

Parashas Va-Yeitzei

Parsha Summary

On the way to Charan, Yaakov went to sleep and dreamt of a ladder with angels ascending and descending, and God appeared at the top assuring Yaakov that He would be with him. Yaakov awoke and asked God to protect and provide for him, and said that he would return to this place to serve God.

Yaakov got to a well where shepards gathered to remove the stone covering it together. When Yaakov saw Rachel - his cousin - tending his uncle Lavan's flock, he lifted the stone off the well himself and kissed Rachel telling her who he was. Lavan came to greet Yaakov and hired him as a shepherd, and Yaakov asked to marry Rachel as payment. After seven years, Lavan switched Rachel with her older sister Leah, forcing Yaakov to work another seven years to marry Rachel as well. God saw that Yaakov loved Rachel but not Leah, and so God gave Leah four children: Reuvein, Shim'on, Levi, and Yehudah.

Rachel begged Yaakov for children, and suggested that Yaakov marry Bilha, her maidservant, to have children. Bilha bore Yaakov two sons: Dan and Naftali. Leah saw that she was no longer having children, so she gave Yaakov her maidservant Zilpah, and she bore Yaakov Gad and Asher. Reuvain gave *duda'im* to his mother Leah, and she traded them to Rachel to take her night with Yaakov, after which Leah bore three more children: Yisaschar, Zevulun, and a girl Dinah. God remembered Rachel and gave her a son, Yosef.

Lavan and Yaakov agreed that Yaakov's wages would be all of the striped, spotted, and ringed sheep, and Yaakov made sticks of those patterns for the sheep to look at while they were in heat, and all of the sheep bore lambs that were striped and spotted. Yaakov saw that Lavan felt threatened by Yaakov, and so after consulting his wives he gathered his family and snuck away from Lavan, but Lavan caught up with them three days later. God warned Lavan not to harm Yakov. Lavan accused him of stealing his family and his idols (which Rachel in fact did), but made a peace treaty with Yaakov's family, represented by a stone mound. Yaakov went on his way and was met by angels of God.

Classic Questions

What is the meaning of Yaakov's dream and his vision of the ladder and angels?

- **Tanhuma/Pirkei dRebi Eliezer:** the ladder represents time, and each angel is a nation that will subjugate Israel in the future but will ultimately fall
- **Targum Yonasan/Midrash Rabbah, Seforno:** the ladder reaches God through serving or praying to him. The angels are the priests who will serve God here in the temple
 - **Midrash Rabbah 2:** the ladder is Sinai, with Moshe and Ahron ascending it
- **Rashi:** the angels protecting Yaakov in God's land switched with angels for 'outside'
- **Rambam (MN 1:15):** the angels represent prophets who reach spiritual heights and then return to Earth to convey God's message to its inhabitants
- **(Ibn Ezra)/Radak/Ramban:** God was showing that He controls the world through angels
- **R. Hirsch, R. DZ Hoffman:** the ladder shows how man can connect to God through his actions, and that those actions affect what occurs to him in this world

Why did Yaakov love Rachel (more than Leah)?

- **Chizkuni:** rumor had it that Lavan's older daughter Leah was destined to marry Yitzchak's older son Eisav, and Yaakov didn't want to antagonize Eisav more
- **Seforno:** Yaakov simply fell in love with Rachel as a person
- **R. Hirsch:** Rachel was more beautiful than her sister
 - **Rashi:** Leah's eyes were unattractive (due to her excessive crying)
 - **Targum, Rashbam:** Leah's eyes were beautiful
 - **R. Hirsch:** because Yaakov loved Rachel for external reasons (which was not appropriate for a man of his stature), Leah merited to bear most of his sons

Why did Rachel steal her father's *terafim* (idols)?

- **Rashi:** to stop Lavan from worshipping them
- **Rashbam, others:** the idols were objects used for divination, and Rachel didn't want them to reveal Yaakov's family's whereabouts to Lavan
 - **Ibn Ezra:** the *terafim* were used for astrological calculations
 - **Bechor Shor:** Rachel believed that they had powers of divination, and took them to use for herself, but Lavan believed them to be gods and worshipped them
- **Ramban:** there were merely tools to measure time, but Lavan used them for divination
- **R. Yoel bin Nun, scholars:** to solidify her family's status as the true heirs

Important "Chazal"s and "Rashi"s

- Yaakov established the evening prayer, as it says "he met [*va-yifga*] in the place..." and *pegi'a* only refers to prayer (Brachos 26b)
- R. Yitzchak said, all of the stones [that Yaakov placed around himself] gathered saying, 'the *tzadik* should rest his head upon me' and they all became one stone (Hullin 91b)
- Yaakov did not discover Leah's identity until daybreak, because Rachel gave Leah the signs that Yaakov told her [in order that she not be embarrassed] (Megillah 13b)
- R. Yohanan b. Shim'on said, from creation, no one had thanked God until Leah [called her son Yehudah] saying "this time I will thank God" (Brachos 7b)
 - **Rashi/Bereishis Rabbah:** the matriarchs were prophets, and Leah knew that Yaakov would have four wives and twelve sons, and when she had her fourth son she thanked God for giving her more than her share
- Leah made a judgement: Yaakov will have 12 children, I have six and the maidservants have four; if I have another son Rachel will have less than the maids--so her child turned to a girl (Brachos 60a)

A Short Vort

The Torah first describes Yaakov as "loving Rachel more than Leah," implying that he loved Leah as well, but immediately afterwards writes that "Leah was hated" by Yaakov. Which is it, did Yaakov hate Leah or merely love her less? Clearly, Yaakov did love Leah, but because he loved his other wife more, but the Torah considers such 'lesser love' to be hatred. R. Shimon Schwab writes that this teaches us the standard of love demanded by a spousal relationship: unless one loves his wife more than anyone else, that love is insufficient for a proper marriage.