

Parashat Vayetzei (Genesis 28.10-32.3)

The biography of Jacob as an independent personality, a patriarch in his own right, now begins. The home-loving favorite of an overprotective mother is now an exile, utterly alone and friendless, embarking on a long perilous journey that takes him from Beer-sheba in southern Canaan to Charan in northern Mesopotamia. His character is to be tested and refined, his personality molded and transformed by the experience.

In typically non-descriptive biblical style, the narrative provides no details about the adventures or the trials and tribulations of Jacob in the course of his trek, only the bare facts that he set out and that he arrived. This follows the pattern of the accounts of Abraham's three-day journey to Moriah and of his servant's mission to Aram-naharaim. In the present instance, however, the silence on detail is broken by the highlighting of a single, momentous encounter on the way, an encounter not with man but with God. This event draws the curtain on the cycle of Jacob-Esau stories and prepares the reader for a new phase in the life of Jacob.

Parashat Vayetzei (Genesis 28.10-32.3)

Chapter 28.10-22

10 Jacob left Beersheba, and set out for Haran. 11 He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12 He had a dream; a stairway [ramp—RA; ladder—CS, REF, EF] was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky [to heaven—CS, RA], and angels of God were going up and down on it. 13 And the Lord was standing beside him [stood above it—CS; was standing over him—REF; was over against him—EF; was poised over him—RA] and He said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. 14 Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. 15 Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

16 Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!” 17 Shaken, he said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God [a house of God—EF], and that is the gateway to heaven.” 18 Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19 He named that site Beit-El [house of God]; but previously the name of the city had been Luz. 20 Jacob then made a vow, saying, “If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 and if I return safe to my father’s house—the Lord shall be my God. 22 And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God’s abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You.”

Chapter 29

1 Jacob resumed his journey [lit. lifted up his feet, so REF, RA, EF] and came to the land of the Easterners [of the people of Kedem—CS]. 2 There before his eyes was a well in the open. Three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for the flocks were watered from that well. The stone on the mouth of the well was large. 3 When all the flocks were gathered there, the stone would be rolled from the mouth of the well and the sheep watered; then the stone would be put back in its place on the mouth of the well. 4 Jacob said to them, “My friends, where are you from?” And they said, “We are from Haran.” 5 He said to them, “Do you know Lavan the son of Nachor?” And they said, “Yes, we do.” 6 He continued, “Is he well?” They answered, “Yes, he is; and there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock.” 7 He said, “It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals; water the flock and take them to pasture.” 8 But they said, “We cannot, until all the flocks are rounded up; then the stone is rolled off the mouth of the well and we water the sheep.”

POINTS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

Guide to the Translators and Commentators used here

EF: Everett Fox REF: Richard Elliott Friedman RA: Robert Alter NS: Nahum Sarna CS: Chaim Stern
SRH: Samson Raphael Hirsch RASHI: Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak OJPS: Old Jewish Publication Society version
WGP: W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* TWC2*The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's flock; for she was a shepherdess. 10 And when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his uncle [lit. "his mother's brother"] Lavan, and the flock of his uncle [his mother's brother] Lavan, Jacob went up and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well, and watered the flock of his uncle [his mother's brother] Lavan. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and broke into tears. 12 Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

13 On hearing the news of his sister's son Jacob, Lavan ran to greet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and took him into his house. He told Lavan all that had happened, 14 and Lavan said to him, "You are truly my bone and flesh." When he had stayed with him a month's time [lit. "a month of days"], 15 Lavan said to Jacob, "Just because you are a kinsman [my brother—lit., REF, EF], should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

16 Now Lavan had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes [Leah's eyes were tender—REF, RA; were delicate—EF]; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. 18 Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." 19 Lavan said, "Better that I give her to you than that I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Lavan, "Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her." 22 And Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. 23 When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her. 24 Lavan had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid. 25 When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Lavan, "What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?" 26 Lavan said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. 27 Wait until the bridal week of this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years." 28 Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife. 29 Lavan had given his maidservant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid. 30 And Jacob cohabited with Rachel also; indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served him another seven years. 31 The Lord saw that Leah was unloved [hated—REF, EF; disfavored—CS; despised—RA] and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32 Leah conceived and bore a son, and named him Reuben [See, a Son!—EF]; for she declared, "It means: 'The Lord has seen my affliction'; it also means: 'Now my husband will love me.'" 33 She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This is because the Lord heard that I was unloved and has given me this one also"; so she named him Simeon [Hearing—EF]. 34 Again she conceived and bore a son and declared, "This time my husband will become attached to me [will join me—RA], for I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi [Joining—EF]. 35 She conceived again and bore a son, and declared, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she named him Judah [Giving-Thanks—EF]. Then she stopped bearing.

Chapter 30

1 When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb?" 3 She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children." 4 So she gave him her maid Bilhah as concubine, and Jacob cohabited with her. 5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 And Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; indeed, He has heeded my plea and given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan [**He-Has-Done-Justice—EF**]. 7 Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 And Rachel said, "A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed." So she named him Naphtali [**My Struggle—EF**]. 9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine. 10 And when Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, 11 Leah said, "What luck!" [**What fortune!—EF, REF, CS**] So she named him Gad [**Fortune—EF**]. 12 When Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, 13 Leah declared, "What fortune!" [**What happiness!—EF, REF, CS**] meaning, "Women will deem me fortunate [will call me happy—EF, REF, CS]." So she named him Asher [**Happiness—EF**]. 14 Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben came upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15 But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." 16 When Jacob came home from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You are to sleep with me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night. 17 God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore him a fifth son. 18 And Leah said, "God has given me my reward for having given my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar [**This-Is-Hire—EF**]. 19 When Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son, 20 Leah said, "God has given me a choice gift; this time my husband will exalt me, for I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun [**Prince—EF**]. 21 Last, she bore him a daughter, and named her Dinah. 22 Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my disgrace [**Hebrew: asaf elohim et kherpati**]." 24 So she named him Joseph [**Yosef—EF**], which is to say, "May the Lord add [**Hebrew: yosef adonai**] another son for me." 25 After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Lavan, "Give me leave to go back to my own homeland. 26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, that I may go; for well you know what services I have rendered you." 27 But Lavan said to him, "If you will indulge me [**If I have found favor in your eyes— lit. & EF, REF, RA**] I have learned by divination [**I have prospered—CS & REF based on a parallel Akkadian phrase; have become**

wealthy—RA] that the Lord has blessed me on your account.” **28** And he continued, “Name the wages due from me, and I will pay you.” **29** But he said, “You know well how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me. **30** For the little you had before I came has grown to much, since the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. And now, when shall I make provision for my own household?” **31** He said, “What shall I pay you?” And Jacob said, “Pay me nothing! If you will do this thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flocks: **32** let me pass through your whole flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted animal—every dark-colored sheep and every spotted and speckled goat. Such shall be my wages. **33** In the future when you go over my wages, let my honesty toward you testify for me: if there are among my goats any that are not speckled or spotted or any sheep that are not dark-colored, they got there by theft.” **34** And Lavan said, “Very well, let it be as you say.” **35** But that same day he removed the streaked and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats—every one that had white on it—and all the dark-colored sheep, and left them in the charge of his sons. **36** And he put a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Lavan’s flock. **37** Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar, and of almond and plane, and peeled white stripes in them, laying bare the white of the shoots. **38** The rods that he had peeled he set up in front of the goats in the troughs, the water receptacles, that the goats came to drink from. Their mating occurred when they came to drink, **39** and since the goats mated by the rods, the goats brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young. **40** But Jacob dealt separately with the sheep; he made these animals face the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals in Lavan’s flock. And so he produced special flocks for himself, which he did not put with Lavan’s flocks. **41** Moreover, when the sturdier [**or early-breeding**] animals were mating, Jacob would place the rods in the troughs, in full view of the animals, so that they mated by the rods; **42** but with the feeble [**or late-breeding**] animals he would not place them there. Thus the feeble ones went to Lavan and the sturdy to Jacob. **43** So the man grew exceedingly prosperous, and came to own large flocks, maidservants and menservants, camels and asses.

Chapter 31

1 Now he heard the things that Lavan’s sons were saying: “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s, and from that which was our father’s he has built up all this wealth.” **2** Jacob also saw that Lavan’s manner toward him was not as it had been in the past. **3** Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers where you were born, and I will be with you.” **4** Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field, where his flock was, **5** and said to them, “I see that your father’s manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father has been with me. **6** As you know, I have served your father with all my might; **7** but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again [**lit. ten times**]. God, however, would not let him do me harm. **8** If he said thus, ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks would drop

speckled young; and if he said thus, 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks would drop streaked young. **9** God has taken away your father's livestock and given it to me. **10** "Once, at the mating time of the flocks, I had a dream in which I saw [lit. I raised my eyes and saw in a dream, behold] that the he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and mottled. **11** And in the dream an angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' 'Here,' I answered. **12** And he said, 'Note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled, and mottled; for I have noted all that Lavan has been doing to you. **13** I am the God of Beit-El, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land.'" **14** Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, "Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father's house? **15** Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. **16** Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you." **17** Thereupon Jacob put his children and wives on camels; **18** and he drove off all his livestock and all the wealth that he had amassed, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. **19** Meanwhile Lavan had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household idols. **20** Jacob kept Lavan the Aramean in the dark [lit., stole the mind of Lavan the Aramean], not telling him that he was fleeing, **21** and fled with all that he had. Soon he was across the Euphrates and heading toward the hill country of Gilead. **22** On the third day, Lavan was told that Jacob had fled. **23** So he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days, catching up with him in the hill country of Gilead. **24** But God appeared to Lavan the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad." **25** Lavan overtook Jacob. Jacob had pitched his tent on the Height, and Lavan with his kinsmen encamped in the hill country of Gilead. **26** And Lavan said to Jacob, "What did you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword? **27** Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with festive music, with timbrel and lyre. **28** You did not even let me kiss my sons and daughters good-by! It was a foolish thing for you to do. **29** I have it in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father said to me last night, 'Beware of attempting anything with Jacob, good or bad.' **30** Very well, you had to leave because you were longing for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?" **31** Jacob answered Lavan, saying, "I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. **32** But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! In the presence of our kinsmen, point out what I have of yours and take it." Jacob, of course, did not know that Rachel had stolen them. **33** So Lavan went into Jacob's tent and Leah's tent and the tents of the two maidservants; but he did not find them. Leaving Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. **34** Rachel, meanwhile, had taken the idols and placed them in the camel cushion and sat on them; and Lavan rummaged through the tent without finding them. **35** For she said to her father, "Let not my lord take it

amiss that I cannot rise before you, for the period of women is upon me.” Thus he searched, but could not find the household idols. **36** Now Jacob became incensed and took up his grievance with Lavan. Jacob spoke up and said to Lavan, “What is my crime, what is my guilt that you should pursue me? **37** You rummaged through all my things; what have you found of all your household objects? Set it here, before my kinsmen and yours, and let them decide between us two. **38** “These twenty years I have spent in your service, your ewes and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I feast on rams from your flock. **39** That which was torn by beasts I never brought to you; I myself made good the loss; you exacted it of me, whether snatched by day or snatched by night. **40** Often [lit. I was], scorching heat ravaged me by day and frost by night; and sleep fled from my eyes. **41** Of the twenty years that I spent in your household, I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flocks; and you changed my wages time and again. **42** Had not the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear [meaning of Hebrew *pachad* is uncertain; REF prefers Awe] of Isaac, been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God took notice of my plight and the toil of my hands, and He gave judgment last night.” **43** Then Lavan spoke up and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks; all that you see is mine. Yet what can I do now about my daughters or the children they have borne? **44** Come, then, let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness between you and me.” **45** Thereupon Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. **46** And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” So they took stones and made a mound; and they partook of a meal there by the mound. **47** Lavan named it Yegar-sahadutha [Aramaic for the mound or stone-heap of witness] but Jacob named it Gal-ed [Hebrew for the mound or, stone-heap of witness]. **48** And Lavan declared, “This mound is a witness between you and me this day.” That is why it was named Gal-ed; **49** and [it was called] Mizpah, because he said, “May the Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of sight of each other. **50** If you ill-treat my daughters or take other wives besides my daughters—though no one else be about, remember, God Himself will be witness between you and me.” **51** And Lavan said to Jacob, “Here is this mound and here the pillar which I have set up between you and me: **52** this mound shall be witness and this pillar shall be witness that I am not to cross to you past this mound, and that you are not to cross to me past this mound and this pillar, with hostile intent. **53** May the God of Abraham and the god of Nachor—their ancestral deities—“judge between us.” And Jacob swore by the Fear [meaning of Hebrew *pachad* is uncertain; REF prefers Awe] of his father Isaac. **54** Jacob then offered up a sacrifice on the Height, and invited his kinsmen to partake of the meal. After the meal, they spent the night on the Height.

Chapter 32

1 Early in the morning, Lavan kissed his sons and daughters and bade them good-by; then Lavan left on his journey homeward. **2** Jacob went on his way, and angels of God encountered him. **3** When he saw them, Jacob said, “This

is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim.

