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Temple Sinai

## Vayetze (and he left) Gen 28:1-32:3

Reviewed 3/6/21

Text: Rhonda Karlton Rosen  
Chants: David Goldstein

### Introduction:

This portion describes Jacob's flight from Esau after stealing both his brother's birthright and his special blessing as first born. He runs away with virtually nothing. As evening falls, he prepares to sleep out in the open, his head surrounded by stones. He dreams of a ladder connecting heaven and earth and hears God's promise that the Divine will not abandon him. Jacob will be protected on the way and will return to his father's land in peace. On the way he meets Rachel, Leah and their family. He was deceived into marrying Leah and then has to wait years to marry Rachel. Afterwards he proceeds to work 20 years for his father in law, Laban.

*Note: restore quote from Safet Emet p.47..."like taking a crock out of a barrel."*

## Niggun

### Part I: The Jacob in us

The "rabbinic and later mystical image of Jacob as the ideal of human perfection stands in strong contrast to the Bible's own account of him as trickster, a tradition reflected even in his name [heel grabber, crooked, twisted]. Perhaps there is a message of hope in this irony" Jacob, even Jacob, was capable of becoming Israel, the one who prevailed over God and man. You too, O ordinary mortal..."

p. 44 Sefet Emet (Art Green)

When Jacob departed [for Haran], on the mundane plane he had nothing.

p. 65 Isbitza

Jacob "left the sphere of the land of Israel...[he] *left Beer-sheba, and went to an alien domain...*

p. 321 Zohar

He owned nothing. He was nowhere familiar.

" 'And behold, I am with you.' ...and the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him all the processes of refinement that would have to be undergone and suffered, so therefore He promised him,' and I will guard

you everywhere you shall go, and I shall return you to this land.' 'I shall return you...is the term for retuning a lost article...for one cannot stand on the Torah unless he has first failed in keeping it... meaning that through the experience of failure the heart of man receives a greater desire to enter words of Torah...than before..."

p. 68 Isbitza

The Isbitza writes:

..."A man has three names—one is what his father and mother called him, one is what other people call him, and on is the name he acquires for himself."

"As for the name he acquires for himself, in other words how he fixes and heals his deficiency, even the deficiencies he was born with...therefore the name he acquires for himself is far greater [than the one he is born with], for the word name always signifies the source of life, for the entire soul is exemplified in it.

pp. 68-9 Isbitza

Addressing what we lack:

"When He gives [us] His good in form of an attribute, in that very attribute He creates a lack, and the good within cannot come into action until the lack has been healed. Before this lack is healed all the prayers and self-mortification that [we] attempt will be of no use until the lack is healed and [we] experience salvation. Therefore, it [is] necessary to clarify [and refine ourselves.]"

p. 69 Isbitza

Jacob, in leaving home, finds himself in a world

"That does not understand the first thing about what motivates him in life—what he wants, what he aspires to, what guides him, and what agitates him."

p. 57 Steinsaltz

"The Jacob who leaves Beersheba is a man who is incapable of engaging in a struggle. When faced with an obstacle, he tries to circumvent it rather than approaching it head-on. Even his name 'Jacob'—from the Hebrew 'akov,' meaning 'crooked' or 'twisted'—[this] attests to his propensity to avoid any confrontation."

"Only after Jacob encounters the angel—"for you have struggled with a divine being and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29)—can he survive, growing into the leader he was destined to be. Without passing this test, Jacob cannot become Israel. ..This is the beginning of a nation, the beginning of our enduring existence."

p. 58 Steinsaltz

“A distinction is sometimes drawn between ‘Israel’ and ‘Elder Israel.’ When we speak simply of ‘Israel,’ of Jacob our patriarch, this refers to the actual person who lived in history. But when we speak of ‘Elder Israel,’ this refers to the Jacob who still lives in our midst, who still lives within each and every one of us, and thus his spiritual work [is passed on to] all of us...  
p. 59 Steinsaltz

“the attribute of [Abraham] is love, and the attribute of [Isaac] is fear. In a place where love is greatly abundant, fear is constricted, and similarly when the attribute of fear is complete, then the attribute of love is constricted. However, with [Jacob our Father], the two attributes balanced each other, and this is called the attribute of *tiferet*, harmony or beauty, the attribute of [Jacob our Father], which contains both of them, and they do not contradict each other.”  
pp. 67-8 Isbitza

**Chant: Eh'yeh asher eh'yeh - I am what I am becoming (Exodus 3:14)**

**Silence**

## **Part II: The Unexpected Encounter comes out of Nothing**

“Jacob left Beer-sheba and set out for Haran. He came upon a certain place and stopped, for it became suddenly night. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. He had a dream...” (Gen 28:10-12)

“Rashi speaks of a void left behind Jacob as he begins his journey. But perhaps the void is *in* Jacob, as well. As he ‘goes out’ of his place, a vacuum separates him from his origins. [This is] a kind of necessary detachment.  
p. 181 Zornberg

Here there is a “Dramatic, unexpected encounter happens ... in space and in time. [Jacob] ‘collided with a certain place’—[*va-yifga*] like a dynamic encounter with an object that is traveling towards [him]. The force of this meeting is palpable and of mystery.

Traditionally, this ‘certain place’ is identified with Mount Moriah, ‘where Jacob’s father was bound in sacrifice.’ This is the future place of the Holy Temple, of prayer and sacrifice, of the human attempt to come close to God.

It is a place of purity and danger, of great longing and strict distancing.

And the *makom*, the 'certain place,' is equally a metaphoric reference to God Himself, 'who is their Place of the universe...' Jacob, therefore makes contact here with God Himself. There is a shock of spiritual awakening, and Jacob initiates the Evening Prayer..."

p. 187 Zornberg (words rearranged for this narrative)

"Leaving all his support systems behind him, Jacob moves into the world of the night.

It became suddenly night. The place and the night collide with him.

He lies down, placing a stone of that place beneath his head.

p. 188 Zornberg (words rearranged)

And his dream comes to him, for all of us.

"The land upon which you are lying will I give unto you and your descendants" [Gen. 28:13]. The rabbis taught that the blessed Holy One folded up the entire Land of Israel and placed it beneath him. Just as our father Jacob included all the souls of Israel, so did he now have the entire land. Jacob is the [ideal] person whom God created in His world and his image is engraved beneath the Throne of Glory. Thus this place belonged to him, since it includes all the places."

p. 43 Sefat Emet

And he dreams.

Our mystics write that God was not above Jacob, or next to Jacob, but God was standing upon Jacob. That God was, is, and will be always connected to Jacob.

(On the meaning of *omed*.) Isbitza p. 67

*"Here, YHVH nitstsav alav, was standing upon [the ladder]... (Gen 28:13).*

"Alternatively, *Here, YHVH was standing (alav), upon him*—upon Jacob, so that all would become a holy chariot: right, left, Jacob in their midst, and Assembly of Israel linking with them...Then, *the land on which you lie* (Gen 28:13)—all one holy chariot. He saw that he would become Consummation of the Patriarchs.

p. 335 Zohar

Our mystics write that the angels were running up and down upon Jacob, jumping on him, running back and forth, trying to figure out why this most ordinary sleeping man could correspond to his image on the throne on high.

Quoting from Bereshit Rabbah:

“What can this mean? They are accusing and defending him. They are pushing him, leaping over him, abusing him—as it is said, ‘You are My servant, Israel in whom I glory’ [Isaiah 49:3]—“You are the one whose face is carved out in the worlds above [in the Throne of Glory (*Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*)]. The angels go up and see Jacob’s face; they come down and find him sleeping. This is like a king, who would sit in judgment in his council chamber. His people would go up and see him there in his dignity; they would go down and find him in the corridor, sleeping!”

“Jacob....exists both in the higher world—in some ideal, spiritual, and wakeful form—and in the lower worlds—ungracefully, disgracefully asleep. This duality exercises the angels...”

p. 191 Zornberg

Here is the contrast: Jacob exists as both the flawed human, and as the realized being, who he is becoming as a spiritual, and universal being.

“The ladder is placed *toward* the earth; its top reaches *toward* the heavens (28:12); there are opposing tendencies ... that extend him, extend us, endlessly in both directions....”

p. 192 Zornberg—paraphrased to fit this work

In the language of the Zohar:

*Hear O Israel! YHVH our God, YHVH is one!* (Deuteronomy 6:4), This was supernal perfection, unifying unitary unification.

p. 325 Zohar

*“Happening it happened” ...*

*“As is written: a ladder set up on earth, its head reaching to heaven—moving above, moving below. Happening it happened, one above, one below.*

p. 331 Zohar

“Now, if you say he was complete even then –no! Rather he saw that he would be complete eventually. And you might say, “Look at what is written: *Here, I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go* (Gen 28:15)! True, the providential protection of the blessed Holy One never left Jacob—whatever he needed in the world—but in the supernal world, not until he was complete.

p. 337 Zohar

*“Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely YHVH is in this place, and I, I did not know!’ (Gen 28:16). Why ‘and I, I did not know?’ Is it any wonder that he didn’t know?*

*“...Jacob said, “have I seen so much, and yet Anokhi I did not know? Because he was alone and had not entered under the wings of Shekhinah.*  
p. 337 Zohar

*“The face of YHVH denotes Shekhinah, the Divine Presence, who is also known as Anokhi, I. because through Her the divine reveals itself, declaring “I am.”*  
Footnote 137 Zohar

Jacob did not yet know that Holy Presence who declares “I am.”

*“... ‘I [anokhi] am with you’” this suggests an energy that will accompany him constantly through all the vicissitudes of exile. There is a quality of life promised here—a buoyancy Jacob... experience[s] as he walks through the world...Jacob will go with an extended amokhi, a sense of self that...will contain God. This will affect his perspective [of the mundane] world, even as he moves outwards upon it.”*

Kalonymous Shapira writes:

*“I (Ani) am the God of your father, “ and only afterwards it is written “I (Anochi) am with you.” We must strive to attain the level of Anochi, which is “I am written into you.” God is saying, “Work to etch ME (Ani) indelibly within you, and then I (Anochi) will be with you always.”*  
*Sacred Fire, Torah from the years of Fury 1939-1942, Rabbi Kalonymos Kalmish Shapira, translated by J. Hershy Worch, p. 18*

*“I am with you”...Rashi places this in the context of Jacob’s fear.*

*“Experientially, the promise to ‘be with you’ translates as a mitigation of loneliness for the human being...This, in the words of Ramban, is ‘a great promise: that he will not be in the hands of angels, but will be the portion of God, and God will be with him always” (28:12). Pulled downwards by the forces of gravity, he will find in himself a strange buoyancy, a dimension that is not entirely his own.”*  
p. 193-4 Zornberg

This relationship is a promise. But it is not yet complete in us. It is a path toward completion, toward consummation. Our prayers each evening remember this.

Our prayers each evening are different from the other prayers of the day. They hold the memory of that strange buoyancy of Jacob's heart, from the chance meeting that comes through the unconscious, unbidden capacity to love and be loved by the Blessed One. In the dark, we are receptive to the elevations of the soul. There is no sense of rote obligation. Our prayers are a continuation of Jacob's unexpected spiritual revelation that night in Beth-El.

Paraphrased from p. 67 Kook

**Chant: Adonai bamakom hazeh, v'anochi lo yadati - God is in this place, and I did not know it. (Genesis 28:16)**

**Silence**

### **Part III: The heart of the matter**

"He looked, and there was a well in the field, and there were three flocks of sheep lying down by it, for from that well the flocks were watered. But the stone was large on the mouth of the well. When all the flocks were gathered there, they would roll the stone off the mouth of the well" [Gen. 29:2-3]

"This reality—the well in the field—is found in every thing and in every one of Israel. Every thing contains a life-giving point that sustains it. Even that which appears to be as neglected as a field has such a hidden point within it. The human mind is always able to know this intuitively. This knowledge is the three flocks of sheep, which stand for wisdom, understanding, and awareness....

p. 45 Sefat Emet

The fact that in Jacob's case Scripture says 'he revealed' rather than 'he rolled' means that he found it from within himself, for he was the whole of Israel. He was also *tsaddik*, foundation of the world, by whose merit the world exists. Therefore, 'he revealed it' from within himself."

"On the Sabbath it is called 'field,' ready to be seeded. Then the power of inwardness, the divine life-point within it, is aroused and it receives its seed."...This means that on the Sabbath a source of living water is opened, this is 'a well in the field'."

p. 46 Sefat Emet

“But the stone was large on the mouth of the well.’ It should have said: ‘There was a large stone on the mouth of the well.’ This may hint that although the stumbling-stone, our evil urge, is to be found everywhere, ‘on the mouth of the well’ it is at its largest. It does not allow us to open our mouths in prayer, the service of the heart. Prayer is this well, the teaching that is in the mouth. That is why we say [before each ‘Amidah prayer]” Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise’ [Ps. 51:17]. The main goal of the evil urge is to postpone prayer....  
p. 47 Sefat Emet

*“They would roll the stone off the mouth of the well (Gen 29:3), removing from Her the rigor of severe Judgment...[Severe judgment] congeals and freezes water—[and acts like a stone upon the well].*  
pp. 347-8 Zohar

...the ‘service of the heart’; it depends upon the longing of the heart’; it depends upon the longing of the heart—all day long, in all one’s deeds...  
p. 47 Sefat Emet

Yet, times we go to pray and the words, the heart’s longing is not present.

“The *tsaddik* fully understands that this stone is there for special guarding, just as the cork is in the barrel to keep its contents from defilement. To one who stands on the outside it can surely feel as if heavenly forces are holding him back, placing a stone on his heart. This this is all for his own good.”  
Sefat Emet p. 47

...the three prayers we recite each day...enable us to roll away the stone.”  
p. 47 Sefat Emet

We keep returning over and over again until the time is ripe.

Jacob did his work in Haran, the foreign land of his uncle, and it is time to return.

*“Jacob went on his way, and angels of God encountered him.” (Gen 32:2)*

“Come and see: When Jacob first set out on his journey to Haran, he was alone, unmarried. What is written? *He entreated, the place* (Gen 28:11). But he was answered only in a dream. Now that he was married and accompanied by all those tribes, supernal camps of angels entreated him, as it were, supplicating him, as it is written: *They entreated him.* (Gen 32:2)—coming round to entreat him! Because by the virtue of Jacob and those tribes, they are watered by waters of the vast sea.  
Zohar, PP. 423-4

Further, at first in a dream; now with eyes wide open in daylight, as it is written:



*When he saw them, Jacob said, ‘ This is a camp of God!’ (Gen 32:3).*

How did he recognize them? He saw they were the same ones he had seen in the dream. So he called them *Double Camps*—camps manifesting above, camps manifesting below.

Why did they appear, entreating him? Because *Shekhinah* approached him to possess the house. She was awaiting Benjamin, to possess the house fittingly, along with Jacob, whereupon it is written: *Jacob will return and be calm and secure, with no one frightening him* (Jeremiah 30:10).  
pp. 423-4 Zohar

“Because *Shekhinah* approached him to possess the house...Once Benjamin is born, completing the full complement of twelve tribes, *Shekhinah* arrives, escorted by angels, .....[to become] Jacob’s spouse and ‘essence of the house.’ She and Jacob will then reside in peace fittingly in the Holy Land.”  
Footnote 848

Blessed be the Holy One.

**Chant: Hinay Yah bayni u'vayncha, ad olam - Here is God between you and me forever (1 Samuel 20:23)**

**Silence**

**Niggun**

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