

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vayetzei
November 13, 2021 *** 9 Kislev, 5782

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We welcome all to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Vayetzei in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3191/jewish/Vayetze-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Jacob leaves his hometown of Beersheba and journeys to Charan. On the way, he encounters “the place” and sleeps there, dreaming of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending on it; G-d appears and promises that the land upon which he lies will be given to his descendants. In the morning, Jacob raises the stone on which he laid his head as an altar and monument, pledging that it will be made the house of G-d.

In Haran, Jacob stays with and works for his uncle Laban, tending Laban’s sheep. Laban agrees to give him his younger daughter, Rachel—whom Jacob loves—in marriage, in return for seven years’ labor. But on the wedding night, Laban gives him his elder daughter, Leah, instead—a deception Jacob discovers only in the morning. Jacob marries Rachel, too, a week later, after agreeing to work another seven years for Laban.

Leah gives birth to six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun—and a daughter, Dinah, while Rachel remains barren. Rachel gives Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife to bear children in her stead, and two more sons, Dan and Naphtali, are born. Leah does the same with her handmaid, Zilpah, who gives birth to Gad and Asher. Finally, Rachel’s prayers are answered and she gives birth to Joseph. Jacob has now been in Charan for fourteen years, and wishes to return home. But Laban persuades him to remain, now offering him sheep in return for his labor. Jacob prospers, despite Laban’s repeated attempts to swindle him. After six years, Jacob leaves Charan in stealth, fearing that Laban would prevent him from leaving with the family and property for which he labored. Laban pursues Jacob, but is warned by G-d in a dream not to harm him. Laban and Jacob make a pact

on Mount Gal-Ed, attested to by a pile of stones, and Jacob proceeds to the Holy Land, where he is met by angels.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Hosea 11:7 – 12:14

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/593837/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's *haftarah* mentions Jacob's flight from home to the "field of Aram," an episode that is recounted in this week's Torah reading.

The *haftarah* begins with the prophet Hosea's rebuke of the Jewish people for forsaking G-d. Nevertheless, Hosea assures the people that G-d 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 prophet discusses the misdeeds of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the future degeneration of the Kingdom of Judea. He contrasts their behavior to that of their forefather Jacob who was faithful to G-d and prevailed against enemies, both human and angelic.

The *haftarah* also makes mention of the ingathering of the exiles which will occur during 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."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Time for Love, Time for Justice (Vayetse) from the Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

<https://rabbisacks.org/time-for-love-time-for-justice-vayetse/>

Judaism is supremely a religion of love: three loves.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” (Deut. 6:5);

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Lev. 19:18);

And

“You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land.” (Deut. 10:19)[1]

Not only is Judaism a religion of love. It was also the first civilisation to place love at the centre of the moral life. C. S. Lewis and others pointed out that all great civilisations contain something like the golden rule – Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you,[2] or, in Hillel’s negative formulation: Don’t do to others what you would hate them to do to you. (Shabbat 31a) This is what Game Theorists call reciprocal altruism or tit-for-tat. Some form of this altruism, (especially

the variant devised by Martin Nowak of Harvard called “generous”) has been proven by computer simulation to be the best strategy for the survival of any group.[3]

Judaism is also about justice. Albert Einstein spoke about the “almost fanatical love of justice” that made him thank his lucky stars that he was born a Jew.[4] The only place in the Torah to explain why Abraham was chosen to be the founder of a new faith states, “For I have chosen him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” (Gen. 18:19) So why this combination of justice and love? Why is love alone not enough? Our parsha contains a gripping passage of only a few words that gives us the answer. Recall the background: Jacob, fleeing home, is taking refuge with his uncle Laban. He falls in love with Rachel, Laban’s younger daughter, and works for seven years so that he can marry her. A deception is practised on him, and when he wakes up the morning after their wedding night, he discovers that he has married Rachel’s elder sister Leah. Livid, he confronts Laban. Laban replies: “It is not done in our place to marry the younger before the elder.” (Gen. 29:26) He tells Jacob he can marry Rachel as well, in return for another seven years of work.

We then read, or rather hear, a series of very poignant words. To understand their impact, we have to recall that in ancient times until the invention of printing there were few books. Until then most people (other than those standing at the bimah) heard the Torah in the synagogue. They did not see it in print. The phrase Keriat ha-Torah really means, not reading the Torah but proclaiming it, making it a public declaration.[5]

There is a fundamental difference between reading and hearing in the way we process information. Reading, we can see the entire text – the sentence, the paragraph – at one time. Hearing, we cannot. We hear only one word at a time, and we do not know in advance how a sentence or paragraph will end. Some of the most powerful literary effects in an oral culture occur when the opening words of a sentence lead us to expect one ending and instead we encounter another. These are the poignant words we hear:

 | “**And he [Jacob] loved also Rachel.**” (Gen. 29:30)

This is what we expected and hoped for. Jacob now has two wives, sisters, something that will be forbidden in later Jewish law. It is a situation fraught with tension. But our first impression is that all will be well. He loves them both.

That expectation is dashed by the next word:

“mi-Leah”, “more than Leah.”

This is not merely unexpected. It is also grammatically impossible. You cannot have a sentence that says, “X also loved Y more than Z.” The “also” and the “more than” contradict one another. This is one of those rare and powerful instances in which the Torah deliberately uses fractured syntax to indicate a fractured relationship.[6]

Then comes the next phrase and it is shocking.

“The Lord saw that Leah was hated.” (Gen. 29:31)

Was Leah hated? No. The previous sentence has just told us she was loved. What then does the Torah mean by “hated”? It means, that is how Leah felt. Yes she was loved, but less than her sister. Leah knew, and had known for seven years, that Jacob was passionately in love with her younger sister Rachel, for whom the Torah says that he worked for seven years “but they seemed to him like a few days because he was so in love with her.” (Gen. 29:20)

Leah was not hated. She was less loved. But someone in that situation cannot help but feel rejected. The Torah forces us to hear Leah’s pain in the names she gives her children. Her first she calls Reuben, saying “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.” The second she calls Shimon, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved.” The third she called Levi, saying, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me.” (Gen. 29:32-35) There is sustained anguish in these words.

We hear the same tone later when Reuben, Leah’s firstborn, finds mandrakes in the field. Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac properties, so he gives them to his mother hoping that this will draw his father to her. Rachel, who has been experiencing a different kind of pain, childlessness, sees the mandrakes and asks Leah for them. Leah then says: “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?” (Gen. 30:15) The misery is palpable.

Note what has happened. It began with love. It has been about love throughout. Jacob loved Rachel. He loved her at first sight. There is no other love story quite like it in the Torah. Abraham and Sarah are already married by the time we first meet them. Isaac had his wife chosen for him by his father’s servant. But Jacob loves. He is more emotional than the other patriarchs; that is the problem. Love unites but it also divides. It leaves the unloved, even the less-loved, feeling rejected, abandoned, forsaken, alone. That is why you cannot build a society, a community or even a family on love alone. There must be justice-as-fairness also.

If we look at the fifteen times the word “love,” ahavah, is mentioned in the book of Genesis, we make an extraordinary discovery. Every time love is mentioned, it generates conflict. Isaac loved Esau but Rebecca loved Jacob. Jacob loved Joseph, Rachel’s firstborn, more than his other sons. From these came two of the most fateful sibling rivalries in Jewish history.

Yet even these pale into insignificance when we reflect on the first time the word love appears in the Torah, in the opening words of the trial of the Binding of Isaac: “Take now your son, your only one, the one you love...” (Gen. 22:2) Rashi, following Midrash (itself inspired by the obvious comparison between the Binding of Isaac and the book of Job), says that Satan, the accusing angel, said to God when Abraham made a feast to celebrate the weaning of his son: “You see, he loves his child more than You.” (Rashi to Genesis 22:1) That, according to the Midrash, was the reason for the trial, to show that Satan’s accusation was untrue. Judaism is a religion of love. It is so for profound theological reasons. In the world of myth, the gods were at worst hostile, at best indifferent to humankind. In contemporary atheism the universe and life exist for no reason whatsoever. We are accidents of matter, the result of blind chance and natural selection. Judaism’s approach is the most beautiful I know. We are here because God created us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. Love, God’s love, is implicit in our very being.

So many of our texts express that love: the paragraph before the Shema with its talk of “great” and “eternal love”; the Shema itself with its command of love; the priestly blessings to be uttered in love; Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs, the great poem of love; Shlomo Albaketz’s Lecha Dodi, “Come, my Beloved,” Eliezer Azikri’s Yedid Nefesh, “Beloved of the Soul.” If you want to live well, love. If you seek to be close to God, love. If you want your home to be filled with the light of the Divine Presence, love. Love is where God lives.

But love is not enough. You cannot build a family, let alone a society, on love alone. For that you need justice also. Love is partial, justice is impartial. Love is particular, justice is universal. Love is for this person not that, but justice is for all. Much of the moral life is generated by this tension between love and justice. It is no accident that this is the theme of many of the narratives of Genesis. Genesis is about people and their relationships, while the rest of the Torah is predominantly about society.

Justice without love is harsh. Love without justice is unfair, or so it will seem to the less-loved. Yet to experience both at the same time is

virtually impossible. Niels Bohr, the Nobel prize winning physicist, once discovered that his son had stolen an object from a local shop. He realised that he could have two separate reactions to the situation: he could view his son from the perspective of a judge (justice) or through his perspective as a father (love), but he could not do both simultaneously.[7]

At the heart of the moral life is a conflict with no simple resolution. There is no general rule to tell us when love is the right reaction and when justice is. In the 1960s the Beatles sang "All you need is love." Would that it were so, but it is not. Love is not enough. Let us love, but let us never forget those who feel unloved. They too are people. They too have feelings. They too are in the image of God.

[1] See also Leviticus 19:33-34. [2] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York, 1947. [3] See for example Martin Nowak and Roger Highfield, *Super Cooperators: Altruism, Evolution and Mathematics (or, Why We Need Each Other to Succeed)*. Melbourne: Text, 2011. [4] Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949. [5] This has halachic implications. Keriat ha-Torah is, according to most Rishonim, a chovat ha-tsibbur, a communal rather than an individual obligation (unlike the reading of the Megillah on Purim). [6] The classic example is the untranslatable verse in Gen. 4:8, in which Cain kills Abel. The breakdown of words expresses the breakdown of relationship, which leads to the breakdown of morality and the first murder. [7] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 51.

[Facing Our Blessings \(Part 2: Recognition\) by R. Aviva Richman](https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/facing-our-blessings-part-2#source-11353)
<https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/facing-our-blessings-part-2#source-11353>

When last we left Ya'akov, his father had given him a blessing without recognizing him, a blessing that Ya'akov knows was not meant for him. As he flees from home, he is plagued by wondering whether he deserves blessing at all, and this anxiety continues to nag at him throughout his time with Lavan. On a literary level, "recognition"—or lack thereof—reemerges at pivotal moments of this unfolding story. Following the theme of recognition in Ya'akov's journey allows us to address the same fundamental questions ourselves: Do we deserve the blessings we have? Do we get the blessings we "deserve"?

Lavan confronts Ya'akov when he sneaks away with his large family and many possessions to return home. Accusations abound. Most pointedly, Lavan accuses Ya'akov of stealing his idols. In response, Ya'akov says: Genesis 31:32

...“In the presence of our kinsmen, recognize what I have of yours and take it!” ...

At face value, he is simply saying that Lavan should check for the idols. But the significance of this imperative “recognize!” becomes more powerful when we pay close attention to the broader meaning and usage of this word. The last time we saw this Hebrew root was when Ya'akov came to Yitzhak for blessing and he “did not recognize him / וְלֹא־הִכִּירוֹ.” These two scenes are the first times the Torah uses this relatively uncommon root (נ.כ.ר). Literarily, the scenes are in conversation, centered around the theme of recognition.

What does “recognition / נ.כ.ר.” entail? It can simply mean to identify something or someone, but it can also connote *feelings and actions* that flow from recognition of a particular individual. A judge should not “recognize” one party over the other and give preferential treatment (Deuteronomy 16:19); a father should not “recognize” the son of a beloved wife and offer more inheritance, over and above the firstborn from a hated wife (21:17). In one grammatical form, the Hebrew root can also mean its opposite: to disguise or alienate. The concept of “recognition” in these broader senses has been the object of much study across disciplines in the past several decades, in philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience alike.¹ With recognition comes clarity about who we are, who we are in relationship with, and what these relationships require of us.

This concept of recognition drives the string of stories of Ya'akov and his sons throughout the book of Genesis. Pivotal moments hinge on this same Hebrew root, and on the root question of whether a relationship will deepen in mutual recognition or unravel in alienation. Yehudah shows Ya'akov Yosef's coat dipped in blood saying: “Recognize / הִכִּירוּ־נָא” —is this Yosef's coat (37:32)? As a mirror to this scene, pregnant Tamar turns to Yehudah, after he was with her as a prostitute, and voices the same imperative to “Recognize / הִכִּירוּ־נָא” the

personal belongings he had left behind (38:25). Her ask isn't only for identification, but to live up to his responsibility in this relationship, in contrast to his earlier abandonment towards his brother echoing in these same words. Finally, when Yosef "recognizes" his brothers who come down to Egypt during famine even as they don't "recognize him" (42:8, וַיִּכְרֹּיֶסְרָא אֶתְאָחִיזוּ וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָתוּ, v. 7), he is living out a complex tension between recognition and alienation in his relationship to family.

What exactly was the nature of the initial "lack of recognition," when Ya'akov came before his father? Why does it continue to reverberate so powerfully—as he confronts Lavan, and as his sons bear his legacy of alienation? One *midrash* offers an eerie and profound interpretation of Yitzhak's failure to recognize Ya'akov. Yitzhak may very well have identified that it was Ya'akov in front of him, but through his prophetic ability to see into the future, he saw that Ya'akov's descendants would include people who were wicked—no better than Esav.² So he saw no reason to compassionately embrace Ya'akov as more deserving of blessing in his own right, to "recognize" him as the preferred son.³ By bringing up Ya'akov's future wicked descendants, the *midrash* also leaves *us* with the sense that Ya'akov didn't inherently "deserve" blessing. We end up with a story where there is no alignment between blessing and merit. There is no such thing as a deserved blessing. It is this lingering impact of Yitzhak's lack of recognition, and Ya'akov's anxiety about whether he deserves blessing, that comes to a head in the climactic scene when Ya'akov confronts Lavan with the demand for recognition, הִכְרָתְךָ. As Lavan searches through all of Ya'akov's belongings, Ya'akov launches into a speech demanding recognition for his hard work under the extremely difficult and unfair conditions of Lavan's terms (Genesis 31:37-42). Ya'akov speaks of how much he has done to earn this prosperity—i.e. his own blessing—and cringes at Lavan's accusation that Ya'akov is a crook who has earned none of it. Invoking the word "recognize / הִכָּר," Ya'akov shows how scarred he is from his father's lack of recognition, how much anxiety he carries about whether he will ever be recognized as someone worthy of blessing.

The final biblical story that hinges on this same root is that of Boaz and Ruth, which can be seen as a denouement to the cascading effects of “recognition gone wrong” in the relationships surrounding Ya’akov and his children. When Boaz chooses to behave generously towards Ruth, offering her food and protection, she turns to him saying:

Ruth 2:10

“Why have I found favor in your eyes to recognize me, when I am a stranger?”⁴

Ruth feels she is receiving an undeserved blessing, but it is not a source of guilt or anxiety. This undeserved blessing represents an expansive gaze of recognition, one that embraces the other in relationship even when there is no reason to do so. Boaz’ generosity of recognition stems from Ruth’s initiative in extending the recognition of family and compassion towards her mother-in-law, Naomi, when she had no responsibility to do so. Recognition in this story is about cascading acts of generosity, not about trying to earn or pay back what we receive. This accords with how the philosopher Paul Ricoeur speaks of the comfort and catalyzing effect recognition offers, as it “lightens the weight of obligation to give in return and reorients this toward a generosity equal to the one that led to the first gift [of being recognized].”⁵ Ruth generously recognizes Naomi, and this catalyzes a separate act of generosity.

The resolution to Ya’akov’s misalignment of undeserved blessing is not to try to justify why we deserve the blessings we have. We live in a world where prosperity, hard work, and merit don’t necessarily match up. Following in the footsteps of Ruth and Boaz, we can aspire to an approach where the response to undeserved blessing is to expansively share our own gaze of recognition, empathy, and responsibility, to do whatever we can to move forward that undeserved blessing into the world.

Shabbat Shalom.

¹ French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in his book *Parcours de la Reconnaissance*, speaks of recognition as a fundamental part of coming into our own self-knowledge and sense of responsibility towards others. See the translation of David Pellauer, *The Course of Recognition* (Harvard, 2005). Facial recognition has become its own

research area, in neuroscience and psychology, as we have developed the skills to explore the specific brain area dedicated to facial recognition and how it is stimulated in significant moments, particularly as part of developing parent-child relationships.

² Bereshit Rabbah 65:22: "ולא הכירו כי היו ידיו וגו' בשעה שהיו רשעים עומדים ממנו לא הכירו."

³ One commentary explicitly interprets the root נ.כ.ר. here as showing love and compassion. See Peirush Maharzo of R. Zev Wolf Einhorn, 19th c. Belarus: "לא הכירו. פי' "מלשון רחמים וחמלה כמ"ש מדוע מצאתי חן בעיניך להכירני."

⁴ Again, playing on the same dual meaning of the root נ.כ.ר.

⁵ The Course of Recognition, p. 243.

"Mostly Dead is Slightly Alive" by Bex Stern Rosenblatt

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J05EajC5rCYBEHe6tw-ctgbMkY8SgqWy/view>

The first time we are introduced to the concept of Sheol is by Jacob. Our once strong character, who outwitted brother and uncle and wrestled with an angel, is undone by the supposed death of his son, Joseph. From that point onward, there is a refrain that repeats for Jacob. No matter what the situation is, he talks of descending, mourning, to Sheol.

Meanwhile, in our haftarah portion, we get one of the most memorable descriptions of what Sheol might be. God speaks, saying in the JPS translation:

"From Sheol itself I will save them,
Redeem them from very Death.
Where, O Death, are your plagues?
Your pestilence where, O Sheol?"

So what is this Sheol, this place Jacob brings up back in Genesis and that God seems to mock many hundreds of years later in the Book of Hosea? Clearly, it is associated with death. In order to understand what this association means, we have to explore what we mean when we talk about death in the Tanakh. Jon Levenson puts forth a very interesting way of how to understand death in a biblical context. He writes, "death in the ancient Near Eastern world was often conceived of as a disease - the most serious disease, to be sure, and seldom if ever, curable - but a disease nonetheless."

The specter of death hangs over each of the patriarchs in Genesis. Isaac and Jacob both lean into old age and climb onto their deathbeds many decades before they actually die. From a modern perspective, this

seems bizarre. Why do they assume they are dying when they have such a long time to live? Yet from a biblical perspective, Isaac and Jacob place themselves on the death-side of the continuum or spectrum from life to death. They view themselves as sick or sad or incapacitated, more dead than alive in an existence without hope. Of course, that didn't mean they were literally, medically dead as we understand death today. They were just suffering from death, the disease, for decades. Neither of them ever recovered.

Within this framework of death, Sheol is the location at which death is experienced. It is the narrow place, the pit, the prison, the watery deep, the seemingly inescapable underneath where humans feel themselves to be when they are suffering from death, the disease. It is Jacob's way of expressing his hopelessness and inertia upon losing Joseph. He finds himself in Sheol, in a state of confined existence.

Of course, God is a God of life, a living God. In this way, God is very much located at the opposite end of the spectrum from death. In fact, in many of the Psalms, Sheol is depicted as a place or feeling of being cut off from God. What we see then in the text of the haftarah is God overcoming this separation. God enters the place that is defined as God's absence and in doing so overcomes death itself. When God chooses to come down into the metaphorical pit with us, the pit loses its power over us to such an extent that the disease of death no longer seems quite so fatal. When hope is returned to us, doom is no longer inevitable. As we read the story of Jacob in the coming weeks, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the interplay between hope and God as the thing that redeems us from various Sheols.

Yahrtzeits

Neil Fox remembers his father Hyman Fox (Chaim) on Wed. Nov. 17th (Kislev

Blossom Primer remembers her husband Irwin Primer and Jeremy his father on Fri. Nov. 19th (Kislev15)

Amy Cooper remembers her uncle George Israel Stieglitz (Yisrael) on Fri. Nov. 19th (Kislev 15)

Roni Bamforth remembers her father William Gelfond on Fri. Nov.19th (Kislev 15)

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### Coming Up At Kol Rina

Shabbat Morning, live and in-person at Kol Rina, November 13, beginning at 9:45

Shabbat morning services will take place indoors at the Kol Rina space in view of the expected cool temperatures and possible rain. Masks and full vaccination are required for all services indoors. We hope you will join us!

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Monday evening minyan

Our regular weekday evening minyan will take place via Zoom on Monday, November 15, beginning at 8:00. Your presence allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending. Use the following Zoom link to attend:

<https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09>

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### Don't forget to register: Exciting lecture series by Dr. Ruth Calderon

Israel's leading secular scholar of Talmudic narrative, Dr. Ruth Calderon, will speak via Zoom from Israel on three Sundays, November 21, December 12 and December 19, at 1:30 PM. The series, entitled *Holiness Seen and Unseen: Three Talmudic Tales*, is presented by the Susan Marx Fund for Adult Education at Kol Rina, in cooperation with Congregation Beth Shalom of Bloomington, Indiana and Temple Beth Shalom of Livingston, New Jersey.

To receive the Zoom link, please register on Eventbrite using the following link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/holiness-seen-and-unseen-3-talmudic-tales-dr-ruth-calderon-3-part-series-tickets-199398896467>

This is an outstanding opportunity to hear a strikingly original thinker, provided free of charge and open to all.

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Save the date: Hanukkah party at Kol Rina

Let's have a party, we'll all dance a hora Dig out your Hanukkiah and your dreidels: Kol Rina will be putting on a fun Hanukkah party on Sunday, December

5 from 3:30 to 5:30. Put it on your calendar and watch this space for further details!