

ALIYA BY ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA Israel Region

PARSHAT VAYEITZEI

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. Angels ascend and descend the ladder. G-d assures Yaakov that he will receive the Land and return in peace to the Land.

While we tend to focus on the intriguing imagery of the angels, the emphasis of this story is the reassurance that Yaakov will return in peace.

But, hold on, why was he allowed to leave the Land? His father Yitzchak was not. When it was time to find a mate, Eliezer was made to swear that Yitzchak would not leave the Land. Yitzchak's wife must be brought to him, in the Land. And Yitzchak was commanded directly by G-d not to leave the Land in the famine; not to take the path well-trodden to the bread basket of Egypt.

Why is Yaakov treated differently and allowed to flee the Land?

Yaakov's life is in contrast to Yitzchak's. In one way, he carries on the legacy of Avraham and Yitzchak; he is promised the Land. But he flees the Land.

The Ramban introduces a notion he calls "maaseh avot, siman l'banim". He notices events that occur to the Avot echoing years later in other events in Jewish history.

But perhaps that expression could be seen differently. That the lives of the 3 avot create story lines that are paradigms of different stages in Jewish history. Not just repeated in a story in Tanach, but paradigms of the sweep of Jewish history.

Formative. Continuity. And builder.

Avraham's life is formative. He journeys to the Land. He is the formative generation of the Jewish people. The discoverer. The pioneer. The trail blazer. Innovator. The seeker of the new life in the new place.

Yitzchak preserves. Continuity. Never leaves the Land. Does what his father did – the wells, the pact with Avimelech, two children.

Yaakov is complicated. Born in the Land. But leaves. His life becomes a life of hard work, building wealth and building a family. He is not brought a wife, but finds one. Lifts the heavy stone off the well. Works for his wife for 7 years. Works for Lavan. Long days of endless toil and travail. And later, endures tragedy. His dear wife Rachel dies. Yosef is killed, or so he thinks, by a wild animal.

Leaves the Land, returns to the Land, leaves again when he reunites with Yosef, never to return.

Perhaps these paradigms are to teach us how to read Jewish history. There will be Avraham eras – discovery, new lands,

formative, optimistic, honored, respected. Though "ger v'toshav". Resident aliens; residents but not in our home.

Yitzchak eras. Carrying on the traditions of the father. Preserving but not pioneering. Settled but not seeking. Blessed but not blazing new paths.

And Yaakov eras. Unsettled. Exile, return, exile. The wandering Jew. Successful, only to pack up and move again. Toil. Industrious. Accomplished. Yet suffering.

Yaakov's life differs radically from both Avraham and Yitzchak. His life of wandering, of success, of exile, of suffering creates a paradigm of the life of the Jew in exile.



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 and is told: 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. The first person he runs into is Rachel!

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.

Yaakov toils for 7 years for the right

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to marry Rachel. A striking contrast to Yitzchak, whose wife Rivka is brought to him by Eliezer, with no effort on his part at all.

The switch of Leah for Rachel is an obvious parallel. A sinister parallel. My father couldn't see and I tricked him; it was night and I couldn't see and I 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". But how should he interpret this 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 wage he seeks 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 in his father's footsteps: Avraham had great wealth, Yitzchak was blessed with "meah shearim", a 100-fold bounty of agriculture. And now Yaakov too is blessed.

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 am 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 favour that he will continue the legacy of the Jewish people.

Yaakov perceives conflicting indicators: of favour and disfavour, 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 favour and disfavour. 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 those of us 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.

HOSHEA 11:7-12:14

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." ■