



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

In memory of **Evelyn Rivers, a"h**,
mother of Reuven Tradburks
on her first yartzeit today

PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

Our parsha begins with Yaakov fleeing the Land of Israel from Esav's murderous intent and it concludes with his return to the Land of Israel. He dreams as he leaves of a ladder reaching to Heaven with G-d promising that He will bring Yaakov back in peace. Yaakov meets Rachel at the well in Charan, marries Leah and Rachel, 11 of the 12 sons and Dina are born. Lavan and Yaakov bicker. Yaakov earns his wages through animal husbandry. Angels greet Yaakov on his return to Israel.



1ST ALIYA (28:10-22)

Yaakov flees the Land of Israel. He dreams: a ladder with angels, G-d at the top. G-d reiterates to Yaakov the promise of the Land of Israel and of numerous descendants. And that He will protect Yaakov and bring him back to the Land. Yaakov makes a monument at that spot and declares that upon his safe return he will come back and make this spot a house of G-d.

Yaakov has a dream, being assured of Divine protection. But why did he need this

assurance? What was on his mind?

We must read the stories in the Torah in real time. While *we* know how the stories develop, the figures in the Torah do not. Their lives play out as if on a stage with the backdrop of the various prophecies and promises that their forefathers received.

What is going through Yaakov's mind as he is fleeing the Land of Israel?

There is one dominant theme in Breishit. Who is in. And who is out. Who is part of the grand promise to Avraham that his descendants will inherit the Land of Israel? Because some are in and some are out. Yitzchak in. Yishmael out.

And even were he to be in, what about the terrible prediction given to Avraham at the Brit bein HaBetarim, the covenant made with Avraham, that his children will be strangers and afflicted in a foreign land for 400 years. That's bad. And scary. Because it means that the family will end up out of Israel and endure suffering. For a long time. That scary prophecy must hover over Yaakov like a dark cloud. When will this happen? Will I be the exile, suffering in a foreign land?

Now, he did have a blessing from his father Yitzchak, that he will dominate his brother. And a further blessing, often overlooked, at the end of last week's parsha that G-d will give him the blessing of Avraham, to inherit this Land.

But he has to wonder: are Yitzchak's blessings determinative? After all, Avraham never gave his son a blessing. G-d gives blessings. What meaning does a blessing from Yitzchak

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have? Ok, it could be what he wishes it will be. But who knows if his blessings are just wishful thinking or real?

So, Yaakov looks at his circumstances. I deceived my father. And I am being sent away. Perhaps I erred. And I am being banished. Like Yishmael was banished by Avraham, I am being banished.

After all, my father is sending me away from the Land of Israel, when he himself was commanded not to leave. Doesn't the one who is part of the covenant to settle the Land need to live there, in the Land?

And even if I am the next of the Avot, the next generation of the Jewish people, is my leaving the Land perhaps the beginning of exile for 400 years? An exile of suffering in a foreign land?

These are Yaakov's fears. Have I, by stealing the blessings, brought Divine wrath upon myself? Am I undeserving? And am I, by leaving the Land of Israel beginning that long exile of 400 years of suffering?

G-d reassures him – I will give *you* the Land and bring you back. This is an overwhelming assurance. It was one thing for his father to assure him that he will be the continuation of Avraham's legacy, but it is another to hear it from G-d Himself. Yaakov cannot but respond magnanimously; upon my return I will make this a house of G-d.



2ND ALIYA (29:1-17)

Yaakov arrives in Charan. He converses with shepherds at the well. They are waiting for a crowd of them to remove the stone over the well. He inquires of Lavan; that is Rachel, daughter of Lavan, coming now. Yaakov removes the heavy stone of the well, gives Rachel water. He tells her he is Rivka's son. Rachel runs to tell her father;

Lavan runs to greet Yaakov. Yaakov stays with them for a month.

If Yaakov is looking for a sign that he is taking up the legacy of his family, continuing their legacy, here it is. But not following in his father's footsteps. But in his mother's. This story is an exact parallel to Eliezer finding Rivka at the well. Except in reverse. Rivka drew the water for Eliezer and his camels; Yaakov draws the water for Rachel and her animals. Rivka was superhuman and drew water for 10 camels (@100 liters per camel); Yaakov is superhuman and removes the massive stone by himself. Eliezer asked Rivka who she was; Yaakov tells Rachel who he is. Rivka ran home to her mother; Rachel runs home to her father. Eliezer was seeking a wife for Yitzchak and returning to Israel; Yaakov is seeking family but not returning. Yet.



3RD ALIYA (29:18-30:13)

Yaakov loves Rachel. When Lavan inquires how he can compensate Yaakov for his work, Yaakov offers to work 7 years to marry Rachel. At the end of that time, Lavan makes a celebration. He gives Leah to Yaakov. In the morning Yaakov realizes. Lavan remarks that here we don't switch younger and older. Yaakov marries Rachel and works another 7 years. Leah has 4 children: Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda. Rachel is upset, as she is barren. She gives Yaakov Bilhah, her maidservant. She has Dan and Naphtali. Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, has Gad and Asher.

Echoes of the past dominate. Rachel is barren, an echo of Sarah who was barren. Rachel gives her servant to Yaakov to bear a child, as Sarah gave Hagar to Avraham to bear a child.

And a more sinister echo. My father couldn't see and was tricked; it was night and

I couldn't see and was tricked. I, the younger, took the place of the older. Here, the older, Leah, takes the place of the younger.

Yaakov must be thinking "I got what I deserve". And may interpret it as a Divine punishment. In spite of the blessing of his father and in spite of the assurance from G-d that He would return him to the Land of Israel, maybe Yaakov is having some niggling uncertainty. Am I getting a message that Divine judgement has rendered me undeserving of those blessings?



4TH ALIYA (30:14-27)

Reuven brings jasmine, a fertility enhancer to Leah. Rachel asks for it and in exchange Leah conceives and has Yissachar, followed by Zevulun. Rachel bears Yosef. Yaakov asks Lavan permission to return home.

And another perhaps sinister echo. 11 of the sons of Yaakov and his daughter Dina have been born. The bearing of 12 children is an echo of those *excluded* from the Jewish people. Nachor had 12 children, Avraham 8. Yishmael had 12 children, Yitzchak only 2. Yaakov has 12 children. Is he following in the footsteps of those not a part of the Jewish people? Nachor and Yishmael?



5TH ALIYA (30:28-31:16)

Lavan asks Yaakov what his wage is for all the work he has done. Yaakov asks that he be allowed to select and breed certain animals as his wage. He is wildly successful and becomes laden with livestock. Lavan's sons become jealous. Yaakov knows it is time to leave. He carefully explains to Rachel and Leah that he is worried as Lavan has not been honest with him. And that the angel has told him it is time to return to the Land. They agree that

whatever G-d says they must do.

This description of Yaakov's cleverness in animal husbandry is curious. What is its place in the story? It could be that this enormous wealth is another indication that he follows his father's footsteps: Avraham had great wealth, Yitzchak was blessed with "meah shearim", a 100-fold bounty of agriculture.

Or perhaps it is an answer to Yitzchak's blessing. Yitzchak loved Esav because he had *ציד בפיו* – cunning. Yitzchak thought: we are on the cusp of building the Land of Israel. We need a leader with cunning. He thought Esav had that. But Esav had chicanery; deception and folly. Real leadership demands resourcefulness, imagination, ingenuity, problem solving. Yaakov here is proving himself capable of the type of resourcefulness needed to lead his people; just what Yitzchak was looking for.



6TH ALIYA (31:17-42)

Yaakov and the family leave without telling Lavan. Rachel steals Lavan's idols. Lavan pursues. G-d tells him not to harm Yaakov. Lavan berates Yaakov for his deception, not allowing him to kiss his children. Were it not that G-d instructed him otherwise, he would be justified in harming Yaakov. He searches for his idols but does not find them. Yaakov is fed up. He berates Lavan for his lack of appreciation of all of Yaakov's hard work, changing his wages 10 times. But G-d saw my oppressive work and rewarded me.

Another sinister echo. In the prophecy to Avraham that his children would be exiled in a foreign land and afflicted, the Hebrew word for affliction is "eenu". And this affliction would be for 400 years. And then they would return with great wealth. Yaakov uses that very word to describe his hard work for Lavan "G-d saw my hard labour – an'ee".

Perhaps, Yaakov wonders, I am that Jewish people. Foreign land. Afflicted. I have been here 20 years, a long time – seems like 400. Leaving with great wealth.

Oh, how difficult it is in real time to see which prophecies are being played out.



7TH ALIYA (31:43-32:3)

Lavan and Yaakov part amidst a parting ceremony. A marker and stones are placed as testimony that Lavan will not approach Yaakov, nor Yaakov approach Lavan. Lavan returns home. Angels encounter Yaakov as he returns to the Land.

The angels greet Yaakov. Angels when he left and angels when he returns. Another sign of Divine favor that he will continue the legacy of the Jewish people.

Yaakov perceives conflicting indicators: of favor and disfavor, of parallels and contrasts, of promises and punishment.

Perhaps this description of the life of our forefather, the forefather for whom our people is named, Yisrael, perhaps this creates a paradigm of Jewish experience. Jewish experience is promises and uncertainty. We see favor and disfavor. We have prophecies but perhaps are undeserving.

Yaakov, the recipient of a dream of prophecy, even Yaakov is uncertain of his fate. The Jewish people receive many prophecies. Knowing with certainty when those prophecies are playing out is oh so elusive. Especially we, who are privileged to walk in our Land, we need to be vigilant against overzealous certainty. If Yaakov lived with uncertainty, we too would be wise to temper our zeal with caution. Certainty is not the stuff of Yaakov's life. We need to be vigilant to exercise prudent caution when it comes to seeing our history as the fulfillment of prophecy.

HAFTORAH: HOSHEA 12:13-14:10 (ASHKENAZ)

This week's *haftorah* makes direct mention of Yaakov's flight from home to the "field of Aram," which is a critical episode recounted in this week's Torah reading.

The *haftorah* states Hoshea's rebuke of the Jewish people for their sin of forsaking Hashem. However, Hoshea assures the people that Hashem will not abandon them: "How can I give you, Ephraim, and deliver you [to the hands of the nations]? . . . I will not act with My fierce anger; I will not return to destroy Ephraim."

The *haftorah* proceeds to discuss the transgressions of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the future demise of the Kingdom of Judea. The *navi* makes a comparison between this generation and the behavior of their forefather Yaakov who was faithful and dedicated to God and prevailed against his enemies

The *haftorah* optimistically highlights the eventual ingathering of the exiles which will occur at the Final Redemption: "They shall hasten like a bird from Egypt and like a dove from the land of Assyria; and I will place them in their houses, says the Lord." ■

**OU Israel extends condolences
to the family of**

**Rabbi Jay Marcus zt"l
on his passing**

**Rabbi Marcus was a remarkable
builder of Torah and Am Yisrael
both in Eretz Yisrael and in the
Diaspora. His warmth, vision,
and relentless dedication continue
to shape generations.**

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים