

Parashah Vayetzei

The one that tells the story of Jacob and his wives and children.

Jacob, son of Isaac and Rebecca and brother of Esau, departs from his home in Be'er Sheva and travels to Haran. On his way, he experiences a dream in which he sees a ladder with angels on it reaching to the heavens. He awakens and recognizes the place as holy, naming it Bethel (House of God).

Upon arriving in Haran, Jacob meets Rachel at a well and falls in love with her because of her beauty and kindness. He agrees to work for her father, Laban, who is his uncle, Rebecca's brother. He works for Laban for seven years in order to marry Rachel. However, on the wedding night, Laban deceives Jacob by substituting Rachel's elder sister, Leah. It's the morning after when Jacob realizes the switch. When confronted, Laban justifies his actions by saying it's not customary to marry off the younger daughter before the elder. As a compromise, Laban allows Jacob to marry Rachel a week later in return for another seven years of service.

Over the years, Jacob has many children with Leah and Rachel and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Leah gives birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, as well as a daughter, Dinah. Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, gives birth to Dan and Naphtali. Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, gives birth to Gad and Asher. After many years, Rachel gives birth to Joseph.

Jacob becomes prosperous, not just through the growth of his family, but also in terms of wealth, mainly livestock. However, Laban and his sons grow envious of Jacob's prosperity. Jacob perceives this animosity and decides to leave. Without informing Laban, Jacob leaves with his family and wealth. As the family journeys from Bethel, Rachel goes into labor with her second child. The childbirth is difficult, and she dies while giving birth. Before her death, she names her son "Ben-oni," meaning "son of my sorrow." However, Jacob renames him "Benjamin," meaning son of my right hand, or strength.

Laban pursues Jacob, and after a tense confrontation, they form an agreement not to harm each other. They set up a stone pillar and heap as a witness to this covenant. The place is named Galeed (Heap of Witness) and Mizpah (Watchtower).

These events shape Jacob's journey from a fugitive to a patriarch with a large family, setting the stage for the story of the Israelites.

The dynamic between Jacob and Rachel, with its moments of deep love, despair, and tragedy, forms a critical narrative in the Torah, influencing the events that unfold in the lives of their descendants.

Teen Takeaways from Parashah Vayetzei

- 1. Pursuing dreams with integrity:** Jacob has a dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, symbolizing the connection between the spiritual and the physical. This can inspire people to dream big but also to keep their feet grounded, ensuring that they maintain integrity in their pursuits.
2. In the dream, angels are ascending and descending, teaching that angels originate not necessarily in the heavens, but here on earth. They are with us even without our realizing it. What and who are angels, in your opinion?
- 3. The importance of hard work:** Jacob works for Laban for many years to earn the right to marry Rachel, only to be deceived and given Leah first. Despite the deceit, he continues working diligently. This emphasizes the importance of hard work, patience, and commitment to one's goals, even when faced with setbacks. It also tells us that there are some things and people for whom we work because we are driven by love and ambition.
- 4. Dealing with deception:** Jacob, who deceived his father and brother earlier in the story, is himself deceived by Laban multiple times. This is a reminder that actions have consequences and the patterns we set up in our youth can come back to impact us later. And perhaps it reinforces the truth that "what goes around comes around." Poetic justice sometimes can be seen in our world.
- 5. Value of persistence:** Despite the many challenges he faces - from dealing with Laban's deceit to the challenges of shepherding flocks - Jacob never gives up. This teaches the importance of perseverance and resilience. Sometimes in life there is light at the end of the tunnel.
- 6. Complexity of relationships:** The relationship dynamics in Vayetzei are intricate. Leah and Rachel, both wives of Jacob, experience sibling rivalry, love, and jealousy. The challenges faced by Jacob and his wives emphasize the complexities inherent in familial and romantic relationships, encouraging people to approach such relationships with empathy and understanding.
- 7. Faith in difficult times:** Throughout his challenges, Jacob maintains his faith. This can inspire people to stay connected to their beliefs and values, even when times are tough.
- 8. The power of names:** In the parashah, we see the naming of Jacob's children, each name bearing significant meaning and reflections of the circumstances or emotions during the child's birth. This can serve as a reminder about the power of identity and the importance of understanding one's roots. What does your name mean? Who were you named for? What qualities in your personality remind your family of the person whose memory is preserved in your name? Have a conversation about this with your parents.
- 9. Standing up for oneself:** When Jacob finally decides to leave Laban, he asserts his rights and what he has earned. This can teach teens the importance of standing up for themselves and what they believe in, especially when they feel they are being treated unjustly. What's fair is fair.

Summary

Parashah Vayetzei teaches the importance of **integrity, hard work, dealing with deception, understanding complex relationships, and maintaining faith during challenges.**