

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vayetzei
November 25, 2023 *** 12 Kislev, 5784

[Vayetzei in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3191/jewish/Vayetze-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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The name of the Parshah, "Vayetze," means "And he left" and it is found in Genesis 28:10.

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 Charan, 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 14 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

The Character of Jacob: Vayetzei by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z'l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayetse/the-character-of-jacob/>

What kind of man was Jacob? This is the question that cries out to us in episode after episode of his life.

The first time we hear a description of him he is called *ish tam*: a simple, quiet, plain, straightforward man. But that is exactly what he seems not to be. We see him taking Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. We see him taking Esau's blessing, in borrowed clothes, taking advantage of their father's blindness.

These are troubling episodes. We can read them midrashically. The Midrash makes Jacob all-good and Esau all-bad. It rereads the biblical text to make it consistent with the highest standards of the moral life. There is much to be said for this approach.

Alternatively, we could say that in these cases the end justifies the means. In the case of the birthright, Jacob might have been testing Esau to see if he really cared

about it. Since he gave it away so readily, Jacob might be right in concluding that it should go to one who valued it. In the case of the blessing, Jacob was obeying his mother, who had received a Divine oracle saying that “the older shall serve the younger.”

Yet the text remains disturbing. Isaac says to Esau, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” Esau says, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob [supplanter]? He has supplanted me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Such accusations are not levelled against any other biblical hero.

Nor does the story end there. In this week’s parsha a similar deceit is practiced on him. After his wedding night, he discovers that he has married Leah, not, as he thought, his beloved Rachel. He complains to Laban:

“What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?” [Gen. 29:25](#)

Laban replies:

“It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn.”
[Gen. 29:26](#)

It’s hard not to see this as precise measure-for-measure retribution. The younger Jacob pretended to be the older Esau. Now the elder Leah has been disguised as the younger Rachel. A fundamental principle of biblical morality is at work here: As you do, so shall be done to you.

Yet the web of deception continues. After Rachel has given birth to Joseph, Jacob wants to return home. He has been with Laban long enough. Laban urges him to stay and tells him to name his price. Jacob then embarks on an extraordinary course of action. He tells Laban he wants no wages at all. Let Laban remove every spotted or streaked lamb from the flock, and every streaked or spotted goat. Jacob will then keep, as his hire, any new born spotted or streaked animals.

It is an offer that speaks simultaneously to Laban’s greed and his ignorance. He seems to be getting Jacob’s labour for almost nothing. He is demanding no wages. And the chance of unspotted animals giving birth to spotted offspring seems remote.

Jacob knows better. In charge of the flocks, he goes through an elaborate procedure involving peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees, which he places with their drinking water. The result is that they do in fact produce streaked and spotted offspring.

How this happened has intrigued not only the commentators (who mostly assume

that it was a miracle, God's way of assuring Jacob's welfare) but also scientists. Some argue that Jacob must have had an understanding of genetics. Two unspotted sheep can produce spotted offspring. Jacob had doubtless noticed this in his many years of tending Laban's flocks.

Others have suggested that prenatal nutrition can have an epigenetic effect – that is, it can cause a certain gene to be expressed which might not have been otherwise. Had the peeled branches of poplar, almond, and plane trees been added to the water the sheep drank, they might have affected the Agouti gene that determines the colour of fur in sheep and mice.[\[1\]](#)

However it happened, the result was dramatic. Jacob became rich:

In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

Gen. 30:43

Inevitably, Laban and his sons felt cheated. Jacob sensed their displeasure, and – having taken counsel with his wives and being advised to leave by God Himself – departs while Laban is away sheep-shearing. Laban eventually discovers that Jacob has left, and pursues him for seven days, catching up with him in the mountains of Gilead.

The text is fraught with accusation and counteraccusation. Laban and Jacob both feel cheated. They both believe that the flocks and herds are rightfully theirs. They both regard themselves as the victim of the other's deceitfulness. The end result is that Jacob finds himself forced to run away from Laban as he was earlier forced to run away from Esau, in both cases in fear of his life.

So the question returns. What kind of man was Jacob? He seems anything but an *ish tam*, a straightforward man. And surely this is not the way for a religious role model to behave – in such a way that first his father, then his brother, then his father-in-law, accuse him of deceit. What kind of story is the Torah telling us in the way it narrates the life of Jacob?

One way of approaching an answer is to look at a specific character – often a hare, or in African-American tradition, "Brer Rabbit" – in the folktales of oppressed people. Henry Louis Gates, the American literary critic, has argued that such figures represent "the creative way the slave community responded to the oppressor's failure to address them as human beings created in the image of God." They have "a fragile body but a deceptively strong mind." Using their intelligence to outwit their stronger opponents, they are able to deconstruct and subvert, in small ways, the hierarchy of dominance favouring the rich and the strong. They represent the momentary freedom of the unfree, a protest against

the random injustices of the world.[2]

That, it seems to me, is what Jacob represents in this, the early phase of his life. He enters the world as the younger of two twins. His brother is strong, ruddy, hairy, a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, whereas Jacob is quiet, a scholar. Then he must confront the fact that his father loves his brother more than him. Then he finds himself at the mercy of Laban, a possessive, exploitative, and deceptive figure who takes advantage of his vulnerability. Jacob is the man who – as almost all of us do at some time or other – finds that life is unfair.

What Jacob shows, by his sheer quick-wittedness, is that the strength of the strong can also be their weakness. So it is when Esau comes in exhausted from the hunt, famished, that he is willing to impulsively trade his birthright for some soup. So it is when the blind Isaac is prepared to bless the son who will bring him venison to eat. So it is when Laban hears the prospect of getting Jacob's labour for free. Every strength has its Achilles' heel, its weakness, and this can be used by the weak to gain victory over the strong.

Jacob represents the refusal of the weak to accept the hierarchy created by the strong. His acts are a form of defiance, an insistence on the dignity of the weak (vis-a-vis Esau), the less loved (by Isaac), and the refugee (in Laban's house). In this sense he is one element of what, historically, it has been like to be a Jew.

But the Jacob we see in these chapters is not the figure whom, ultimately, we are called on to emulate. We can see why. Jacob wins his battles with Esau and Laban but at the cost of eventually having to flee in fear of his life. Quick-wittedness is merely a temporary solution.

It is only later, after his wrestling match with the angel, that he receives a new name – that is, a new identity – as Israel, "because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." As Israel he is unafraid to contend with people face-to-face. He no longer needs to outwit them by clever but ultimately futile stratagems. His children will eventually become the people whose dignity lies in the unbreakable covenant they make with God.

Yet we can see something of Jacob's early life in one of the most remarkable features of Jewish history. For almost two thousand years Jews were looked down on as pariahs, yet they refused to internalise that image, just as Jacob refused to accept the hierarchies of power or affection that condemned him to be a mere second-best. Jews throughout history, like Jacob, have relied not on physical strength or material wealth but on qualities of the mind.

In the end, though, Jacob must become Israel. For it is not the quick-witted victor but the hero of moral courage who stands tall in the eyes of humanity and God.

[1] Joshua Backon, "Jacob and the Spotted Sheep: The Role of Prenatal Nutrition on Epigenetics of Fur Colour," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2008. [2] Henry Louis Gates, *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York, Methuen, 1984, pp. 81-104.

Listening with Yaakov by Naomi Kalish

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/listening-with-yaakov/>

A Thanksgiving meal, or any family gathering, in our time of divisive politics and social polarization can be a source of great anxiety. How will we remain civil to those with whom we profoundly disagree? Parashat Veyetzei provides us with a model of how one of our ancestors, Yaakov, managed conflict with a family member and was able to move toward reconciliation.

A crucial aspect of reconciliation and healing is the willingness to listen and, through the process of listening, to make space for the uniqueness of the other person. Jonathan Shay, MD, a clinical psychiatrist who has worked extensively with veterans, writes that "healing from trauma depends upon communalization of the trauma—being able safely to tell the story to someone who is listening and who can be trusted to retell it truthfully to others in the community." [1] Listening is a crucial component of the necessary trust-building; he continues, "so before analyzing, before classifying, before thinking, before trying to do anything—we should listen." Often, we listen to respond instead of to understand. Shay writes that often our "listening deteriorates into intellectual sorting" and this breaks trust. What can Yaakov teach us about listening that paves the way toward peace?

The parashah begins with Yaakov fleeing from his brother Esav, from whom he had stolen the blessing. Following his mother's instruction, Yaakov seeks refuge in his uncle Lavan's home. Now years after his deception, Yaakov has his own humbling experience of being tricked. Lavan repeatedly changes the terms of agreement for both Yaakov's marriage and his employment, manipulating Yaakov into greater service to him.

Eventually Yaakov makes a unilateral decision to flee with his household from Lavan. When an incensed Lavan, pursues him, Yaakov is forced to stop and engage his adversary. This encounter could have taken many different forms including physical violence. Instead, the story culminates with a pact leading to peace between Yaakov and Lavan. Embedded in the story of Yaakov and Lavan is a process of interpersonal trust-building, negotiation, assertion, and accommodation.

Lavan speaks first and has much to say. He begins with an accusation: "What did

you mean by keeping me in the dark and carrying off my daughters like captives of the sword[. . .]? Why did you flee in secrecy and mislead me and not tell me? . . . ” ([Gen. 31: 26-27](#)). He fashions himself as the hero who would have sent Yaakov off with a festive meal, music, and kisses goodbye (a self-portrayal inconsistent with the fourteen years of deception and manipulation during which he prevented Yaakov from leaving).

How does Yaakov respond? What do we do when faced with someone who makes assertions we think are absurd and self-serving? First, Yaakov listens. This must have been a difficult process. He surely would have objected to Lavan’s portrayal of the events. Yaakov hears Lavan’s grievances and surely does not agree with much of the content of what he says, but his listening builds enough trust that they are able to resolve their differences civilly.

Israeli peace activist Rav Hanan Schlessinger identifies listening as an essential component in reconciliation:

We have to be able to reach across the divides and listen. We even have to listen when it looks like the other side doesn’t want to listen. [. . .] You should have the strength of character to enter into a dialogue in which at the first meeting or two they only yell at you. [. . .] Because very often, not always, after they yell and they see that you listen, you’re willing to acknowledge some of their grievances, sometimes they calm down and they’re willing to listen to you.[2]

What was significant in Yaakov’s participation was not his arguments, but that he gave Lavan the opportunity to speak his mind and be heard. When he did respond, it was with what is sometimes referred to as an “I” statement: “I was afraid because I thought you would take your daughters from me by force” ([Gen. 31:31](#)). The two men go back and forth and, as Rav Schlessinger describes often happens the experience of listening draws them closer together and maximizes their ability to make a pact. After exhausting his need to speak his mind, Lavan shifts his posture and says to Yaakov, “Come, then, let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness between you and me” ([Gen. 31:44](#)).

The process of peacebuilding becomes formalized through language and ritual. Following Lavan’s proposal, Yaakov and his household create a pillar of stones, after which the Torah tells us:

וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ לְבֵן יֶגֶר שְׁהָדוּתָא וַיַּעֲקֹב קָרָא לוֹ גַלְעָד:

Laban named it Yegar-sahadutha, and Yaakov named it Gal-ed. [Gen. 31:47](#)

Traditional commentators are fascinated by the different names given for this

pillar by Lavan and Yaakov. As Rashi explains, these phrases are, respectively, the Aramaic and Hebrew words for “Mound of Witness.” “Yegar-sahadutha” is also the first appearance of Aramaic in the Torah. We see a process of translation and interpretation among the two men as they navigate the use of two languages and ultimately two cultures and worldviews. Yaakov translates Lavan’s Aramaic term, Yegar-sahaduta, into Hebrew. Lavan then offers in Hebrew—in Yaakov’s language—an explanation of the meaning of the name based on its literal meaning: “This mound is a witness between you and me this day” ([Gen. 31:48](#)). Each of them is navigating the process of reconciliation through their native tongue and translation to the other’s language.

The challenge of making space for and tolerating both men’s worldviews is intensified by their inclusion of the religious language of prayer. When Lavan offers his interpretation of the pillar’s symbolism, he concludes with prayer:

אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹהֵי נְחוֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵּינֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁבַּע יַעֲקֹב בְּפָחַד
אָבִיו יִצְחָק:

“May the God of Abraham’s [house] and the god of Nahor’s [house] judge between us.”

The biblical author adds that these refer to Yaakov and Lavan’s ancestral deities. Interestingly, Lavan references Yaakov’s grandfather, but he goes one generation farther back in invoking his ancestry, to Terach, who was a common ancestor to both of them. As Sforno explains, “He had chosen Nachor to underline that Nachor’s god was also the god of Terach, who was the father of both Avraham and Nachor.” Lavan likely anticipated that Yaakov would be uncomfortable with invoking the deity of an idolator, and so he chooses their common ancestor as a way of establishing common ground. Yaakov does indeed seem uncomfortable: the Torah tells us that “Yaakov [then] swore by the Fear of his father Yitzhak’s [house]” (31:53). As Sforno explains, Yaakov chose someone who was not the son of Terach to make certain it was understood that his oath was only to the God of Yitzhak.

Yet while prayer can be an area of divisiveness, it can also create a meeting ground for people from diverse backgrounds with contentious relationships. Chaplains frequently pray with people from religious backgrounds different from their own. Without being syncretistic, they work with the recipients of their care to find either common language, or they make space for the other to pray while being present and bearing witness to the other at prayer. Community clergy and religious leaders also often come together at times of mutual interest—such as Thanksgiving services—or to stand with one another during difficulties. In the

presence of one another, they often offer prayers or reflections that can vary greatly in language, beliefs, and form. These programs are often not fully comfortable, just as listening is not always comfortable. But both experiences can create the kinds of relationships that build trust, a most basic component of reconciliation. [1] Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995. [2] "Peacemakers in a Time of War" Forum at Temple Beth-El, Richmond Virginia. November 12, 2023. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=285370747828581> (Naomi Kalish is a Harold and Carole Wolfe Director of the Center for Pastoral Education; Assistant Professor of Pastoral Education at JTS)

Vayetzei: Jewish Geography by Ruthie Davis

<https://www.growtorah.org/breisheit/2021/11/11-vayetzei-jewish-geography>

In Parshat Vayetzei, with a brother plotting his murder and a father on his deathbed eager for Yaakov to find a wife in Charan, Yaakov leaves. His departure forces him into broken spaces: isolated, unknown, transitory. Nevertheless, it is in one such space that he is brought closest to Hashem.

Our parsha opens with Yaakov's journey towards Charan. On the way, he lies down, taking a rock as a pillow. Yaakov dreams there of a ladder set upon the earth with its top reaching towards the heavens. Angels are ascending and descending before him, as Hashem appears to Yaakov and promises that the land upon which he is lying will be for him and his offspring; that He will be with him and guard him wherever he goes.[1]

In coming to this vision we are told that Yaakov "encountered the place." The passuk repeats the word "מקום" ("place") three times:

וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי־בָא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשָּׂם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

He encountered the 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. [2]

What is it about the place that is so important? Rashi tells us that the physical space that would one day hold the Beit HaMikdash moved towards Yaakov at Beit-El.[3] Furthermore, Rashi[4] relays from the Midrash that the sun set early that day so that Yaakov would be drawn to lie down on that spot. These signs seem to signify a certain magnetism toward this particular place, but also a mutable and temporary physical world.

In a different vein, to understand what it means that Yaakov encountered the

place, the commentator, the Beit Yaakov, connects it to the name of Hashem - HaMakom. Yaakov encountered "the Place", as it were, rather than "the place". The Beit Yaakov invokes the Midrash Rabbah, which asks why we sometimes refer to Hashem as Makom. He answers that it is because Hashem is the place of the world; it is not that the world is His place.[5]

What does it mean for Hashem to be a "Place?" The Beit Yaakov goes on to explain that Yaakov's encounter with Makom is like the clarity of the morning light. Until it comes in, the world is a liminal mix of light, dark, and shadow; a place in which meaning is difficult to ascertain.

Then comes that moment when light begins to illuminate the day. Within that transition we experience a powerful sense, a clarity: Makom, like this light, is the most profound expression of the awe and unity of landscape, of geography, of Creation.

The groundedness and material nature of Yaakov's concerns did not diminish the supreme spirituality of Beit-El. On the contrary, we understand that his appreciation of Hashem, of Place broadly, is tied to the specificity and site of Beit-El. He repeats "hamakom hazeh" – while "hazeh" could be superfluous, its use shows that through connecting with this place, and no other, Yaakov is made aware of the heavens, of Place, and the world.

Following his exhilarating vision, the vow Yaakov makes still binds his relationship to Hashem to the provision of simple, even mundane, needs. He cannot get lost in the wonder of Hashem's promise; while traveling he has more pressing concerns. He says, "If Hashem will be with me and guard me on this path that I travel, and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear; and I return in peace to my father's house, then Hashem will be a G-d to me." [6]

The immediacy of his concerns is not a rejection of spirituality, it is a framing allowing him to trust and connect with Hashem, even beyond visions and promises. It brings Hashem down to earth, just as this place enables him to understand The Place. Though encounters like Yaakov's with Hashem Himself are few and far between, his experience of space is something we can all appreciate. Our immediate surroundings, in their glorious specificity, are our best way of understanding, connecting with, and caring for the world at large.

After this experience, alive with a new purpose, the Torah says that Yaakov "lifted his feet." [7] Sforno [8] tells us that this signifies his sense of purpose. Though he is originally compelled to leave, after his encounter with Hashem, Yaakov voluntarily continues on with a renewed sense of direction. He steps forward to struggle with the realities of sustenance, family, social living, and justice. Let us

care for the pressing needs, let us revel in the places where we find ourselves, and through that, let us find direction in our connections with Hashem and the world at large. [1] Bereisheit 28:10-15 [2] Bereisheit 28:11 [3] Rashi on Bereisheit 28:11, s.v. "vayifga bamakom." [4] Rashi on Bereisheit 28:11, s.v. "ki va hashemesh." [5] Sefer Beit Yaakov on the Torah Bereisheit, Vayeitzei, 15 [6] Bereisheit 28:20-21 [7] Bereisheit 29:1 [8] Sforno on Bereisheit 29:1

Growth Requires Truth: Vayetzei by Rabbi Kari Tuling

<https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/torah-commentary/growth-requires-truth>

Jacob was given a blessing that promised him all the worldly goods and acclaim he could want. He would be rich and important. But this week's portion, Vayeitzei, opens with Jacob using a rock as a pillow, utterly destitute and completely alone. Jacob is running from one of the central truths of his life: his mother has been willing to take advantage of his passivity to manipulate him, at the cost of his good relationships with the rest of his family.

That night, Jacob has a dream that tells him God will stay with him wherever he goes. When he wakes up, Jacob declares, "Truly, the Eternal is in this place, and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:16). Even though everything is going against Jacob at this point, we don't see him giving up hope: he is naturally resilient. He may wake up and realize the truths of his life and grow from this experience - a central message of this week's parashah.

Jacob ultimately arrives at his Uncle Laban's household. When he is brought back to the house, he tells Laban everything that has happened. After listening, Laban replies, "You are truly my bone and my flesh" (Genesis 29:14). While Laban immediately recognizes his sister's handiwork in Jacob's story, Jacob does not understand that this story is part of a larger pattern in his family. Jacob is not aware that his mother has been taking advantage of his passivity - a family pattern that he'll need to transcend.

Not eager to take initiative or forge a new path and a new identity, Jacob stays with his uncle for a while. At first, it seems a mutually beneficial arrangement: Jacob agrees to work for Laban for seven years to marry Rachel. But Jacob does not realize that trickery is part of the dynamic with his mother's family; he doesn't suspect that his uncle might be manipulating him. One might think that he would be savvier at this point.

Why doesn't he recognize the truth of the situation? It's especially difficult to rise above family patterns, as they feel so familiar and comforting - even patterns that

do not serve us and prevent us from reaching our full potential. Following Laban's instructions probably felt just like following his mother's instructions: she would tell him to do what she said, and he obeyed without questioning. It does not occur to him to question Laban or his motives.

When his two wives engage in a desperate battle of fertility, Jacob does not yet have the resilience or fortitude needed to navigate that rivalry. All three of them come from the same branch of the family; each has grown up with their assigned role in the family's disfunction. I get the sense that Jacob does not know how to speak up for himself or navigate interpersonal difficulties, as he had always been discouraged from doing so.

When Rachel, Jacob's favorite wife, confronts him with the evidence that he has been helping Leah bear son after son, he shrugs off her pain, saying, "Am I in place of God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (Genesis 30:2). He would rather dismiss Rachel's pain than risk an uncomfortable conversation with Leah.

There are a set of truths about Jacob that Vayetztei brings to light - he avoids confrontation, doesn't force issues, and prefers to trick someone than admit the truth - each of these truths make his later actions surprising.

Eventually, Jacob figures out how to move past the generational patterns that were holding him back, preventing him from taking responsibility for his own future, and keeping him from navigating the complicated dynamics between his wives.

Jacob's insight appears to come to him rather suddenly: Jacob realizes that Laban is taking advantage of him, makes plans to leave, and talks to both of his wives to be sure he has their support. It's easy to imagine that this conversation is a difficult one for him. He has never been honest with them about his relationship with Laban, nor is it clear how they will respond. We get the impression that none of them have ever had a conversation like this before.

It turns out that Rachel and Leah have their own grievances against Laban and are happy to leave their father's household. They even speak as one in spite of their own rivalry. Jacob had not realized that Laban cheated Rachel and Leah as well, selling them as concubines rather than giving them the full status of wives. Laban had pocketed Jacob's wages instead of doing the right thing for his daughters and giving them the money as a dowry.

Finally having this conversation allows all three to admit these truths, recognize each other's pain, and work together to leave Laban. It is a rare moment of truth for the family and pushes them to grow in ways they hadn't thought possible.

Thus, Jacob decides to leave Laban's household and face his brother while Rachel and Leah agree to stop engaging in their baby war. They all grow from this difficult conversation.

We learn quite a bit from this story, but most of all we learn that living is about learning to transcend ourselves, our lives, and our limitations to leave a legacy worthy of the next generation. It is the hardest possible task - and the most necessary. There is no truth without growth, and there is no growth without truth.

(Rabbi Dr. Kari Tuling (she/her) is a congregational rabbi and a sought-after teacher, author, and speaker. She has taught at the University of Cincinnati, the State University of New York, the Louisville Seminary, and the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in New York.)



Yahrtzeits

Neal Fox remembers her father Hyman Fox on Sun. Nov. 26th.

Blossom Primer remembers her husband Irwin Primer on Tues. Nov. 28th

Amy Cooper remembers her Uncle George Israel Stieglitz on Tues. Nov. 28th

Roni Bamforth remembers her father William Gelfond on Tues. Nov. 28th

Bob Axelrod remembers his father Isadore Axelrod on Tues. Nov. 28th

Willa Bruckner remembers her mother Anita Cohen on Wed. Nov. 29th.

Albert Gottlieb remembers his father Arnold Gottlieb on Fri. Dec. 1st.

Nancy Rothchild remembers her son Joshua on Fri. Dec. 1st.

Alice Solomon remembers her mother Florence Weiss Blitzler on Fri. Dec. 1st.