

CONQUERING THE LAND

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Harried and pursued, faced with a seemingly implacable foe, Yakov returns to the Land of Israel. He will suffer a crippling injury in his encounter with the angel and alter ego of Eisav. He will endure shame and tremendous sadness when the local chieftain of the tribe that inhabits the city of Shechem rapes his daughter Dena. Yakov disowns the actions of Shimon and Levi when they exact revenge on Shechem for dishonoring their sister and he is forced to separate himself from his children, creating a lasting tension in his family. His beloved wife, Rachel, dies in childbirth while delivering Yakov's twelfth son, Binyamin. All in all, the parsha is certainly not a happy one in describing Yakov's life and his return to the Land of Israel. It seems that he was perhaps better off staying in the house of Lavan, in the exile of Aram Naharayim, rather than attempting to reestablish himself in the Land of Israel. Yet, he returns home, because the Lord told him to do so. And eventually he is able to overcome all of the difficulties that befell him on his return to his homeland. Eisav leaves him for greener pastures, he is healed from his crippling injury, the incident of Shechem finally passes after wars and struggles with the local population, and Yakov establishes his home in the Land of Israel. His heart is never healed from the death of Rachel and the tension in the family between he and the brothers, as well as between the brothers themselves is subdued but present. Returning home to the Land of Israel was a great challenge for Yakov, fraught with problems, dangers and tragedy. Yet, he is happy to be home for he knows that there is where God wishes him to be.

The events of the fathers illuminate the lives of their descendants. Over the past two centuries the children of Yakov have returned home to the Land of Israel. They have encountered wars, enmity, tragedy and enormous difficulties. The adventure of this later return has caused enormous rifts within the Jewish world itself. The brothers of Israel do not see eye to eye regarding its significance and direction. The struggles have been mighty and continue to be daunting. Yet somehow, God has brought together over five million Jews into their homeland where they have prospered and built a first world country and nation. The continuing, relentless war against the Jews mounted by the Arabs has crippled us in many ways, as has the continually growing list of tragic casualties. Yet, we hope to emulate our father Jacob and return home whole in spirit, whole in body and mind, whole in wealth and prosperity. This is no small order but since Yakov accomplished it so will we be able to do so as well. The dictum of the rabbis that the events of the fathers are the harbingers of the circumstances of their descendants has been proven true over and over again throughout Jewish history. So we should be confident of an eventual positive outcome to our generation's difficulties as

well.

Shabat shalom.

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