the strongest reading of Rashi: כי אלחם עמו, "for I will fight him." When would Yaakov have fought? He had divided the camp so his family could get away. Suppose Esav came from the direction Yaakov did not expect and cut off that escape. Now Esav is between the children and safety. Yaakov goes ahead of them: "Let him fight me first." That is readiness to fight if he has to. In the event, Esav embraced him. There was no battle between the brothers.

Now read the Ramban in **source 3**. He tells us to follow Yaakov in three preparations. We understand the gift and the tefillah. But if Yaakov stood ready to fight, why does the Ramban finish by telling us לברוח ולהנצל, "to flee and be saved"? Rav Simcha Zissel Broyde asks what changed between Yaakov's time and the generations the Ramban is addressing.

> **Here is the critical difference. When Yaakov faced Esav, there was as yet no oath binding Klal Yisroel in galus against rebelling against the nations.** The Ramban says וראוי לנו, "it is fitting for us." Who is "us"? A Jewish people already living in galus. In Rav Simcha Zissel's reading, the oath in Kesubos 111a, שלא ימרדו באומות העולם, now binds that people. Even if Yaakov would have fought Esav, we cannot infer from his conduct permission for a later Jewish community to rebel. Yaakov did not live under the obligation that governs the case we are trying to decide.

What, then, do we learn from Yaakov? Look at what he arranged before Esav surprised him: a second camp with a way out. The Ramban himself gives the example on 32:9. One ruler threatens the Jews in his country, and another gives the refugees a place to live. Those families are the surviving camp. A community that davens, seeks to appease the ruler and gets its families to safety has learned all three preparations from Yaakov. It has fulfilled the third one even if nobody strikes a blow.

10–14 MINUTES

Why didn’t Yaakov run?

Now look at **Source 4**. Let’s give the obvious question a chance. “Rabbi, you say the plan was to run. I looked ahead. Yaakov and his children are standing right there when Esav comes. Why didn’t they run?” That’s a good question. And the Abarbanel asks us to pay attention to the river.

In the Abarbanel’s account, Yaakov had to judge which side Esav was likely to approach from. He put the camp with the livestock on that side. He took the women and children across the Yabok. Suppose Esav stopped at the flocks. While he was occupied there, the family across the water would have time to escape. Now listen to Yaakov daven. Of all the things that Esav might take from him, what does Yaakov name? *Pen yavo vehikani eim al banim* — I am afraid he will come and strike a mother with her children. What possibility was keeping Yaakov awake? That Esav could come from the other side.

And in the morning? Precisely the side where the family was. The Abarbanel, at the beginning of perek lamed-gimmel, says that by then Yaakov could no longer avoid the meeting. He gathered his family and went ahead of them to bow. The Abarbanel adds a lovely point. Yaakov had hoped that, if the worst happened, he might have to give up everything in one camp to save the other one. Hashem brought it about that both camps survived. There is a world of difference between the plan Yaakov responsibly made and the yeshuah Hashem actually sent him.

The Malbim on the division also puts the herds and their keepers in one camp and the women and children in the other. If Esav attacked the first, his intentions would be plain and the others would have time to act. The Malbim allows for either flight or resistance. It is the Abarbanel who explicitly follows Esav around to the family’s side. That is why the two camps and the reunion belong in the same shiur.

That answers question number one. What did Yaakov prepare for? He prepared a way to get his family out. If he had to risk himself for that, he was ready. By the time he saw Esav, the way out had closed. His willingness to stand there gives us no proof that Jewish greatness consists in winning wars. What the Chofetz Chaim does learn here is something a Jewish parent may one day need the courage to teach: **there are times when you have to know when to run away.**

14–18 MINUTES

Who did Yaakov actually fight?

Here's question number two. If the danger is Esav and those four hundred men, why does the Torah leave us by a river all night with somebody else? We could go straight from Yaakov's tefillah to the arrival of Esav, and it would make a perfectly understandable story. What would we lose?

Please look at **Source 5**. Listen to Yaakov's words at dawn in Bereishis 32:25–30. Yaakov is alone. A man wrestles with him. Yaakov's hip is hurt. The other one asks to be released, and Yaakov refuses to let him go until he gives him a brachah. One minute. Yaakov has already been bentched by Yitzchak and has heard promises from Hashem Himself. Is this the man he needs a brachah from? If somebody had just done that to my hip and I had him in my grasp, I could think of something else to ask him. Why does it have to be *his* brachah?

Rashi tells us first who this is: **שרו של עשו**, the malach representing Esav. And on *ki im beirachtani*, Rashi tells us what Yaakov wants. Acknowledge the brachos my father gave me. Who has been challenging my right to those brachos all these years? Your Esav. I want the acknowledgment from you. Now you understand why another brachah from somebody else would have left Yaakov right where he was.

The Ran in his second derashah says Yaakov's victory accomplished something in its own right. So long as Esav's sar opposed Yaakov's claim, there was a struggle in Shamayim about what would unfold down here. That opposition gave way. The sar acknowledged the brachah. Now go ahead to the conversation between the brothers. Esav says, **יהי לך אשר לך** — let what is yours remain yours. On the surface he is talking about the gift. Rashi hears an admission about the brachos. Whose admission did Yaakov receive during the night? Whose does he hear now, in words a human ear can hear?

Read the two statements printed in source 5 aloud. Let somebody answer which brachos are at issue in both places.

The Malbim hears the sequence in the words וישא יעקב עיניו — Yaakov lifted his eyes. All night he had faced Esav's sar. Now he lifts his eyes and sees Esav himself. Yaakov had already divided the camps. He had sent the gift and davened. What preparation was still missing? Before he could face Esav over the survival of his family, he had to prevail over the malach on the question of what that family would live for. Would he hold on to Yitzchak's brachos and the avodah they carried? Even with his hip injured, Yaakov held on until Esav's own malach acknowledged those brachos.

Here is what we learn from that night. Before we face a physical battle for survival, we are tested in a spiritual battle for survival. When we win that first battle and remain faithful to what Hashem asks of us, we can be worthy of a physical yeshuah. What form can that yeshuah take? Sometimes the battle we feared never takes place. That is what happened to Yaakov. Esav came with four hundred men, ran to meet his brother, and embraced him. Sometimes we still have to fight. Then the spiritual victory prepares us, with Hashem's help, to prevail in the physical battle as well.

18–21 MINUTES

A man called Yisroel walks with a limp

There's another voice worth hearing here. Rav Yoel Bin-Nun of the Har Etzion world reads the struggle as the emergence of a Yisroel able to face an opponent directly. He recognizes quite explicitly that Yaakov tried to escape and that Rashi allows fighting when necessary. His emphasis is on what the encounter revealed about Yaakov's capacity for strength. I can grant that point. Yaakov was strong. The man who held a malach until morning does not have to prove to me that he was strong. But once he had that strength, what did he choose to do with it? The very next morning, he bowed seven times so his family could live. Whom did he fight for the brachah? The malach. Whom did he go out of his way to appease? His brother. The Torah lets us see both decisions made by the same strong man.

That answers question number two. Before Yaakov heard Esav acknowledge the brachos on earth, he had to prevail in the struggle over them in Shamayim. Here's the avodah for us. We daven for a physical yeshuah. Do we ask with the same urgency what spiritual battle we have to win in order to be worthy of it? Yaakov himself says *katonti*, I have been diminished by all the kindness I have received. Even with a havtachah from Hashem, he looks at himself. Where do I have to be more faithful to the brachah I am asking Hashem to protect?

Some of us were together on Motzaei Shabbos learning about nikur and the *gid hanasheh*. Think about that mitzvah now. What do we carry away from the encounter, all the way into a Jewish kitchen? The memory of the place where Yaakov was hurt. Imagine seeing him walking toward you that morning. He has just earned the name Yisroel. He is limping. If all you knew was how he looked, would you know who had won? Hold on to that question. The very next picture in the Chumash is also one you can look at and misunderstand completely.

21–25 MINUTES

Who stands first when Esav comes?

Here's question number three. Why do I need to know the exact order in which the mothers and children stood? The Torah could have told me that Yaakov gathered his family and went out to meet his brother. Instead it wants me to see Bilhah and Zilpah with their children first, Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Yosef furthest back. What am I supposed to see? Let's put the two pesukim next to each other in **Source 6**.

First, the pshat. In 33:2 Rashi says **אחרון אחרון חביב**. Those especially dear to Yaakov stood farther back, away from Esav. But who stood in front of the first mother and child? Read 33:3. **והוא עבר לפניהם** — Yaakov himself went ahead of them. Now here is something remarkable. Koheles Rabbah asks, "Where do we see preparation for war?" It cites this very order and Yaakov stepping ahead. The Midrash puts it in a father's words: **מוטב שיפגע בי ולא בבני** — "Better that he strike me than my children." Here is the second Rashi I asked you to keep a finger on. If that wicked man comes to fight, says Yaakov, let him fight *me* first. What a difference one pasuk makes. Whatever you understand about the order behind him, whose body is he willing to put between Esav and Bilhah's child? His own.

Look at **Source 7**. Now the Vilna Gaon reads a remez in the order of those three groups. The Tikkunei Zohar Chadash sees Yaakov looking down the generations to the end of galus. The Gra explains that the front position corresponds to the Erev Rav exercising public power. The middle position, Leah with her children, corresponds to ordinary, decent Jews. And the last position, Rachel and Yosef, corresponds to the talmidei chachamim, whose Torah ought to guide the people and whose voice may carry the least weight in public life.

What does Erev Rav mean here? The original words in Shemos refer to the mixed multitude who went up from Mitzrayim with the Jews. In this teaching the Gra uses the name for an influence working *within* Jewish life, able to win a Jewish following while drawing its values from somewhere else. The remez is about the positions. Bilhah and Zilpah themselves are mothers of shevatim. Look at Rachel in the back. Is the Torah telling you that Yosef has less to teach the Jewish people because fewer people could see him? Of course not. What is obvious when you're looking at Yosef can be remarkably difficult to remember when you're looking at your own generation.

25–30 MINUTES

Does military success prove that a cause is right?

The middle group is the one I think most of us can recognize. An ordinary Jew gets up, makes a living, davens, loves his family and wants his children to remain Jewish. Whom will he trust when two people tell him different things about the future of Klal Yisroel? One says, “Look what we built. Look how many people follow us. Look what happened when people listened to me.” The other has spent fifty years learning what the Torah asks of a Jew. What can the second man put on the table that the first man will agree to count? The Gra asks us to think about how a person in that middle group makes a choice.

Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chaver puts his finger on one way this happens. Public respect for a talmid chacham can be whittled away with a casual remark about his parnassah. Somebody says, “That’s who you went to ask? He can hardly make a living himself!” Notice what just happened. Nobody opened the sefer to see whether the man was right. Nobody even argued with him. We simply agreed, without saying it out loud, that money qualifies a person to say what a Jewish life is for. Once we’ve agreed to that, we’ve already put the people in a particular order.

Now someone may say, **“Rabbi, look how successful the Israeli soldiers have been. Surely that means they’re doing the right thing. Would Hashem give them victories if the whole idea were wrong?”** Let’s hear the claim precisely. A soldier risks his life and saves other Jews. We owe him hakaras hatov. The person asking the question wants to draw a further conclusion: that the victory itself proves the Torah endorses the national ideal in whose name it is claimed. Can the outcome of a battle answer that shaylah?

Look at **source 7**. Rav Yisroel Elya Weintraub brings us back to Devarim 7:10. Rashi explains that a person can receive, during his lifetime, the reward due him for good he has done. The good deed has real value. Now follow Rav Weintraub’s reasoning. One way a harmful influence ends is that someone actively overcomes it. Rav Weintraub describes a second possibility. A movement can draw strength from a measure of good within it. So long as that good still has merit to its credit, it can sustain the movement. If the reward is paid out in full, what looked like the height of its success can actually mark the exhaustion of what sustained it. We cannot look at a particular victory and know Hashem’s accounting. Once the Torah gives us even this other way to understand success, how can victory alone prove that an ideology is right?

30–33 MINUTES

What would that argument prove about Ashur and Bavel?

Try that reasoning on an empire we know from Tanach. Ashur's armies conquered one country after another. Its king says in Yeshayahu, "By the strength of my hand I did it." If battlefield success settled whose outlook was right, what answer could anybody have given him at the height of his power? Yet Yeshayahu answers him then and there. Can an axe boast over the one who swings it? The king really had conquered those lands. His mistake was what he thought the conquests proved about himself. (Yeshayahu 10:13–15.)

> And what became of those empires? Nineveh fell. Bavel, which helped bring down Ashur, rose to power in its turn. Later Koresh took Bavel, and its empire too came to an end. If victory were a proof of being right, would we have had to change our convictions each time a new army won? Bring that question back to us. We can thank Hashem that Jewish lives were saved. When someone goes on to say, "Therefore this is what the Torah wants Klal Yisroel to become," we are entitled to ask: **Where is the Torah source for that conclusion?**

That answers question number three. Yaakov's arrangement teaches us how easily public prominence can turn our scale of values upside down. The Gra shows us where people may stand. Rav Weintraub explains why even genuine success cannot decide whom we should follow. I have no business going around the shul identifying people as Erev Rav. I have plenty of business asking who gets the last word at my own Shabbos table. Which brings us to a remarkably practical test. Very soon a child is going to stand beside us at the menorah. Who gets to tell him what those men were fighting for?

33–37 MINUTES

Whose Maccabees will a child remember?

Here's question number four. The Chashmonaim really did fight. They won. Jewish rule returned. Doesn't Chanukah prove what Yaakov's meeting with Esav could not? Here we cannot say the plan was to run away. Yehudah HaMaccabi and his brothers went out and fought. Before we reply to anybody, let's agree how much of the objection is true.

Please look at **Source 8**. We can actually trace how the Maccabees became an image of the modern Jewish fighter. Near the end of *The Jewish State*, Theodor Herzl says, "The Maccabees will rise again." In the next sentence, what future does Herzl have in mind? He returns to the Jews' obtaining a state of their own. What future is he asking his readers to see in the name Maccabee? It is there on the page. Herzl is making a promise about what Jews can build. He is invoking the brothers as ancestors of that undertaking.

Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote an introduction to his Russian translation of Bialik's poem about the Kishinev pogrom. Listen to his description of Jews who stood up to their attackers. **"Yes, they have arisen — the children of those whose ancestor was Judah, lion of the Maccabees."** What did he want the reader to feel even for defenders who lost their lives? Grief, certainly, but also honour. Herzl sees a state in the future. Jabotinsky sees honour restored in a Jew's willingness to resist. Whose words have we heard so far about what a Maccabee stands for? We still have to hear from Mattisyahu.

Aharon Ze'ev gave that generation a Chanukah song, *Anu Nos'im Lapidim*, "We Carry Torches." Listen to four words: **נס לא קרה לנו —** "No miracle befell us." His pioneers speak about labouring and finding light through their own work. Picture one child marching to that song and another child beside his father saying *Al HaNissim*. Both children have heard about light. Ask each one, "Whom do we thank tonight?" Would you expect the same answer?

A recent example makes the question precise. The IDF Education and Youth Corps' Chanukah material for 2025 describes the revolt as a struggle "for Jewish independence in the land." It also recounts the oil miracle and the Chashmonaim's trust in Hashem. Jewish sovereignty did return. The Rambam records that himself. But how do we tell the difference between what a war achieved and what warranted risking Jewish lives in the first place? Keep that distinction in mind when we come to Rav Shimon Schwab's reading of Al HaNissim.

37–42 MINUTES

Ask what they hurried back to do

Please look at **Source 9**. There is an early Jewish account of the revolt in the first Book of Maccabees. Listen to how it portrays Mattisyahu's call for people to join him. Who should come? The person zealous for the Torah who stands by the covenant. Later it portrays Yehudah addressing men frightened by the size of the force facing them. Where does strength come from? From Heaven. What are they fighting for? Their lives and their laws. Even in an account that takes us out onto the battlefield, the reason for fighting is already there. Now look at the Rambam in the same source.

The Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah, perek gimel. In the first halachah the Greeks try to uproot Jewish religious life. They forbid Torah and mitzvos and violate the Mikdash. Hashem has mercy, and the sons of the Chashmonaim prevail. Then the Rambam tells us that Jewish rule returned for more than two hundred years. Rav Yehuda Amital, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, reads the return of sovereignty as one of the reasons for the festival. Fair enough. The Rambam chose to record it. In the second halachah the Rambam tells us what happened next. What do the Jews do with that freedom? They enter the Heichal, find enough pure oil for one day, and light. It burns for eight.

Then come the first three words of halachah three: **ומפני זה התקינו** — "and because of this, they instituted." Keep that order in mind. Which event explains the eight days? Why does the mitzvah put a light at the entrance to a Jewish home? The oil explains the eight and the light. Where do we explicitly thank Hashem for the victory in battle? Look at the words of Al HaNissim in **Source 10** and listen to whom we thank, what the enemy threatened, and where our people went afterwards.

Invite two people to read the three Hebrew lines in Source 10 aloud, followed by their translations. Pause after "עוסקי תורתך" before reading "ואחר כן."

The Yevanim sought *lehashkicham Torasecha*, to make them forget Your Torah. Then one word settles whom we thank: **מסרת** — *You* delivered. And look at the final pair in the list. The arrogant were given into whose hands? *Oskei Sorasecha*. People occupied with Your Torah. After describing what they achieved in battle, the siddur still wants you to know what those hands were usually busy doing.

Now look at **source 11**. Rav Shimon Schwab asks us to stop at two words, ואחר כן, "and afterwards." Why doesn't the tefillah simply say that the victors entered the Beis HaMikdash? Ask a Jew what the kohanim fought for and he might well say, "To take back the Beis HaMikdash." Rav Schwab says those two words rule out precisely that reading. What compelled them to risk Jewish lives was the gezeirah of shmad: Jews were being forced to abandon Torah and mitzvos. Even the desire to reclaim the holiest place in the world would not, by itself, explain going to war. **Afterwards**, once Hashem had delivered them, they could enter the Mikdash, purify it and kindle the lights. The first part tells us why they fought. The second tells us what they could finally do again.

42–45 MINUTES

What have we proved?

That answers question number four. The Chashmonaim show how courageous Jews can be when Torah itself is being taken from them. To claim their courage as a proof for a secular national purpose, you have to remove the very thing that explains why they showed it. Give me the whole story, including what they did the morning they could serve Hashem freely again. Then the evidence points the other way.

Think of the two Jewish children we have been following all morning. There is a child across the river whom Yaakov wants to get away. In the Midrash, Yaakov asks Hashem: If Esav destroys these children, who will read the Torah You will give at Sinai? And there is the child whom the Yevanim wanted to grow up without that Torah. Yaakov would run to save the first child. The Chashmonaim would fight so the second could live as a Jew. How could opposite actions express the same loyalty? Because in both cases the child has a Torah to receive. That is what determines what the courage is for.

So when a grandson beside the menorah says, “Zeidy, the Maccabees were outnumbered and they won,” tell him he has remembered something wonderful. Then say, “Let’s give those men what they wanted. They wanted a Jewish child to be able to learn Torah. What shall you and I learn together tonight?”

And I can already hear the last question. **“Rabbi, but now that we have a state?”** The existence of the state changes the circumstances a Jew lives in. It cannot change what word Rashi quoted, whose brachah Yaakov sought, or what we have been thanking Hashem for every Chanukah. What obligations follow once a state exists deserves a shiur of its own. We’ll leave that for another Shabbos. **These two episodes give us no proof that military power is the purpose of Klal Yisroel. They do show what a Jewish parent will do for a child who has a Torah to inherit. Sometimes the courage is in getting that child out. Sometimes the courage is in standing up so that child can keep Shabbos.**

SOURCE NOTES / MODERN READINGS

Who makes the argument?

Yaakov and national defence

Rav Dov Begon. Born in 1940, about 86 in November 2026. Founder and head of Machon Meir, and a talmid of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook. “Vayishlach: Preparing for War, Prayer and Gifts,” Israel National News, December 10, 2003. He moves explicitly from the order of Yaakov’s preparations to strengthening Israel’s armed forces. He also calls for prayer, trust in Hashem and an effort to reduce hostility. Article · Machon Meir biography

Rav Shlomo Aviner. Born March 12, 1943, age 83. Former rav in Beit El and longtime rosh yeshiva of Ateret Yerushalayim, a talmid of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook and author of the responsa She’eilat Shlomo. In “Doron, Tefillah o Milchamah?” he cites Rashi 32:9 and applies it to Israel’s response to attacks. His published responsa establish his role as a posek. His answer · Yeshiva biography

Rav Yoel Bin-Nun. Born in 1946, age 80. A founding figure at Har Etzion and a teacher of Tanach. “War and Morality: Yisrael in the Land,” Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2016. He acknowledges flight and defensive necessity. The reading of the new name Yisroel emphasizes Yaakov’s ability to struggle face to face. He also emphasizes Yaakov’s willingness to bow for peace. Read the shiur

The Chashmonaim in modern Zionist writing

Theodor Herzl. The Jewish State (1896), conclusion. The appeal to the returning Maccabees immediately precedes his reaffirmation that the Jews who desire their own state will have one. Herzl’s text

Ze’ev Jabotinsky. Introduction to Skazanie o Pogrome, his Russian translation of Bialik’s poem on the Kishinev pogrom. Source 8 gives the English wording reproduced in The Empty Wagon, Part II, ch. 12, n. 1014. The words belong to Jabotinsky’s own introduction.

Aharon Ze’ev. “Anu Nos’im Lapidim” (“We Carry Torches”). The first-person plural is the voice of the pioneers. The song’s treatment of human effort and the flask of oil illustrates a secular Chanukah retelling. The ANU Museum of the Jewish People discusses the song’s cultural setting. Text of the song · Museum discussion

SOURCE NOTES / CHANUKAH IN PUBLIC LIFE

What the Chashmonaim fought to preserve

Rav Shimon Schwab on Al HaNissim. Oral Chanukah derashah, reported firsthand in The Empty Wagon (print reference, p. 1293; Kindle locations 24,315–24,329). The words v'achar kein separate the war over forced abandonment of Torah from the purification of the Mikdash that followed. Source 11 presents his explanation in paraphrase.

IDF Education and Youth Corps. Its December 2025 Chanukah teaching material describes a revolt for Jewish independence, links its memory to pioneers and soldiers, recounts the oil miracle and credits the Chashmonaim's trust in Hashem. It puts the national reading into words used to teach another generation. Official Chanukah text

Rav Yehuda Amital (1924–2010). Founding rosh yeshiva of Har Etzion. In "What Kind of Redemption Does Israel Represent?", section C, he cites Rambam 3:1 for his understanding that the restoration of sovereignty was among the reasons for Chanukah. His claim is narrower than defining Jewish purpose by military strength. Rav Amital's shiur

A question to reserve for the following class

Rav Aviner expressly distinguishes the circumstances of galus from those of an existing state. Rav Broyde is explaining what Yaakov's conduct can teach later generations under the conditions of galus. This shiur tests what the pesukim prove. The obligations created by present circumstances are the question for another Shabbos.

SOURCE NOTES / TORAH AND COMMENTARIES

Where to learn the passages

The two camps. Bereishis 32:7–13. Rashi 32:8–9 and 33:2–3. Koheles Rabbah 9:18 explicitly cites the morning order and Yaakov going ahead as proof of preparation for war. Ramban's introduction to Vayishlach, printed at 32:4, and his comment on 32:9. Chofetz Chaim al HaTorah, Parshas Devarim, on Devarim 2:3–5. Bereishis Rabbah 75:12 describes Esav's armed men. 75:13 records Yaakov's question about the children who will read the Torah at Sinai. Compare the description of Avraham in Bereishis 14:14 and Yaakov's years with Lavan in 31:38–41. Rashi · Ramban · Chofetz Chaim extract · Midrash

Rav Simcha Zissel Broyde. Rosh Yeshivas Chevron (1912–2000), author of Sam Derech. The distinction between Yaakov himself and later generations in galus is paraphrased from the account of his teaching in n. 338 below. Read it with Rashi on 32:8, Koheles Rabbah 9:18 and Kesubos 111a. Midrash · Kesubos

The river and the encounter. Abarbanel on 32:8–12 and the opening of ch. 33 explains which side Esav approached. Malbim on 32:8–9 allows for flight or resistance once the other camp recognizes Esav's intent. On 33:1 he reads the spiritual encounter as preparation for the physical one. Rashi 32:25, 32:27 and 33:9, and Derashos HaRan, derush 2, §26, explain the malach and the brachos. Abarbanel · Malbim · Ran

The order of the household. Bereishis 33:1–4 and Rashi. The Gra on Tikkunei Zohar Chadash, collected in Even Sheleimah, ch. 11. Rav Yitzchok Isaac Chaver, Ohr Torah on Maalos HaTorah, §27. Rav Yisroel Elya Weintraub, Hatekufah B'saaras Eliyahu. For the transmitted reading see the locations below. See Brachos 5a, Devarim 7:10 with Rashi and Sotah 49b. The Gra on all three groups · Rashi on Devarim 7:10 For the historical illustration in the shiur, see Yeshayahu 10:13–15 and the British Museum, Babylon: Myth and Reality, teachers' resource, p. 3. The comparison with the empires is our illustration.

Chanukah. Al HaNissim in the Amidah or Birkas HaMazon. Rambam, Hilchos Megillah v'Chanukah 3:1–3, and Shabbos 21b. For the earlier historical account see I Maccabees 2:27 and 3:18–22. Rav Shimon Schwab's reading of v'achar kein is recorded at the location below. Rambam · Shabbos 21b · I Maccabees 2 · I Maccabees 3

References for further learning

The Empty Wagon, Kindle locations. Yaakov and the Chofetz Chaim, 2,701–2,726, nn. 336–338, including Rav Simcha Zissel Broyde in Sam Derech. Gra and Weintraub, go to 2,386, nn. 298–302, and see n. 290 for Rav Chaver. Modern Chanukah readings and the Rambam, 8,758–8,842. Rav Schwab, 24,315–24,329. The Kindle menu accepts a location number without a comma. Open the book