Introduction to Parsha #7: Vayeitze[1]

READINGS:	***Torah Vayeitze***:	**Genesis 28:10 – 32:3**
	Haftarah:	**Hosea 12:13 – 14:10**
	B'rit Chadasha:	**John 1:35-51**



And Ya'akov departed ....
[Genesis 28:10]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 4, *Ga'al* *[the Petition for Redemption].*

Vayeitze Ya'akov mi-Be'er Shava *– And Ya'akov departed from Be'er Sheva ....* **Genesis 28:10.**

The curtain of Torah' 7th parsha – *Vayeitze* – opens to find a tired-looking young Hebrew man walking alone along the 'Ridge Road' as it approached the Kena'ani village of Luz. The path his sandals were treading was a well-established trade route that followed the easternmost ridgeline of the Judean/Samaritan mountain range. That early international highway was accustomed to caravans loaded down with spices, fabrics, and other precious articles of trade. This man, in stark contrast, was traveling with nothing but the clothes on his back. Neither wife nor friend, servant nor master, camel nor donkey accompanied him. While he carried a shepherd's staff, not a single sheep, goat, or other domestic animal followed him. How strange. Does this poor man not understand the dangers of this road? Has no one told him that there are mountain lions, wolves, jackals, and brigands that lie in wait to prey on any poor defenseless soul foolish enough to travel alone? Does he not know that he is probably being watched - and perhaps stalked – at this very instant?

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What is this stranger's story? Is he *lost*? Is he *drunk*? Is he *crazy?* Why is he walking the ridgeline alone – with darkness approaching, no less? Why isn't he going into the nearby town of Luz to procure a meal, enjoy some conversation, and pass the night? Is he an outlaw on the run? Is he a predator on the prowl? Is he running from something – or someone? Where does he think he is going? What is he looking for out of life?

Meanwhile, who (if anyone) is watching out for this young man? If there is anyone who cares about him, why is he traveling alone? If he has any hope of surviving this journey, from whence we get help? And if somehow, against all odds, he makes it to whatever destination awaits him, and finds a way to navigate whatever challenges his new environs present to him, will he find whatever it is he is looking for? Will he discover secrets of *wholeness* and *shalom* that have eluded him thus far in life? Will the broken places of his heart and tortured fragments of the soul receive healing? And if and when he passes this way again, in what particulars will he, his life circumstances, and his prospects for the future have changed?

Stay tuned, Dear Reader! I think I know who the young man is - and if he is indeed who I suspect him to be – well, this could be just the beginning of a story for the ages – and a *mashal* for us, our children, and our childrens' children forever!

The Fall-Out from the 'Blessing-Gate' Scandal

News of the 'Blessing-Gate' scandal that rocked the household of Yitzchak has spread fast. As we read last week in *Toldot,* Ya'akov's sins – against father, against brother, and against the Holy One - have been exposed. He is now a pariah – a fitting subject for both the accusations of ha-Satan and the ridicule, wrath, and hatred of the hyper-judgmental, self-righteous whisperers of this world. Exposed as a deceiver, who would trust him - or listen to anything he has to say – now? His credibility is non-existent. He would have sworn that he loved his father and his mother with all his heart, and that he would do anything to honor them; but he had brought unimaginable heartbreak and shame upon them both. In one moment, all his personal and familial identity paradigms had been shattered in a million pieces. His image as a glorious *tzadik*-in-training had dissolved into dust. When his duplicity was exposed he uttered not a word in his own defense. He refused to uncover the participation of his mother, who had planned and orchestrated the Grand Charade. He accepted all the guilt. He bore all the shame. He bowed his head, covered his face with his headdress, and hit the road. Yitzchak and Rivkah walked him to the edge of their encampment, bid him a tearful farewell, and released him … into the hands of what they prayed would be the heavenly hosts.

Heaven Help Him Now

Ya'akov took one last parting look around, drinking in the stark beauty of the land

the Creator had set aside to his family. He loved every square centimeter of that land. He had spent his entire life being inspired by the beauty of its sunrises and sunsets. He loved pasturing his father's herds and flocks on its mountains, valleys, and plains. He loved the smell – and the unparalleled productivity - of the fields he had always dreamed he would one day inherit. But that dream – like every other dream he had ever dreamed - was now in tatters. No matter how much he loved this land, he could no longer stay here. He would have to find a new dream. He was *persona non gratis*. He was disgraced. The components of the goat-hair costume he had donned to trick Yitzchak into giving him the firstborn blessing mocked him, testified of his guilt, and declared his guilt. He deserved scorn – and Esav accommodated him. The deep-cover deception he had practiced on his blind and disabled father warranted forfeiture of inheritance, exile, and worse - just ask his defrauded brother! Like Cham, Esav was ready, willing, and ecstatic to expose a family member's shame in every forum, at every opportunity, to everyone who would listen. The offended one was running around the Negev like a madman, ranting, raving, literally screaming bloody murder. Ya'akov's deception had allowed Esav to usurp the 'moral high ground'. The scandal lent an air of justification – if not an aura of entitlement - to the hairy oaf's oft and dangerous rampages of anger, offense, outrage, envy, lust, and greed. It allowed him to play the social injustice 'victim card'. It allowed him to pretend - to himself and to the world - that he was wholly righteous, pure, and innocent as the driven snow.

It had all been too much for the family to bear. Life as Ya'akov knew it was surely over. His allotted time dwelling in the tents of his father and playing nemesis to Esav was up. He had to leave everything he knew and loved, and go far, far away. Perhaps his mother was right – perhaps it was time for him to look for a wife, and start building a family of his own. He would go to the house of his mother's brother, Lavan, in Paddam-Aram. Compared to what he was facing at home, how bad could Lavan's house – and his world - be, anyway?

On a Dark Desert Highway …

So, as the next epoch of Torah's storyline begins, we find the young diamond-in-the-rough the world knows as 'Ya'akov' on *the road*, on *the run*, and on *the lam*. As the first word of the parsha puts it: *Vayeitze – i.e.* ***and*** *[he]* ***departed***[2]. *Bon voyage, young man* – and may the God of your fathers be with you. May angels watch over and comfort you. May the Torah that you have learned at your father and grandfather's feet serve you well in your exile. May the holy energy of the

[2] The verb root of the Hebrew phrase *Vayeitze* is *yatza, yod, tzade, alef*, Strong's Hebrew word #3318, pronounced *yaw-tzaw'*. This verb means to *go or come out or forth*, or to *depart.* The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 1:12, where Torah tells us that on the third day, after the Creator spoke forth plant life from the dry ground, and from the earth was caused to go or issue forth [*yatza]* grass and herbs bearing seed, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed.

Sabbath inspire, refresh, and sustain you each week. May you live long and prosper. And may you one day return to the Holy Land, and to your father's house, in *shalom. Bashem HaShem, Elohei Yisrael; mimini Micha'el, usmismoli Gavri'el; ulmilfanai Uri'el, umeachorai Rafa'el; v'al-roshe, v'al roshi, Shekinat-El.*

It is Exile – or Bust!

Every covenant adventure begins with a radical departure; Ya'akov's odyssey is no exception. Nor will your voyage be, Dear Reader. If we are going to walk with the Creator of the Universe we must do exactly that – WALK! We cannot be content just to 'believe'. We cannot be satisfied just to 'hope'. The life of a Covenant Partner of the Creator is not a spectator sport. We cannot just shout *Rah! Rah! Rah!* from the sidelines while holding a beer in one hand and a bag of popcorn in the other. The game is won or lost on the playing field, not in the cheap seats. We must step out of the realm of the familiar, break out of the rut of the expected, and escape the prison of all that we have ever thought of as 'normal'. We do not serve our King – or our world - best as 'believers', but as faithful followers, disciples, servants, and friends. For that reason, the Holy One has scripted and choreographed at least one dramatic *Lech Lecha* moment, fraught with emotion, uncertainty, and a whole lot more questions than answers, into the life story of every son or daughter of the Covenant.

Ya'akov's turn to venture out on the pilgrim's pathway has come! Gird up your loins, you trouble-making heel-grabber! Set your face like flint. Focus on Who is calling you and what He has set in place before you instead of who and what you are leaving behind. And step lively, Beloved Ancestor – this is going to be quite an excursion! Welcome to the emotions that accompany a *surrender to destiny*, to the gnawing sensation of helpless humility that comes with stepping out of the familiar and into the unknown. Welcome to the empty feeling that comes with the tearful goodbye-kisses of your friends, the *'Boy-Are-you-ever-going-to-crash-and-burn!'* smirks of your critics, and the angry '*good-riddance-to-bad-rubbish'* glares of your enemies. Welcome to your rite of passage. Welcome to the great Avrahamic 'crossing over' journey. Welcome to the grand quest to lose *the you that you have been* and discover *the you that you were created to be*. Welcome to the pathway that always seems to wind up blocked by a cherub flashing a bright, flaming, two-edged sword.

The Holy One will say, do, and/or allow whatever is necessary to bring His chosen covenant torchbearers and trailblazers to and through their personal '*Lech Lecha'* moment. For Avraham that transformational moment was birthed out of a Divine Apprehension and call. For Yitzchak it was birthed out of a famine, and the need to find food for his family. For Ya'akov, it was birthed out of a great escalation of family drama. Whatever it takes – that is what He will do. Let the reader

understand.

Last week in these studies we noted that the focus of Torah's spotlight was shifting from *Avraham* to his son *Yitzchak*. This week the focus is going to change again – from Yitzchak to his son *Ya'akov*[3]. We were, of course, introduced to Ya'akov last week. Initially we just heard that there were two feisty fetuses at war within Rivkah's womb. Then, as Esav was being born, we saw Ya'akov grasping his heel. We watched as Ya'akov's birth position became a prophetic description of his early life. He was constantly jockeying with Esav for position. He started squirming under Esav's heel, but towards the end of last week's studies a shift occurred in the family dynamic. By *Toldot*'s end Ya'akov found himself blessed with not only the promise that he would inherit the firstborn's share of material goods, but also that he would step into the glorious, world-changing destiny the Holy One had promised to Avraham and his seed – a destiny that includes:

1. spiritual '*ears to hear' – i.e.* that are tuned into and *sh'ma* the Creator's Voice;
2. full *stewardship of the land of Israel* throughout this age;
3. *seed as prolific as the grains of sand* on the seashore, and
4. the *leading, guiding, protection, provision and Presence of the Holy One Himself* - with all the levels and phases of inspiration and empowerment that entails; including
5. the *capacity to attract, receive, carry, and be a conduit of blessing*s to every place, person, family and nation in the world.

Esav was neither impressed nor convinced. As Esav is wont to do, he flew off into a rage. He launched off on a rant. He threatened to commit mayhem, even manslaughter. That, alas, is the Esavian idea of a solution for just about everything that offends his sense of 'social justice', refuses to bow the knee to his 'moral position', and fails to mollycoddle his crude fleshly appetites, urges, lusts, and desires. Partially for this reason, but primarily because Ya'akov was nowhere near ready to responsibly steward the blessings or walk in the destiny that had been pronounced upon him, *Toldot* concluded with a plan taking shape. The family would be divided. Ya'akov would be sent away; Esav – who had taken two wives from the local Kena'ani population - would stay. Both had made their bed – and would have to lie in it. Ya'akov would set off on a journey of 500 miles or so through harsh terrain and pioneer life in the Diaspora. He would seek an uneasy, inhospitable refuge with Laban. Hopefully, while there he would master a trade. Perhaps he would even find a bride. That was the plan – but boy is Ya'akov in for some surprises!

The Third-Generation Odyssey of Covenant Life Is Underway!

As it happened to the patriarchs, *so it is ordained to happen in the lives of all their*

[3] Ya'akov's name is written in Hebrew as: **יעקב** *[yod, ayin, kuf, veit].*

descendants. Be prepared for some major *leave-taking issues* to arise in <u>your</u> lives this week as well! Rehearse your *good-byes*, your *fare-thee-wells* and your *until-we-meet-agains.* Prepare to have routines and relationships interrupted. Oh, and it might not hurt for you to *pack yourself a travel bag* and *get your passport papers in order* while you are at it. Indeed, there are so many *partings* and *leave-takings* contained within the four chapters we study this week that I have come to call the week we study this parsha the '*Week of Radical Departures'*.

This week the action begins with Ya'akov making a dramatic *departure*. He had to leave his father and his mother. He had to leave his twin brother and his sisters-in-law. He had to leave his beloved Negev – and the home in which he grew up. He had to leave the flocks and herds he had raised and fussed over from their birth. Indeed, he had to leave everything he had ever known of life. He had no choice in the matter. He simply could not stay where he was any longer. He simply could not remain <u>*who*</u> he was for one more day.

Torah describes the first step of the Great Prophetic Ya'akovian Odyssey as follows: ***Vayeitze Ya'akov mi-Be'er Shava*** *– Then Ya'akov departed from Beer-sheva ...* ***vayelech Charanah*** *– and he set off walking toward Charan.* **Genesis 28:10.**

Vayeitze Ya'akov *– Then Ya'akov departed ...*

Departing. It means leaving something behind – at least temporarily – to go where destiny calls us. It sounds so ... well, *permanent.* It sounds drastic. It even sounds dangerous. It is all of those things, to one degree or another. And yet, departing is something with which everyone in the Covenant must come to grips. If you have not had to make a great departure yet, I assure you – you *will*!

Strategic departing is, you see, a good part of what life on earth for a child of the Most High God is about. Avraham learned that lesson beginning in Genesis 12. Yitzchak learned the *same lesson* beginning in Genesis 26. In *Vayeitze* it is Ya'akov's turn[4]. And as it was for the patriarchs, so it is for us today. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov[5] likened life in this world to a series of dangerous crossings. Perhaps the rabbi's most famous declaration along this line was:

Kol ha-olam kulo gesher tza'ar me'od
Everything in this age [is a journey across] a very narrow bridge.

v'haikar lo lifached
And the most important thing is to fear nothing at all.

[4] Moshe will learn this lesson beginning in Exodus 1; Israel will learn it beginning in Exodus 14.
[5] The Rebbe's teachings emphasize an approach to life centered in a continual flow of reverent yet intimately conversational prayer to, of conscious 'as a friend' kinds of interaction with, and of joyful service unto the Holy One and fellow man, in contradistinction to either an intellectual, academic, approach, a legalistic approach, or a superstitious approach.

Behold: The Bridge[6] *Calls to Us Across the Centuries!*

Picture in your mind stepping off of *terra firma* onto the most narrow, rickety old hanging rope and plank bridge you can imagine. Imagine that bridge spanning a deep, treacherous gorge thousands of feet deep. Imagine the bridge is the only way you can get from *where you are now* to *where the Holy One would have you to be.* Imagine taking step after step fully aware that the slightest slip or stumble on your part could mean instant death - not just for you but for everyone close to you. If you think too much you will never move. If you look down, you will freeze in fear. If you get distracted, behave carelessly, or act impulsively you will endanger everyone on the bridge. The key is to stay calm, keep looking ahead instead of down or back, maintain your focus on your next two or three steps forward ... and just keep moving.

Each year as we enter the week of *Vayeitze* we, like our ancestor Ya'akov, always find ourselves at a point of critical departure. The *status quo* is shifting around us – and we have to shift with it. The wallpaper of our world is about to change, and we have to find our place in it. This is not a season for sentimentality. This is not a time to philosophize, theologize, ideologize, or 'play religion'. This is not a time to overthink things, to argue over who is right or wrong, or to look for someone to blame for the situation in which we find ourselves. Who did what to whom and why just doesn't matter now. We have somewhere to go. We need to get ourselves, and as many friends and strangers as we can, across the very narrow bridge that lies before us *safely* – and in a way that honors the One Who called us to make, and trained us for, and preserves us through, the journey in the first place.

Oh ... and about that '*the secret is not to be afraid/give in to fear at all*' thing. Remember what David wrote: ***Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me! Your rod and your staff comfort me!*** **Psalm 23:4.** You are not alone. We are not without a shepherd – a Great Shepherd, who knows the way and will lead us through this and every other challenge. Hum his melody. Sing his song. Follow His cadence. And, most importantly, walk in His steps. Life in this world, in this age, is just *a series of departures*, transitions, sojourns, and arrivals, followed by another series of departures, transitions, sojourns, and arrivals, followed by ... well, you get the picture. Over the course of a lifetime - if we are paying attention - we learn *why* to depart, *from what and from whom to depart, when to depart*, *how* to depart, *how to*

[6] Nachman of Breslov was the grandson of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, and is credited with founding the Breslov Chassidic movement. Born in 1772 in what is now known as Ukraine, Nachman likened this world to a "very narrow bridge"- a series of crossings. "*The whole world is a very narrow bridge. And the most important thing is to not be afraid*."

survive on the journey, and *how to know when we have reached our next destination*.

The prospect of transitioning across the very narrow bridge that stretches out before us creates in us emotions ranging from *apprehension* to *terror* – but *we must cross over in spite of it all.* For if we settle for *where we are* when the Holy One would have us go *somewhere else* we deprive our lives of purpose and destiny.

So just stay calm. Keep your eyes focused on the objective, not just the immediate challenge. Keep a conversation with the Creator of the Universe going at all times. Avoid the temptations and drama with which the people and situations you encounter along your journey will try to entangle you. Resist the temptation to interrupt that on-going conversation with the Creator to complain, rant, accuse, or blame human beings, cultures, or institutions. Do not waste your time fretting over evildoers – or pouting over injustices. Always be always kind - even as you hold fast to Your King and walk with Him in His Pathways of Wisdom. Most of all, resolve, whatever happens to you, to continue to be a blessing and shine a beautiful Kingdom Light; and absolutely refuse to absorb even a thimbleful of anybody's darkness. You have been prepared against this day. Lights. Camera. ACTION!

Introducing Life in the Crucibles of Exile

As stated above, in this seventh parsha of Torah Ya'akov departs the Holy Land and enters into a prototypical 'exile'. Separated from his family he takes up residence in a place far away from anyone who knows the God of Avraham or who even knows that a *sh'ma* lifestyle is – much less lives one. He then spends 20 years or so in a crucible – the crucible of exile - where the Holy One tries him as silver and refines him as gold. As we read and study this parsha keep in mind Proverbs 17:3, the proverb that says: ***The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Holy One tests the hearts.*** [7]

Over the course of this week the Holy One will process Ya'akov through a series of very difficult life experiences. Each such experience is designed to play a strategic role in Ya'akov's maturation from a prodigy into a fully functional Covenant Partner. Some of the experiences are designed to remove the young man's impurities and quiet his inner voices of flesh. Others will be designed to inspire him, to sharpen his edge, to build Covenant levels of stamina in him, and to prepare him to be the vessel of Kingdom glory he was created to be. Always keep in mind, however, that the crucibles that Ya'akov experiences in Vayeitze are by no means his crucibles alone. He is just a forerunner – a pioneer. The painful

[7] See also Malachi 3:3. There we are told that Messiah will "***sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Holy One an offering in righteousness."***

crucibles of exile his journey contains will become part of the Grand Covenant Adventure – and will, therefore, be shared *by all of us, at one level or another, over the course of all subsequent generations.* The Writer of Torah therefore includes the narratives of Ya'akov's exile-experiences in graphic detail not merely in order that we can understand our family history, but also in order that we will learn how to survive, *prosper*, and fulfill our Divine purpose in the midst of even the most daunting crucibles this world has to offer. Read the narratives of Ya'akov's exile and maturation very, very carefully, therefore – and meditate on them. Your very survival – not to mention the degree to which you fulfill the Divine Destiny the Holy One has designed for you and your household – will depend upon how well you learn the lessons that Ya'akov's struggles are designed to teach us about Covenant life.

A Vayeitze Travelogue

At the end of *Toldot* things appeared to really be in a mess for the covenant family. *Yitzchak* had grown old and blind. Esav had just brought *Machalat*, granddaughter of Ishmael, into the patriarchal camp, joining his ever-growing harem of pagan consorts. Meanwhile, *Ya'akov* was preparing to leave his home and his family's encampment near Be'er-sheva and head off into the Wonderland world of Laban the Aramean – a place not unlike Robert Louis Stevenson's immortal dimension where nothing is ever quite as it appears to be.

Alas the covenant family's 'mess' is going to get worse before it gets better.

1. Ya'akov Embarks on His Great Covenant Odyssey

Every journey in life begins with a critical departure[8]. Ya'akov's journey begins with such a departure *from Be'er-sheva*. As the parsha opens the Covenant-Partner-in-Training is *on the run*. His father's dwelling in the Negev is disappearing in his rear-view mirror. He has all he can handle dodging highway robbers and wild beasts as he winds his way through the mountains of Central Kena'an. He has yet to pass through the Galil. Also awaiting him are the dense forests of the Levanon. And even beyond the great land of spreading cedars he will have a gauntlet of physical and spiritual obstacles to overcome before he reaches – ***if*** he reaches - Upper Mesopotamia. His destination - the village of Charan in the region of Paddan-Aram - is still many days of treacherous travel away.

Charan is of course the very same village from which both Avraham and Rivkah had begun their journeys to a new life in Eretz Yisrael. They took two steps

[8] A 'critical departure' occurs when you *leave that which is familiar and comfortable* and *step out into a place where the ordinary schedules and routines of life have to be abandoned in order to deal with a new set of physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges*. Each critical departure involves significant risk and requires *major adjustments to the way one looks at, thinks about, and engages with the world.*

forward; Ya'akov starts his season as the main player on Torah's stage with one step back. Rivkah's brother Laban and his family still live in Charan, and it is in that household that Ya'akov hopes to sojourn until things blow over with Esav.

Anything could happen in the course of such a journey. Will Ya'akov make it – or won't he? And if he manages to somehow navigate through all the foils, the snares, and the valleys of the death's shadow that lie between him and Charan, how will he be changed as a result of his experience in Laban's house?

2. Ya'akov's First God-Encounter

Ya'akov had a whole lot more to think about on this trip than rough terrain, forks in the road, a dearth of watering holes, highway robbers, or crazy uncles. SomeOne much more fearsome than a highway robber was silently shadowing his every footfall. And the moment of confrontation was at hand.

Night was approaching on the first day of the journey. The rapidly encroaching shadows were starting to play games with his depth perception. He was physically and emotionally exhausted. And he knew that at this elevation, one wrong step and .... well, one wrong step and he wouldn't have to worry about Esav anymore! So, as soon as Ya'akov reached a high place with a good vantage point he decided it was as good a place as any to spend the night. He stopped. He had no tent to pitch, and no pillow or bedroll to lay out, so he just plopped down on the ground. After catching his breath for a few moments, he laid his head - on a stone. He fell asleep. And as he lay there, quite without seeking anything other than a few hours of rest, his whole world wound up being dramatically changed. As Ya'akov's head rested on a stone, his eyelids began to flutter - and he found himself caught up in the kind of strange and wonderful experience that only Inspired Biblical Narratives can do justice in the telling. Suddenly, before him Ya'akov *saw a built-up pathway* [Hebrew *sullam*] stretching the stone upon which his head lay all the way into the Courts of Heaven. He gazed in awe and wonder. Then he saw something few men will ever see – he saw hosts of angelic beings moving along the pathway. Some of the hosts were ascending from earth into the Heavenly Realms beyond. Others were descending out of the Heavenly Realms toward earth. But that was just the beginning. At some point Ya'akov looked up toward the top of the *sullam* – and saw the Architect of it All. He saw the SomeOne Who had been shadowing him the whole journey. He saw that Glorious, Awe-inspiring, breathtakingly wonderful SomeOne that his father and grandfather had told him about so many times. He saw the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. There HE was – bigger than life. There He was - much, much more fearsome than Esav or any army of Esavs. *There He was* - exalted above all Creation. *There He was* - radiant in Countenance. *There He was* - clothed in resplendent Light. *There He was* - stunning in His Glory*, yet* both exuding and inspiring joy, mercy, and *shalom*. *And then Ya'akov heard it –*

the Voice of the Creator. His heart felt like it would burst. His ears felt like they would explode. His pulse raced. His body trembled violently. For the first time he heard the Most Beautiful Voice – the Most Wonderful Sound - that a man can ever hear. It was the Holy One - the God He had heard so much about from his father and grandfather. And He was not just looking at Ya'akov – He was interrupting the business of the Courts of Heaven to step into his sub-conscious and SPEAK TO HIM. ***Oh, what is man that You are mindful of him – and the son of man that You visit him?*** **Psalm 8:4.**

The Voice that spoke from the top of the great paved pathway had quite a message to convey. He shared with His awestruck captive the Glorious Plan He had devised before the foundation of the world to make the place where Ya'akov laid his head that night not only Ya'akov's but also his descendants' inheritance forever. The same Voice then declared to Ya'akov that he himself, though presently 40 years old and unmarried, would have 'seed' that would spread out 'as the dust of the earth'. Ah, but there was even more. Three more times the Voice thundered. Three more stunning promises were made to Ya'akov and his seed. The Holy One promised that He would *be 'with' Ya'akov everywhere he went on this journey*. He promised to personally *provide for all Ya'akov's needs*. And He committed all the vast resources of Heaven to *bring Ya'akov back safely to the land of his birth*.

3. Ya'akov Responds to the Holy One's Revelations and Promises

Somewhere in the course of this 'Divine Promise Discourse' Ya'akov woke up. Taken quite by surprise – and not knowing the Holy One well enough yet to trust Him solely upon His Word - Ya'akov laid out a 'fleece' of sorts. It all started with an '*if*'. <u>If</u> the Holy One would both *feed and clothe* him throughout his exile .... <u>If</u> He would really *guard and protect* Ya'akov at all times .... <u>If</u> He would *bring Ya'akov safely back to his native land* .... Well, IF the Holy One would do those things, <u>then</u> – and only then – would he acknowledge the Holy One as God. Then, and only then, would he, as a covenant sign, build a 'house' to honor Him on the site of the dream. And then, and only then, would he, to seal the covenant, give the Holy One a tenth of all he obtained on this journey. Brash? Undoubtedly! Arrogant? Certainly! Childish? Absolutely! But the Holy One was not offended. Ya'akov would learn humility – and the real meaning of the fear of the Holy One - soon enough. He could learn it the easy way, or he could learn it the hard way – but He would learn it. Of that the Holy One had absolute confidence.

4. Ya'akov Arrives in Charan

Ya'akov then continued on his journey and came to a well at the outskirts of Charan. At this well Ya'akov met the young woman destined to be the love of his life - Laban's youngest daughter, *Rachel*.

5. Ya'akov Meets With and Goes to Work for Laban

Laban heard of Ya'akov's arrival and rushed out to invite him into his home. After a 30-day period of 'labor for food' Ya'akov agreed to work for Laban for 7 more years labor in exchange for the hand of Rachel in marriage. After the seven years of labor, however, Laban secretly substituted Leah, his oldest daughter, for Rachel in the darkened bedchamber. The next morning Ya'akov found himself united with someone other than the bride he had bargained for.

Laban had his reasons – or at least an excuse - for playing this trick on Ya'akov, of course. Rachel had an older sister, and in that culture it was taboo for a younger sister to be given in marriage before an older one. Knowing Ya'akov's love for Rachel, Laban took advantage of his naiveté. When his ruse was discovered he told Ya'akov that he would be happy to let him marry Rachel also - <u>if</u> Ya'akov was willing to give him an additional seven years of labor for her bride price. Ya'akov had been outwitted. He had no choice. And so quickly he found himself loved – and fought over – by two sisters who turned out, initially at least, to be a whole lot more like their father Laban than he had anticipated.

6. Ya'akov Fathers 12 Children [11 sons] By Four Women

Leah was fertile, Rachel was barren. Leah bore Ya'akov a total of seven children – six sons and a daughter. Rachel, like her kinswoman Sarai had done before her, decided to try to fix the problem of her barrenness by giving her maidservant to Ya'akov to serve as a surrogate mother. It worked. Leah then followed Rachel's example, giving Ya'akov her maidservant for the same purpose. Ya'akov thereby fathered 4 more children – two by each of his wives' maidservant.

Later in life Rachel was finally enabled by the Holy One to have a son of her own. She named this son *Yosef* (Joseph). By the end of the parsha therefore Ya'akov had accumulated two wives, two maidservants with benefits, 11 sons, and a daughter. Meanwhile, it was *boom time* in Charan, because the Holy One was greatly blessing the house of Laban, and the surrounding territory, by reason of Ya'akov's presence there.

7. Laban's Wealth Is Transferred to Ya'akov

Seeing how richly he had been blessed with material wealth by reason of Ya'akov's presence, Laban had no intention of letting Ya'akov leave. After the 14-year period of indentured service he had imposed on Ya'akov for his daughters was over, Laban used his powers of persuasion to get Ya'akov to work for him another 6 years. Under this 'deal', with a lot of help from the Holy One, Ya'akov wound up being the one who was wealthy, and Laban's holdings returned pretty much to the state they were in back when Ya'akov arrived.

8. As Resentment Over Ya'akov's Prosperity Grows, the Holy One Releases Ya'akov to Go Back Home

After Laban and his sons recognized that Ya'akov was getting wealthier and they were getting poorer they became jealous and angry. Ya'akov then received word from the Holy One that it was time to return to Kena'an. Rather than face Laban, Ya'akov decided just to take his growing family and belongings and run away under cover of darkness. Unbeknownst to Ya'akov Rachel decided to take her father's household idols with her. The hurried departure from Charan with wives, children, and false gods in tow became Ya'akov's second departure of the parsha.

9. Laban Pursues Ya'akov and Catches Up With Him at Gilad

Surprised to find Ya'akov's camp abandoned and Ya'akov, Rachel, Leah, their servants and all their children gone – along with the vast flocks and herds that had once belonged to them and his household idols to boot - Laban and his sons took off in pursuit of the fugitives with mayhem on their minds. It took Laban's war party 7 days to catch up to Ya'akov and his entourage.

10. Laban Confronts Ya'akov

A very emotional and uncomfortable confrontation ensued in the hill country East of the Jordan River that became known as Gilead. Laban accused Ya'akov of various improprieties not the least of which was the theft of his household idols. After a search of the camp for these idols proved unfruitful [due to some deception by Rachel] however the tables turned, and Ya'akov released a torrent of angry charges against Laban.

11. Ya'akov and Laban Make a Mutual Non-Aggression Pact

There were tense moments. But rather than engage in a bloody war, Laban proposed a mutual non-aggression covenant, and Ya'akov accepted. They then partook of a covenant meal and went their separate ways. The departure of Ya'akov from Gilead marked his third critical departure of the parsha.

12. Ya'akov Sees Angels for the Second Time in the Parsha

Then as Ya'akov prepares his final approach to Eretz Kena'an, just as we thought the curtain on the parsha was closing, Torah tells us Ya'akov saw a delegation of angels encamping squarely in his path. Ya'akov was thus reminded of the promises the Holy One had made to him - and the vow he made to the Holy One - 20 years previously.

Ya'akov's Secrets for How to Survive a Long, Unpleasant Exile

Over the course of this week we will see two main dimensions to Ya'akov's 20-year exile in Charan:

1) He will *develop and maintain personal virtue and intimate communion with the Holy One* in the midst of a hostile foreign culture where neither are valued; and

2) He will marry, will father children, will work hard to eke out a living, and will - despite all the negative influences that prevailed in the community in which he is forced to live - struggle to *infuse his family with the spiritual heritage received from Avraham*: *i.e.* ***to keep the way of God and to make/build tzedakah u'mishpat,*** and to be a blessing to every family and nation his life impacts.

In the course of the events, God-encounters, and life experiences Torah lays out for us to study this week we will see the Holy One do an amazing thing – He will through these events transform a very ordinary man's life into a '*stairway to Heaven'* like unto the ladder Ya'akov sees in the dream sequence with which the parsha begins.

Ya'akov will set a pattern to be followed and relived over and over again by all Avraham's true descendants. Each of us, you see, like Ya'akov has been sent - scattered like seed - throughout the world on a mission. What mission? A mission to uncover and draw out the spiritual potential the Holy One has invested in all men and all nations, tribes, and tongues, and to declare in every location and in every life circumstance as do the *serafim* that encircle the Holy One's throne "***Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His Glory***!"

Your Mission, Dear Reader, Should You Choose to Accept It ....

Following the pattern set by our Patriarch Ya'akov the *spirit* [Hebrew, *neshamah – i.e.* that which has been breathed into man by the Creator] of every person - must confront the challenge of physical existence. Departure by departure, as each person matures, establishes and follows a vocation, as he takes a spouse, as he builds a home, and as he raises a family, is faced with the seemingly impossible challenge of creating and maintaining an environment where the *neshamah* is nurtured, where Godly values are expressed, and where Godly principles of government *[i.e.* the *mitzvot* of Torah] are given *meaning, effect,* and real-life *application*.

Through a myriad of contacts with the world around him each person must face – as did Ya'akov - the challenge of discovering, refining and making manifest to the world around him the glory of the Holy One. until ***all the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of The Holy One just like the waters cover the sea***.

This pattern is reflected in the national history of Ya'akov's physical descendants, the Hebrew people. Forced to depart Eretz Yisrael in 586 BCE in connection with the Babylonian captivity and to go into *galut* [exile] among the nations, then forced to go from nation to nation by pogrom, persecution, ghetto-ization and expulsion decree, the Hebrew people have been far less than perfect over the past two and two thirds millennia.

What Hebrews *have* been successful in doing however is maintaining against all odds, by the 'keeping' power of the Holy One, a very strong tradition of God-focused and family-centered life, built squarely [albeit imperfectly] upon the twin foundation stones of the *mitzvot* of Torah and prayer. Hebrews have thereby, like Ya'akov, though very much imperfect as was he, been used mightily by the Holy One to introduce such things as monotheism, sanctification of the Holy One's Name, and eternal standards of righteousness and justice, to every corner of the world to which they have been scattered.

Israel's Exile – Like Ya'akov's – is Part of a Divinely Choreographed Harvesting Strategy

The Holy One did not leave Ya'akov *to his own devices* as he made his departures in this world. Hence on his way out of Israel on the way to exile in Charan Ya'akov will experience a dramatic vision of, and receive directions from, the Eternal One. In connection with this vision, about which we will read in detail in *Shiur L'Yom Sheni* [Monday's Study], Ya'akov will hear the Eternal One promise him unqualifiedly before he ever left the Land of milk and honey: ***I will return you to this soil***. Ya'akov needed very much to hear that. He needed to be strengthened by the knowledge that though his departure was necessary for the present, the Holy One did not intend for him to stay in Charan forever. He needed to know that because his destiny and eternal dwelling place were in Eretz Yisrael, his exile would one day – in the Holy One's time and by the Holy One's doing - come to an end. He needed to know that it was only a journey across a very narrow bridge.

We very much need those revelations as well, Dear Reader. For, you see, Israel's sons, scattered through the world, have now begun the final act of *departing* – the departure from our various lands of exile back to the land of our fathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. It is important in the midst of daily stories of terrorist attacks and 'land for peace' proposals not to lose sight of this miracle that is happening around us in our lifetimes.

Look beyond today's headlines. As terrifying or as frustrating as the headlines may be the truth that really matters is this: *We as a people – and all the people of the nations, tribes and tongues of the world who wish to participate with us - stand on*

the threshold of the Redemption promised to Ya'akov. Indeed, many – natural born Jew and covenant engrafted Gentile - have already crossed that threshold. Many more are approaching it every day. May Maschiach soon lead our people, every individual Jew who will come, and all gentiles who wish to come with them, out of exile and back to the place prepared for them - first in the Holy One's *Holy Land*, and secondly in *the World to Come.*

A Brief Introduction to Haftarah Vayeitze

Hosea 12:13 – 14:10

The haftarah readings selected by the sages for this week come from the book of the prophet known to most people today as '*Hosea*'. The prophet accuses his contemporaries of forgetting the Holy One. The direct connection between parsha *Vayeitze* and this passage in Hosea is made clear by the first verse, wherein the prophet reminds us: ***Ya'akov fled to the land of Aram, and*** *[there]* ***Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he herded sheep.*** **Hoshea 12:13.**

That reference to Ya'akov's time of exile in Charan proves to be a launching pad from which the prophet first indicts Israel for sins of *forgetting and forsaking the Holy One* and for *turning its back on His great deliverance*, then *passionately calls her to make t'shuvah* [*return*]. The prophet will say to her:

Shuvah Yisra'el ad Adonai Eloheicha
Return, Israel, to the Holy One your Lord;

ki chashalta b'avoneicha
you have stumbled because of your deviations from the path laid out for you.

K'chu imachem devarim
Take with you meaningful words and actions

v'shuvu el-Adonai
and return to the Holy One.

imeiru elav kol-tisa Avon v'kach-tov
Say to Him, 'Forgive all iniquity, and grant us favor;

uneshalmah farim s'fateinu
so we will offer the words of our lips instead of calves.'
[Hoshea 14:4-5]

The prophetic call this week for all of us is to pause and consider in what ways and in what areas of our lives we too have for all practical purposes forgotten the Holy One. Here are some questions to ponder:

Have you forgotten what His Presence feels like, and how once it overwhelmed your senses and transcended 'reason'? Have you forgotten what His Voice sounds like, and how once the sound of it made you tremble deep inside? Have you forgotten how the Fragrance of His Breath once awakened passion within you, and

caused your heart to leap within your chest? Have you forgotten what the light of His countenance looks and feels like, and how once that Light both transformed your visage and exponentially enhanced your vision?

Have you forgotten how *Wonderful He is?* Have you forgotten how *Holy and Awesome He is*? Have you forgotten *the humility that comes with the knowledge of his glory*? Ah, Dear Reader, it happens to the best of us. Sometimes in the busyness of life, in the 'mundane, mundane waiting', and as we face deadlines and interpersonal conflicts, we all forget. We don't forget that He exists; we just tend to forget that *He is Above All Else, and is Everything to us.*

Meditate also on the extent to which you have in the course of forgetting Him also forsaken His great deliverance in deference to either the cold orthodoxy of religion on the one hand or the misshapen values of secular society on the other hand. Hear the passion of the Holy One's heart in the prophet's message. This is the prophet through whom the Holy One will declare Himself to be our husband instead of our Master. Hear the Holy One crying out to you like a husband cries out to a cold-hearted spouse. Hear Him calling you back to the place of intimacy and communion with Him. And heed the call to *teshuvah*, then stand and watch in awe as Maschiach restores to you and your loved ones to the destiny and blessedness for which you were all created and which is your eternal inheritance in Him.

Mi chacham v'yaven eleh navon
Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;

v'yeda'em ki-yesharim
whoever is discerning, let him know them.

Dar'chei Adonai v'tzadikim yelchu vam
For the ways of the Holy One are right, and the righteous walk in them;

ufosh'im yikashlu vam
but transgressors stumble in them.
[Hoshea 14:10]

The Apostles of Yeshua of Natzret Speak

John 1:35-51

[Again, the next day, Yochanan stood with two of his talmidim
And seeing Yeshua as He walked, he said, *"Hinei! Seh L'Elohim!"]*

The truly great and eternal truths of Scripture run like a thread throughout all the Holy Writings. All revelation that is pure, holy, and eternal therefore must begin in the Creation story, must resurface in the accounts of the patriarchs, must come into better focus in the Sinaitic revelations, must find voice and expression in the Psalms and Wisdom writings, must be reiterated by the Prophets, and must be brought forward into the Intense Supernal Light of Messiah by one or more of the

apostolic writers. Each Revelatory Truth of the Holy One – each eternal and unchanging principle of relationship with Him – you see, is a river that runs throughout the Bible. *Our perspective of it* changes with the circumstances, but it itself does not. Our ability to grasp it and apply it to our lives increases with each resurfacing and clarification – but it remains eternally the same, *just as its Source remains the same.*

To complement and place in Messianic context the readings of *Vayeitze* and its haftarah I commend to you this year the final 16 verses of the first chapter of Yochanan's [John's] account of Yeshua's life on earth. In these passages Yochanan, who was *kohen gadol* [high priest] by birthright[9], but who turned itinerant preacher of righteousness and Immerser by reason of the pollution of the priesthood he was born to head up, will declare to those who seek to follow him that Yeshua of Natzret is 'the Lamb of God' and will thereby follow Ya'akov in the *ministry of decreasing*.

We will follow the talmidim of Yochanan – men named Andrew and Sh'mon Kefa [Simon Peter] as they come to a point of departure like unto Ya'akov's – in that they first meet the Messiah, then leave everything and everyone they know to learn and begin to walk in Messiah's way of walking out the Torah lifestyle. We will see these two introduce Messiah to a man named *Pilipos* [Phillip], and we will see *Pilipos* in turn introduce Messiah to an acquaintance named *Natan'el* [Nathaniel]. To this man Yeshua will make the famous declaration: ***Most assuredly, I tell you, hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the angels of the Holy One ascending and descending on the Son of Man.*** **John 1:51.**

Hence our week will begin and end with a vision of an open heaven, with a stairway upon which angels ascend and descend.

May you, like Ya'akov and Natan'el, be granted to see the Holy One's gateway to Heaven.
May you and your loved ones dwell in its shadow, and live in the presence of angels.

The Rabbi's son

[9] See Luke 1:5-17.

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

The Fourth Petition: ***Ga'al*** [Kinsman Redemption]

Re'eh v'onyeinu, v'rivah riveinu
Behold our troubles, and carry away our sorrows

u'goleinu m'hera l'ma'an Shemeicha
and redeem us quickly, for the sake of Your Name

ki go'el chazak atah
for You are a fierce Redeemer

Baruch Atah Adonai Go'el Yisrael
Blessed are You, O Holy One, Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer