

Parashat Vayetze

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VISION AND REALITY

- Does Jacob travel to Haran to search for a wife or to escape from Esau?
- How do Isaac and Rebecca relate to Jacob's journey and how does Jacob himself relate to it?
- Which is the main reason for the journey and which is secondary?
- How is the meeting of Jacob and Rachel similar to that of Eliezer and Rebecca and how is it different?
- Why did Jacob accept Laban's deception and remain married to Leah?
- Can part of the twelve tribes of Israel really be a product of Laban's deceit?

A. Jacob's Journey to Haran as an Escape from Esau

And Jacob left Beersheba, and he וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעֵר שֶׁבַע
went toward Haran. (Gen. 28:10) שָׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה:

Why does Jacob leave Beersheba for Haran? Two reasons are given at the end of the previous *parasha*.

Escape from Esau

The first reason given for Jacob’s journey is that he is fleeing from Esau:

And Rebecca was told of the words of Esau, her elder son, and she sent for Jacob, her younger son, and she said to him, “Now, Esau your brother is plotting to avenge himself by killing you. And now, my son, listen to my voice, and get up and flee to my brother Laban, to Haran. And stay with him for a few days, until your brother’s anger subsides. Once your brother’s fury at you subsides, and he forgets what you did to him, then I shall send for you and take you from there; why should I lose you both on the same day?” (Gen. 27:42-48)

וַיִּגְדַּל לְרֵבֶקָה אֶת דְּבָרֵי עֵשָׂו בְּנֵהּ הַגָּדֹל וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְיַעֲקֹב בְּנֵהּ הַקָּטָן וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה עֹשֶׂה אָחִיךָ מִתְנַחֵם לָךְ לְהַרְגֶךָ: וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי וְקוּם בָּרוּחַ לָךְ אֶל לָבָן אָחִי חָרָנָה: וְיָשָׁבְתָ עִמּוֹ יָמִים אַחָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר תִּשׁוּב חַמַּת אָחִיךָ: עַד שׁוּב אִף אָחִיךָ מִמֶּךָ וְשָׁכַח אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ לוֹ וְשָׁלַחְתִּי וְלָקַחְתִּיךָ מִשָּׁם לָמָּה אֲשַׁפֵּל גַּם שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד:

Finding a Wife in Haran

Immediately afterwards, the Torah describes the second reason for Jacob’s journey:

And Rebecca said to Isaac, “I am weary of living because of the daughters of Het, if Jacob should take a wife from among these Hittite women, from the young women of the land, what shall I have to live for?” And Isaac called

וַתֹּאמֶר רֵבֶקָה אֶל יִצְחָק קִצְתִּי בְחַיֵּי מִפְּנֵי בָנוֹת חֵת אִם לִקַּח יַעֲקֹב אִשָּׁה מִבָּנוֹת חֵת כְּאֵלֶּה מִבָּנוֹת הָאָרֶץ לָמָּה לִי חַיִּים: וַיִּקְרָא

to Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, saying to him, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Get up and go toward Padan Aram, toward the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, and take a wife for yourself from there, from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. And the Lord Sha-dai will bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and you will become a community of nations. And He will give the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants with you, to bequeath you the land in which you live, which God gave to Abraham.” And Isaac sent Jacob, and he went toward Padan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, brother to Rebecca [who is] mother of Esau and Jacob. (Gen. 27:46-28:5)

יִצְחָק אֶל יַעֲקֹב וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ וַיְצַוְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה מִבָּנוֹת כְּנָעַן: קוּם לָךְ פָּדָן אַרָם בֵּיתָה בְּתוּאֵל אָבִי אִמְךָ וְקַח לָךְ מִשָּׁם אִשָּׁה מִבָּנוֹת לָבָן אָחִי אִמְךָ: וְיֵאלֹשֵׁי דַי יְבָרֶךְ אֹתְךָ וַיַּרְבֶּךָ וַיִּרְבְּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקַהֲל עַמִּים: וַיִּתֶּן לָךְ אֶת בְּרִכְתּוֹ אֲבָרָהָם לָךְ וְלִזְרַעְךָ אִתְּךָ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרְיֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם: וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פָּדָן אַרָם אֶל לָבָן בֶּן בְּתוּאֵל הָאַרְמִי אָחִי רֵבֶקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו:

Are these two reasons equally important? At first glance, the first reason seems to carry greater weight. Rebecca is primarily concerned for Jacob’s safety, but she tells Isaac that the purpose is to search for a wife to gain Isaac’s approval.¹

1 This is the Rashbam’s interpretation of verse 46: “אם לוקח יעקב – דרך חכמה אמרה רבקה ליצחק להרחיק יעקב מעשו ולא גילתה”

**Blessing for
Land and
Descendants**

God reveals Himself to Jacob on his way to Haran. God gives Jacob two significant blessings – the blessing for land and the blessing for descendants:

And behold, God was standing over him, and He said, "I am the Lord, God of your father Abraham and God of Isaac; the land upon which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. And your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will burst forth westward and eastward, northward and southward, and all of the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and your descendants." (Gen. 28:13-14)	וַהֲנִה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֶתְּחַק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנַנְּהָ וְלִדְרָעָךְ: וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כְּעֵפֶר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרָצְתָּ יָמָה וּקְדָמָה וּצְפֹנָה וּנְגִבָה וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה וּבִדְרָעָךְ:
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**A Promise to
Return to the
Land**

God also promises that He will watch over Jacob and ensure that he returns safely to Canaan:

And behold, I am with you, and I will watch over you through all of your journeys, and I will return you to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done as I have said to you. (Gen. 28:15)	וַהֲנִה אֲנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבַּתִּיךָ אֶל הָאָדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֲעֻזְבֶּךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם עָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ:
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לו שבשביל שטימת אחיו עשתה כן.
 "If Jacob should take" – this is Rebecca's wise way of telling Isaac to distance Jacob from Esau, and she did not reveal that it was due to his brother's hatred. (Rashbam on Gen. 27:46)
 See also Hizkuni ad loc.

**Jacob's Oath –
Request for
Protection**

Following this revelation, Jacob makes an oath:

And Jacob swore an oath, saying, "If the Lord shall be with me and watch over me in my journey, and give me bread to eat and clothing to wear; and I return safely to my father's house, and the Lord shall be my God." ² (Gen. 28:20-21)	וַיִּדַר יַעֲקֹב נֶדָר לֵאמֹר אִם יְהִיָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרֵנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן לִי לֶחֶם לֵאכֹל וּבְגָד לְלַבֵּשׁ: וְשָׁבְתִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה ה' לִי לֵאלֹהִים:
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Jacob does not mention God's promises for land and descendants, nor does he ask for assistance in finding a wife – he merely asks that God watch over him and return him home safely. It seems that **from Jacob's point of view**, this journey is primarily an **escape**. Therefore, he asks God to protect him and help him return home safely. Jacob's main purpose in leaving Canaan is to escape from Esau; finding a wife is only secondary.

This analysis is supported by a later description of Jacob's return home:

And God said to Jacob "Get up and go to Beit El and settle there and make an altar to God, Who appeared to you during your escape from your brother Esau. " (Gen. 35:1)	וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵּית אֵל וְשָׁב שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ בְּבָרְחֶךָ מִפְּנֵי עֵשׂוֹ אָחִיךָ:
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2 The commentators disagree on whether "and the Lord shall be my God" is part of Jacob's conditions (Rashi), or Jacob's promise should the conditions be fulfilled (Ramban). See Ramban on Gen. 28:21.

God indicates that Jacob's main reason for going to Haran was to escape from Esau.

Meeting Rachel - One of the Family

Upon arrival in Haran, Jacob sits by the well and meets Rachel there. Jacob is eager to meet her - and the text states that this is because of her virtuous behavior, not her beauty. The conversation between them is somewhat impersonal, contrary to what would be expected of a first meeting between future partners especially considering that Jacob was explicitly commanded to take one of Laban's daughters for a wife.

In fact, the verses emphasize a different aspect of their meeting:

<p>And it was when Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the flock of Laban, his mother's brother, then Jacob approached and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and he lifted his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he is her father's brother and that he is Rebecca's son, and she ran and told her father. (Gen. 29:1-12)</p>	<p>וַיְהִי כִּשְׂשׂוּר רָאָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת רַחֵל בֵּת לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ וְאֶת צֹאן לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּגְדֹּל אֶת הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיִּשְׁק אֶת צֹאן לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ וַיִּשְׁק יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת קְלוֹ וַיִּבְדֵּךְ וַיִּגַּד יַעֲקֹב לְרַחֵל כִּי אָחִי אָבִיָּהּ הוּא וְכִי בֵן רִבְקָה הוּא וַתָּרַץ וַתִּגַּד לְאָבִיהָ:</p>
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The meeting between Jacob and Rachel revolves

around their family connection. Jacob is eager to meet someone from his mother's family, independent of his search for a wife.³

Jacob's kiss is likewise explained by the commentators and the *midrash* as a chaste kiss - an ordinary way to greet one's relatives:

...R. Tanhuma said... "And Jacob kissed Rachel" - for she was his relative.⁴ (Bereshit Rabba 9)

...ר' תנחומא אמר... "וישק יעקב לרחל" - שהייתה קרובתו.

Rabbi Bahya explains:

"And Jacob kissed Rachel- " she was young⁵... or we might say that this kiss was on the

"וישק יעקב לרחל" - קטנה הייתה... או נאמר שהנשיקה הזאת

3 Jacob may have fleetingly thought of marriage at this point, as Rachel was the "daughter of Laban, his mother's brother," and he had been sent by his father to marry one of Laban's daughters. However, this was not Jacob's focus upon meeting Rachel.

4 The *midrash* teaches that "every kiss is one of lechery," except for three types of kisses: one that is given upon ascent to greatness (such as Samuel's kiss to Saul after [Saul] was anointed), one given upon meeting after a long separation (such as Moses' kiss to Aaron when they met), and a kiss farewell (as Orpah gave to Naomi). R. Tanhuma adds a fourth type: a kiss between relatives, such as the kiss Jacob gave to Rachel.

See also the *midrash* in *Mishnat R. Eliezer*, ch. 7: "...[Jacob] saw that the people were whispering amongst themselves and saying, 'Has this man come to bring us new ways of immorality?' Immediately he wept, so as to signify that this was not a kiss of lechery but one of familial closeness."

5 According to his commentary on verse 15, Rachel was five years old at the time.

”head or the shoulder”⁶... “And he lifted his voice and wept” – this is a **custom upon meeting one’s relatives**.
 הייתה נשיקת הראש או הכתף... “וישא את קולו ויבך” – מנהג הקרובים בפגישה.

Jacob does not Mention Marriage

Jacob does not mention marriage at any point during his conversation with Laban:

And when Laban heard the news of Jacob, the son of his sister, he ran out to greet him and hugged and kissed him and brought him to his house, and he told Laban all of these things. (Gen. 29:13)
 ויהי כשמע לבן את שמע יעקב בן אחתו וינצח לקראתו ויחבק לו וינשק לו ויביאהו אל ביתו ויספר ללבן את כל הדברים האלה:

What “things” did Jacob tell Laban? Rashi explains:

“And he told Laban” – that he had come because his brother [Esau] had forced him to, and that he had taken his money.
 “ויספר ללבן” – שלא בא אלא מתוך אונס אחיו, ושנטלו ממנו ממנו.

Rashbam, however, interprets this verse differently:

“All of these things” – that his father and mother had sent him to his relatives.
 “את כל הדברים האלה” – שאביו ואמו שלחוהו אל אנשי משפחתו.

According to the commentators,⁷ Jacob does not

⁶ See also Ramban on verse 9.

⁷ This interpretation also is apparent from the simple reading of the text: “These things” are what Jacob said to Rachel in the previous verse: “And Jacob told Rachel that he is her father’s brother and that he is Rebecca’s son.” This also explains Laban’s response in the following verse: “And Laban said to

reveal that he has come to marry one of Laban’s daughters. Instead, he shares that he is running away from Esau and that his parents instructed him to go to his family in Haran. In fact, Jacob stays with Laban and his family for an entire month without saying a word about marrying Rachel:⁸

And Laban said to him, “You are my flesh and bone,” and he stayed with him for one month. (Gen. 29:14)
 ויאמר לו לבן אך עצמי ובשרי אתה וישב עמו חדש ימים:

Jacob’s Wages – Marriage

A month later, Laban initiates a conversation with Jacob that is unrelated to marriage:

And Laban said to Jacob, “Just because you are my relative, shall you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” (Gen. 29:15)
 ויאמר לבן ליעקב הכי אחי אתה ועבדתני חנם הגידה לי מה משכורתך:

Only at this point, following Laban’s offer, does Jacob ask to marry Rachel:

And Laban had two daughters; the elder was named Leah and the younger was named Rachel. And Leah’s eyes were soft, and Rachel was beautiful in looks and
 וילבן שתי בנות שם הגדולה לאה ושם הקטנה רחל: ועיני לאה רכות ורחל הייתה יפת

him, ‘You are my flesh and bone.’” Laban confirms Jacob’s statement that he is their relative.

⁸ Compare Jacob’s behavior to Eliezer’s: when Eliezer arrives at Bethuel’s home, he did not even sit down to eat with the family before bringing up the prospect of Isaac marrying Rebecca

countenance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, “I shall serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.” (Gen. 29:16-18)

תָּאָר וַיִּפֶּת מְרָאָהּ: וַיֵּאָהֵב יַעֲקֹב אֶת רָחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֶעֱבֹדךָ שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים בְּרָחֵל בְּתִּיךְ הַקְטָנָה:

Only after Laban asks Jacob the price for his work does Jacob “suddenly” recall his father’s command to find a wife, and asks Laban for permission to marry Rachel.⁹ Even at this point, Jacob does not mention that his father had sent him to Laban specifically to find a wife.¹⁰

The Main Purpose of the Journey - Escape

Apparently, despite the fact that Jacob purportedly went to Haran for two reasons – to escape from Esau and to find a wife – his main purpose was to escape from Esau. He does not seem to think about his father’s command to marry at all.

The comparison between Isaac and Jacob’s respective marriages further supports this interpretation.

(Gen. 24:33). In contrast, Jacob does not even mention the subject of marriage. We will expand upon the comparison between Eliezer and Jacob below.

9 Seforno (on Gen. 29:18) suggests that Jacob had already been considering marrying Rachel. However, he had not mentioned this to Laban since he had no way to support himself and could not take a wife under these circumstances. Once Laban offered Jacob paid work, Jacob realized that he could marry Rachel and fulfill his father’s command.

10 Once again, the difference between Jacob and Eliezer is evident – Eliezer immediately states that he has come at Abraham’s command to find a wife for Isaac.

B. Isaac’s Marriage vs. Jacob’s Marriage

Similarities between Eliezer’s Meeting with Rebecca and Jacob’s Meeting with Rachel

There are obvious differences between the description of Eliezer’s arrival at Nahor’s house in Haran (Gen. ch. 24) and Jacob’s arrival at Bethuel’s home in Haran (Gen. 27:41-29:30).

Both narratives feature a journey from Canaan to relatives in Haran for the purpose of finding a wife who is not from Canaan.¹¹ In both stories, the traveler reaches a well where the initial meeting with the future wife¹² takes place, as she arrives at the well with miraculously perfect timing.¹³ In both stories, the woman at the well turns out to be a relative, and a meeting with her family is arranged.¹⁴ Both accounts

11 Eliezer – Gen. 24:3-4; Jacob – Gen. 28:1-2.

12 Eliezer – Gen. 24:10-25; Jacob – Gen. 29:1-12.

13 In the story of Eliezer:

וַיְהִי הוּא טָרַם כֶּלֶה לְדַבֵּר וְהִנֵּה רֵבֶקָה יֹצֵאת אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לְבֵתוֹאֵל בִּן מִלְכָּה אִשְׁתֵּי נַחֲוֹר אַחֵי אַבְרָהָם וְכֹדֶה עַל שִׁכְמָה:

And it was before he finished speaking, and behold, Rebecca emerged, she who had been born to Bethuel the son of Milcah [who was] the wife of Abraham’s brother Nahor, and her pitcher was on her shoulder. (Gen. 24:15)

In the story of Jacob:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל בָּתוּ בָּאָה עִם הַצֹּאן:

And he said to them, “Is he well?” and they said, “[He is] well, and behold, his daughter Rachel comes with the flock.” (Gen. 29:6)

And:

עוֹדֵנוּ מְדַבֵּר עִמָּם וְרָחֵל בָּאָה עִם הַצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר לְאִבֵיהָ כִּי רָעָה הוּא:

As he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with the flock of her father, for she was a shepherdess. (Gen. 29:9)

14 Eliezer – Gen. 24:28-32; Jacob – Gen. 29:12-13.

describe the young woman running to tell her family about the meeting,¹⁵ and as a result, in both stories, **Laban** runs to greet the approaching traveler.¹⁶

Differences between Isaac's Marriage and Jacob's Marriage

The two stories seem very similar,¹⁷ but these similarities actually serve to highlight the crucial differences between them:

15 Eliezer – Gen. 24:28; Jacob – Gen. 29:12.

16 Eliezer – Gen. 24:29; Jacob – Gen. 29:12.

17 There are also certain linguistic parallels between the two narratives, in addition to the literary similarities. For example, the phrase “these things” appears in both stories in the same context. During Eliezer’s journey, it is written:

וַיְתְּרֵץ הַנַּעֲמָן וַתַּגִּד לְבֵית אִמּוֹת כְּדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהִים:

And the young woman ran and told her mother’s house of these things. (Gen. 24:28)

And during Jacob’s journey:

וַיְסַפֵּר לְלָבָן אֵת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה.

And he told Laban all of these things. (Gen. 29:13)

The Sages also drew parallels between the meeting of Eliezer and Rebecca and the meeting of Jacob and Rachel. Rashi quotes the Sages:

”וַיֵּרֶץ הָעֶבֶד לְקִרְאָתָהּ” – לפי שראה שעלו המים לקראתה.

”And the servant ran toward her – “since he saw that the water rose toward her.

The Sages were inspired to give Eliezer and Rebecca’s meeting miraculous features since the story of Jacob and Rachel’s meeting has an explicitly miraculous occurrence:

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאָה יַעֲקֹב אֶת רַחֵל בַּת לָבָן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ וְאֵת צֹאן לָבָן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ וַיִּגֶשׁ יַעֲקֹב וַיְגִל אֶת הָאֲבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיִּשְׁקֵן אֶת צֹאן לָבָן אַחֵי אִמּוֹ:

And it was when Jacob saw Rachel ,daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother ,and the flock of Laban ,his mother’s brother ,then Jacob approached and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban ,his mother’s brother) .Gen(29:10 .

Jacob exhibits extraordinary strength during his first meeting with Rachel ,which attests to the desirability of the blossoming relationship between them .The Sages reproduced this supernatural sign in the story of Eliezer and Rebeca.

A. Initiative: Abraham initiates and directs the process of Isaac’s marriage and his servant is sent to bring Isaac a wife. Isaac is not involved in the search or the decision. Jacob, on the other hand, is sent to Haran himself to find a wife and makes his own decision regarding whom to choose.

B. Leaving the Land of Israel: Isaac was forbidden to leave Israel and travel to Haran so a messenger had to be sent in his place. Jacob traveled to Haran himself.¹⁸

C. The Purpose of the Journey to Haran: Eliezer’s journey to Haran on Isaac’s behalf had only one goal – to find Isaac a wife. Jacob’s had two goals: escaping Esau and finding a wife.

D. Details of the Travels: Details of Eliezer’s travels are not mentioned so we can conclude that they were uneventful. Jacob, however, merits God’s revelation on his way to Haran.¹⁹

E. Divine Selection: Throughout the search for Isaac’s wife, the text emphasizes that God will indicate the worthy woman. For example, Abraham informs Eliezer “God, Lord of the heavens...He will send His messenger before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there” (Gen. 24:7). Later on, Eliezer asks

18 Even though Jacob is not forbidden to leave the Land of Israel, Isaac blesses him that he will inherit it and God’s revelation to Jacob begins and ends with the subject of land (see Gen. 29:13-15).

19 See note 20.

God for assistance in finding a suitable woman and does not rely on his judgment alone. Even after he meets Rebecca and concludes that she is worthy, he emphasizes that his success is due to God. In contrast, Jacob's choice seems to be completely natural – there is no mention of any Divine involvement.

F. A Test of Character for the Potential Wife: Isaac's future wife passes a test of character given through Divine Providence; by Jacob, there is no such test. Jacob's father had told him to take a wife from the daughters of Laban; Jacob meets Rachel, loves her and decides to marry her.

G. Extended Stay with the Relatives: When Eliezer arrives at Bethuel's home, he does not accept the family's offer to sit and eat with them until he discusses his reason for coming. He immediately tells them of his mission to find a wife for Isaac. Even after the family has agreed to the plan, Eliezer refuses to wait and asks of the family: "Do not delay me, **and God has made my journey successful**, send me and I shall return to my master" (Gen. 24:56). Eliezer considers his success thus far a direct result of Divine Providence and seems to fear 'losing his momentum.' Immediately after the family agrees to the match, Eliezer returns to Canaan with Rebecca.

Jacob, on the other hand, does not mention the topic of marriage at all during his first meeting with Laban. A month later, when he does mention the subject, he does not reveal his father's command, but

asks to marry Rachel on his own initiative. In Jacob's journey, God's Providence is hidden and the process is less straightforward. As a result, Jacob ultimately remains in Haran for many years.

WHAT IS THE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE SELECTION OF ISAAC'S WIFE AND THE SELECTION OF JACOB'S?

Isaac – the Values of Land and Lineage

As we discussed in the previous *parasha*, there are **two values** that govern the search for Isaac's wife: **The first** is finding a worthy wife to build a home with Isaac – a woman not from Canaan, but from the people of Abraham's homeland, the descendants of Shem. **The second** is staying in the Land of Israel.

Isaac – Clear Divine Guidance

Once the objectives are clear, the practical difficulties in finding a wife become trivial. God will certainly help overcome these obstacles, as Abraham tells Eliezer:

<p>God, Lord of the heavens, Who took me from my father's house and my homeland, Who spoke to me and Who swore to me, saying, "To your descendants I will give this land," He will send His messenger before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. (Gen. 24:7)</p>	<p>ה' אלהי השמים אשר לקחני מבית אבי ומארץ מולדתי ואשר דבר לי ואשר נשבע לי לאמר לורעך אתן את הארץ הזאת הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם:</p>
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Isaac is not even personally involved in the selection of his wife. **The match is directed by God and the choice is made explicitly by Him.** This Divine element

is present throughout the narrative.

God's guidance is apparent in Eliezer's behavior as well. Immediately after he discovers that the woman at the well is Bethuel's daughter, the text states:

And the man [Eliezer] bowed and
prostrated himself before God. (Gen. 24:26)
וַיִּקְדּוּ הָאִישׁ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ לַיהוָה.

Eliezer thanks God again after he hears that Rebecca's family has agreed to the match:

And it was when Abraham's
servant heard their words, he
prostrated himself before God. (Gen. 24:52)
וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע עֶבֶד אַבְרָהָם אֶת דְּבָרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה לַיהוָה:

Rebecca's family also shows their recognition of God's hand in making the match:

And Laban and Bethuel answered
and said, "This has come from
God, and we cannot speak good
or ill to you." (Gen. 24:50)
וַיַּעַן לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מֵה' יָצָא הַדָּבָר לֹא נוֹכַל דַּבֵּר אֵלַיְךָ רַע אוֹ טוֹב:

**Jacob -
Natural
Progression**

Jacob's narrative, on the other hand, depicts a **natural progression** of a man fleeing his brother, arriving at his relatives, staying with them, falling in love with one of their daughters and asking to marry her in return for his work. Jacob does not ask for God's help in finding a wife and God's involvement in this process is not apparent.²⁰

²⁰ The only element that clashes with this picture is God's

C. Jacob's Journey to Haran as a Quest for a Wife

In fact, this portrayal of the story is not fully accurate.

**Isaac's Blessing
to Jacob upon
his Departure**

As we mentioned at the outset, Jacob's journey from Beersheba to Haran is a flight from Esau, but before he leaves he is commanded by his father to find a wife. Isaac also gives Jacob the crucial blessing of Abraham – the blessing for land and descendants:

And the Lord Sha-dai will bless you
and make you fruitful and increase
your numbers, and you will become
a community of nations. And He
will give the blessing of Abraham
to you and your descendants with
you, to bequeath you the land in
which you live, which God gave to
Abraham. (Gen. 28:3-4)
וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבָרֶכְךָ אֶתְךָ וַיַּפְרֶכְךָ וַיִּרְבֶּכְךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקַהַל עַמִּים: וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ אֶת בְּרִכְתּוֹ אַבְרָהָם לְךָ וּלְרַעֲךָ אֶתְךָ לְרִשְׁתְּךָ אֶת אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם:

revelation to Jacob during his journey. We will discuss the issue of revelation and vision below. At this point, we can regard Jacob as acting in an entirely natural manner and that God's revelation to Jacob gives the journey a sense of meaning, Divine guidance and promise for the future. Although Jacob continues his journey in an ordinary manner, focusing on his escape from Esau (as is evident from his oath to God), we as readers are now aware that behind this escape lies vision and promise for the future. Jacob's feelings must have changed from this point onward as well. This is expressed in his unexpected ability to roll the stone off the mouth of the well, as explained by Radak: "And this was from God's blessing to him, as He had given him additional strength" (Radak on Gen. 29:10).

Jacob had already been given the blessing to inherit the land when he deceived Isaac into believing that he was Esau. But here Jacob receives the truly significant blessing – the **blessing of Abraham**, the promise for land and descendants. Upon receiving this blessing Jacob becomes the successor of Abraham and Isaac and is thus forbidden from marrying a Canaanite woman.

Does Jacob ignore this Blessing?

This blessing was not given to Jacob by chance. All his life, Jacob has worked toward inheriting this blessing and the responsibility it entails: raising children worthy of continuing Abraham and Isaac’s path. He has prepared for this his entire life and he took steps to receive it – from purchasing the birthright to deceiving Isaac to receive the corresponding blessing.²¹

Jacob could not have been ‘ignoring’ his obligation to marry a suitable woman. Even if he had not been fleeing from Esau, he would have had to find a wife in Haran and not in Canaan.

Traveling at his Father’s Command

The next verse describes Jacob’s departure:

And Isaac sent Jacob and he went toward Padan Aram... (Gen. 28:5)

(ה) וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדֻנָה אֲרָם...

Isaac is the one sending Jacob to Haran; Jacob goes only after his father has equipped him with the blessing of Abraham and the command to marry a woman from

²¹ See our lesson on *Parashat Toledot*.

his relatives. Furthermore, Jacob’s journey is once again described in this manner in verse 7:

And Jacob listened to his father and his mother, and he went toward Padan Aram. (Gen. 28:7)

וַיִּשְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב אֶל אָבִיו וְאֶל אִמּוֹ וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדֻנָה אֲרָם:

Jacob’s journey to Canaan was initiated both by his father, who commanded him to find a wife, and by his mother, who advised him to flee from Esau.²² However, the Torah emphasizes the fact that **his father’s command came first in Jacob’s eyes**.

Jacob’s Main Goal – Marriage

Clearly the search for a wife is not just a pretext for Jacob’s journey. In fact, the opposite is true – in a deeper spiritual sense it the main purpose of the journey.²³

From this perspective, we recognize that Jacob’s flight from Esau is a means to accomplish the main goal – receiving the blessing of Abraham.

God’s Revelation – the Promise of Land and Descendants

This point is reinforced by God’s words to Jacob on his way to Haran:

And behold, God was standing over him, and He said, “I am the

וַהֲנִה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה'

²² While Rebecca also initiated Isaac’s command to send Jacob away in search of a wife (see Gen. 27:41-46), the discussion between Rebecca and Jacob revolved around his escape from Esau, while the conversation between Isaac and Jacob focused upon finding a wife.

²³ If Jacob’s flight from Esau were his main goal, Jacob would not have gone specifically to Haran. Rather, he would have hidden somewhere where his true identity was unknown. This would have surely prevented any future encounter with Esau.

Lord, God of your father Abraham and God of Isaac; the land upon which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. And your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will burst forth westward and eastward, northward and southward, and all of the families of the earth shall be blessed through you and your descendants. And behold, I am with you, and I will watch over you through all of your journeys, and I will return you to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done as I have said to you.” (Gen. 28:13-15)

אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ
וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שׂוֹבֵב
עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה
וְלִוְרְעֶךָ: וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ
כַּעֲפֹר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרָצָתָ
יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצָפֹנָה
וְנִגְבָּה וּנְבָרְכוּ בְךָ כָּל
מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה
וּבְוֹרְעֶךָ: וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי
עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמְרֶתִיךָ בְּכָל
אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ וְהִשְׁבֵּתִיךָ
אֶל הָאָדָמָה הַזֹּאת,
כִּי לֹא אֲעֹזְבֶךָ עַד
אֲשֶׁר אִם עָשִׂיתִי אֶת
אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ:

God promises to protect Jacob, but this is not His first promise. God begins with the promise for land and descendants, and ends with the promise for protection. Jacob focuses mainly on the protection, but he does not ignore the first part of the blessing – which is, in fact, the main component.

While Jacob’s journey to Haran includes the human dimension of escape and fear of Esau, on a deeper level he is accompanied by his father’s blessing, which is reflected in the blessing from God.²⁴

²⁴ See note 20.

D. Vision and Reality

CHOICE AND DECEIT

**Choosing
Laban’s
Daughter –
Divine Choice**

Jacob arrives in Haran knowing that he must marry one of Laban’s daughters.²⁵ When he first meets Rachel and discovers that she is Laban daughter he has no need to “test” her – it is clear to him that she is destined to be his wife.²⁶ Jacob’s association with Laban’s house is not coincidental since he had come to Haran to marry one of Laban’s daughters in the first place.

**Choosing
Rachel over
Leah –
Human
Choice**

The only choice Jacob had was between Rachel and Leah, Laban’s daughters. Here, there is room for Jacob’s personal preference. Why does Jacob prefer Rachel over Leah? We would expect his inclination to be based on some assessment of her character, as with Eliezer’s choice of Rebecca, but the Torah describes Jacob’s reasons quite differently:

...And Rachel was beautiful in looks and countenance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and he said, “I shall serve you seven

וְרַחֵל הָיְתָה יְפֵת תֵּאֵר
וְיֵפֶת מְרֹאֶה וְיִנְיָאָהָב
וַיֵּקֶב אֶת רַחֵל וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲעֹבְדְךָ שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים

²⁵ Jacob was explicitly commanded to marry one of Laban’s daughters – as opposed to Eliezer, who was merely commanded to find a woman in Abraham’s homeland. Jacob had considerably fewer options. In fact, he may not have realized he had a choice at all; Jacob had no way of knowing whether Laban had one daughter or several.

²⁶ Jacob was probably aware of Eliezer’s encounter with Rebecca by the well and he realized that he had found his partner in the same way.

years for Rachel, your younger daughter.”...And Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they were as a few days due to his love for her. (Gen. 29:17-20)

בְּרַחֵל בִּתְּךָ הַקְטָנָה... וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שִׁבְעַ שָׁנִים וַיְהִיו בְּעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אָחָדִים בְּאֵהְבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ.

Jacob's choice of Rachel is apparently based on 'ordinary' human love.²⁷ This simple, natural

27 This interpretation is based on the simple understanding of the text, although the commentators are strongly opposed to this reading. As the *Siftei Cohen* writes:

נראה לכאורה שמחמת יופיה היתה האהבה, ואי אפשר לומר כן על יעקב שהיה נותן עיניו ביופי ולא למד מוקנו שמעולם לא נסתכל בה עד אותה שעה שנכנסו למצרים שנאמר (בראשית י"ב, יא) "עתה ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את", אלא חס ושלום שיעקב הלך אחר היופי... אלא האהבה היתה לפי שהיו אומרים גדולה לגדול וקטנה לקטן, וכל מה שהגדולה היתה בוכה והקטנה היתה שמחה ומרוב השמחה היתה שמינה ודשינה ומוזה בא ליה היופי, ולזה אהבה... או נאמר שהאהבה היתה לפי ששמע אומרים לו ורחל בתו באה עם הצאן שנעשית רועה אמר בלבו שמא כל כך היא כעורה שעשאה רועה ומרוב הכיעור שבה לא יתגרו בה הרועים, כשראה אותה שהיתה דומה לאמו לזה אמר "ויהי כאשר ראה יעקב את רחל בת לבן אחי אמו" וראה בה צניעות שבאה אחר כל הרועים לא עמהם וראה גם כן שהיתה באה בתוך הצאן, שנאמר "ורחל באה עם הצאן" ודרך הרועה ללכת לפני הצאן, מכאן ידע שאין לה שום עסק עמהם, מיד "וישק יעקב לרחל ויגד לה כי אחי אביה הוא", לנסותה אם היא מכנסת אורחים, מיד "ותרץ" והניחה הצאן – אז ידע ודאי דאין עינה צרה באורחים, כי דרכם של בית אברהם ויצחק בהכנסת אורחים ומכאן נקשרה האהבה.

It seems that his love for her was because of her beauty, and it cannot be said of Jacob that he focused on beauty and did not learn from his grandfather [Abraham], who never looked at [Sarah's appearance] until they came to Egypt, as it is written: "Now I know that you are a beautiful woman"; Heaven forbid that Jacob was attracted by her beauty...rather, his love was because they would say that the elder sister [Leah] was for the elder brother [Esau] and the younger sister [Rachel] for the younger brother [Jacob], and as much as the elder sister would cry, so the younger sister would rejoice, and this abundance of happiness caused her to be plump and healthy and this gave her beauty, and for this reason he loved her...

preference²⁸ is consistent with the natural progression we mentioned earlier – once again we feel that Jacob's marriage is a natural human affair, beginning with his escape from Esau and culminating in his 'falling in love' with Rachel.²⁹

Jacob offers to work for seven years in return for permission to marry Rachel and Laban accepts:

And Laban said, "It is better for me to give her to you than to another man; stay with me." (Gen. 29:19)

וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן טוֹב תַּתִּי אֹתָהּ לְךָ מִתַּתִּי אֹתָהּ לְאִישׁ אֲחֵר שָׁבָה עִמָּדִי:

Or we might say that his love was because when he had heard them saying to him "His daughter Rachel comes with the flock", he thought to himself "Is she so ugly that he made her a shepherdess, because her ugliness would keep the shepherds from harassing her"? And when he saw her she was similar in looks to his mother, and this why it says, "And it was when Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of Laban, his mother's brother". He saw her modesty, for she came after all of the shepherds, not together with them, and he saw too that she walked among her flock, as it says "And Rachel came with the flock – "it is the way of a shepherd to walk before the flock. This is how he knew that she had no affairs with] the shepherds, [and immediately" Jacob kissed Rachel...and] he [told] her [that he is her father's brother".] His intent was [to test whether she was willing to welcome guests, and immediately" she ran "and left her flock – then he knew for certain that she was not miserly with guests; and since the way of Abraham and Isaac's house was to welcome guests, this is the foundation of] Jacob's [love.

See also *Sefer Etz Chaim* 38:2, which suggests that Jacob's choice of Rachel stemmed from his spiritual state at the time.

28 This strongly contrasts Eliezer's method of choosing Rebecca as a wife for Isaac.

29 Obviously, this process is only possible because Jacob himself went to Haran to find a wife. Eliezer cannot rely on love as

Jacob fulfills his obligation:

And Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they were as a few days due to his love for her. And Jacob said to Laban, “Bring me my wife, for I have completed my time, and let me come to her.” (Gen. 29:20-21)

וַיַּעֲבֹד יַעֲקֹב בְּרַחֵל שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וַיְהִיו בְּעֵינָיו כְּיָמִים אֶחָדִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ אֹתָהּ: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל לָבָן הִבֵּה אֶת אִשְׁתִּי כִּי מָלְאוּ יָמֵי וַאֲבוֹאָה אֵלֶיהָ:

Jacob's love for Rachel is evident; once he has completed his work period he asks to marry Rachel, as he deserves.

Why is Laban's Deceit Accepted?

Until now everything has proceeded according to Jacob's plan. At this point though Laban interferes:

And Laban gathered the local population, and he made a party. And it was in the evening, he took Leah his daughter and brought her to [Jacob], and he came to her. (Gen. 29:22-23)

וַיֵּאסֹף לָבָן אֶת כָּל אַנְשֵׁי הַמְּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֵּה: וַיְהִי בַעֲרֵב וַיִּקַּח אֶת לֵאָה בִּתּוֹ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ:

Laban deceives Jacob and gives him Leah to marry instead of Rachel. Laban's dishonesty is not surprising.³⁰

a criterion for choosing Rebecca, since it is Isaac (who is not present) who is to marry her. Rather, he must rely on objective criteria (kindness, good character, etc.).

30 Rashi notes:

“ברחל בתך הקטנה” – כל הסימנים הללו למה? לפי שהיה יודע בו שהוא רמאי. אמר לו “אעבדך ברחל” ושמה תאמר רחל אחרת מן השוק, תלמוד לומר “בתך”. ושמה תאמר אחליף ללאה שמה ואקרא שמה רחל, תלמוד לומר “הקטנה”. ואף על פי כן לא הועיל שהרי רמהו.

What is surprising is the fact that he succeeds in deceiving Jacob so blatantly.³¹ How could Leah and Rachel have kept quiet?³² How could Jacob not have noticed the switch?³³ Why does Jacob remain married

“For Rachel, your younger daughter” – why was Jacob so specific? He knew that [Laban] was dishonest. He said, “I shall serve you for Rachel,” and in case [Laban] might claim [to understand this to refer to] another Rachel from the marketplace, he said, “your daughter.” And in case Laban said [to himself], “I shall change her name to Leah and call [Leah] Rachel,” he said “your younger daughter.” And even so, this was to no avail, for in the end he cheated him. (Rashi on Gen. 29:18)

Rashi's commentary is based on *Bereshit Rabba* 70:17.

31 Laban's successful deception is explained by the commentators in a number of different ways, as we shall discuss below.

32 The *Or HaChaim* explains this in his commentary on verse 23:

“ויקח את לאה” – אולי שלא רצתה לרמות יעקב ולקחה בעל כרחו או בריצו דברים, וזולת זה לא היה צריך לומר אלא ויבא לאה בתו אליו.

“And he took Leah” – perhaps she did not want to deceive Jacob and he took her against her will or persuaded her, for otherwise it would have said, “And Leah his daughter came to him.” (Or HaChaim on Gen. 29:23)

The *Ba'alei HaTosafot* interpret this differently:

אמר יעקב ללאה רמאית בת רמאי! קרית רחל וענית לי והשתא קרית לאה וענית לי. אמרה לו מינך ילפית אביך קרא עשו וענית קרא לך יעקב וענית. ואביך מעיד בך שנאמר “בא אחיך במרמה וכו'” אין לך ספרא דלית ליה תלמידא ומתוך דברים הללו התחיל יעקב לשונאה.

Jacob said to Leah “You cheater ,daughter of a cheater !I called’ Rachel ‘and you answered me ,and now I call’ Leah’ and you answer me “!She said to him” ,I learned this from you – your father called’ Esau ‘and you answered him ,and then called’ Jacob ‘and you answered him .And your father testifies to this ;he said’ ,Your brother came in deceit’... –There is no teacher without a student “.And from this conversation Jacob began to despise her) .*Ba’alei HaTosafot* on Gen. 29:22)

According to this interpretation, Leah cooperated with Laban's deception to obtain a husband.

33 This too is explained by the *Or HaChaim*:

to Leah, as opposed to divorcing her? How can Leah not only remain Jacob's wife,³⁴ but actually become the

טעם שלא הרגיש בה, הוא לחששת צדיק וישר ונאמן רוח לבלי כשל במכשול האנושי אשר יתאוו תאוה קודם קרוב אליה, ויטיפו ממנו צחצוחי טומאה קודם התחלת מצוה, ומי לנו גדול מיעקב אבינו, עדות לו בתורה (בראשית מ"ט, ג) "ראשית אוני", ועיין מה שכתבנו שם, אשר על כן הרחיק הראות בה ותיכף ומיד בא אליה לשמור חומו בלי חלל בריתו קודש, וגם אחר גמר ביאה לא הכיר בה כי כיבה נרות כמשפט לאוהבי שמו עד אור הבוקר.

The reason he did not notice was due to his fear as a righteous, spiritually upright man that he would succumb to human weakness and give way to desire before he came close to her, such that drops of impurity would drip from him prior to beginning the mitzvah. And who among us is greater than our forefather Jacob, as the Torah says, "[Reuben,] first of my seed" (Gen. 49:3) and see our commentary there. Therefore, he prevented himself from seeing her and came to her quickly so as not to break the holy covenant, and once they had completed the act he did not recognize her, for he extinguished the candles, according to the custom of those who love His name, until the next morning. (Or HaChaim on Gen. 29:23; see also Hizkuni ad loc.)

In addition, Rashi quotes the Talmud and famously explains, (tractate *Megilla* 13b):

"ויהי בבקר והנה היא לאה" – אבל בלילה לא היתה לאה לפי שמסר יעקב סימנים לרחל וכשראתה רחל שמכניסין לו לאה אמרה עכשיו תכלם אחותי עמדה ומסרה לה אותן סימנים.

"And it was in the morning, and behold, she was Leah" – but during the night she had not been Leah, for Jacob had given Rachel signs, and when Rachel saw that Leah was being led to him, she said [to herself], "Now my sister will be shamed," and gave [Leah] the signs. (Rashi on Gen. 29:25)

34 R. Yitzhak ben Asher suggests an answer to these questions in his commentary on Gen. 29:25:

הקשה ר"ת היאך היו קדושי לאה קדושין הא הוּו קדושי טעות שהיה בדעתו לקדש רחל ולבן מסר לו לאה במקום רחל, ותרץ הר"ר אליקים שיעקב היה ירא מרמאותו של לבן כדכתיב "ברחל בתך הקטנה" כדפרי" שם, והיה חושש ללבן שמא יחליף בלאה ואמר בלבו אם זאת רחל יהיו קדושין לשם רחל ואם יחליף לי רחל ללאה יהיו לשם לאה כדי שלא יעשה בעילתו בעילת זנות.

And Rabbenu Tam asks how Leah's marriage ceremony was valid, since it was a mistaken marriage. [Jacob] had in

mother of half of the twelve tribes, including those destined for kingship and priesthood? How could the house of Jacob, the foundation of the nation of Israel, be based on a 'mistake,' a deception?

HUMAN PROGRESSION AND DIVINE PROGRESSION

Our analysis leads us to conclude that there were two processes taking place simultaneously:

The natural human progression: Jacob flees Esau, arrives at Laban's house and falls in love with Rachel; Laban deceives Jacob and causes him to marry Leah; Jacob marries Rachel, his beloved, as well.

The Divine progression: Jacob travels to Haran to marry one of Laban's daughters; he meets Rachel at the well and knows that she is destined for him, and that he was sent to Haran to marry her.

**Leah's
Marriage:
Outwardly –
Deceit,
Inwardly –
God's Will**

Jacob asks to marry Rachel for ordinary human reasons, but Divine Providence directs him to marry Leah as well. **Laban's treachery does not cause Jacob to marry Leah; God's will does.** Laban's ploy was only a means to allow the marriage intended by God to

mind to marry another – Rachel – and Laban gave him Leah instead of Rachel. And Rabbi Elyakim answered, "Jacob had feared Laban's dishonesty, as he said, 'Rachel, your younger daughter,' as I explained there, and he feared that Laban would exchange her for Leah. And he said to himself, 'If it is Rachel, then my intent will be to marry Rachel, and if he exchanges her for Leah, my intent will be to marry Leah,' so that his relations with her would not be in a promiscuous manner." (R. Yitzhak ben Asher on Gen. 29:25)

take place.³⁵

Vision and Reality

The nature of Jacob's character in this story is that of someone living a fully human existence, dealing independently with all of the complications and difficulties of human life. At the same time, Jacob is not without vision: he received Isaac's blessing – the blessing of Abraham; God reveals Himself to Jacob at the beginning of his journey and blesses him once again with this vital blessing. This vision accompanies Jacob throughout his journey from the Land of Israel, as he contends with the complexity of reality.

Jacob – Coping with His Circumstances

Jacob's life story is filled with difficult situations: he is forced into conflict with Esau to receive his father's blessing; he leaves the Land of Israel

35 According to the *midrash*, and as explained by the *Sefat Emet* and R. Kook, both Jacob and Esau were meant to receive blessings and work in cooperation. Jacob was to concentrate on improving the world on a spiritual level, while Esau was to do the same on a physical level. Leah, who was intended for Esau, was supposed to help him with this external task, while Rachel would help Jacob with his internal task. However, since Jacob acquired Esau's portion (the birthright) and became responsible for the physical improvement of the world, he married Leah as well:

כי הנה יעקב אבינו עליו השלום זכה לקחת חלקו של עשיו... וכשזכה לאותו חלק זכה ליקח את לאה שהייתה מיוחדת לאותו הארה. לכך רחל הייתה האהובה לו כי היא הייתה מיוחדת אליו ממש. ולאה הייתה מיוחדת לחלקו של עשיו... (שפת אמת, ויצא תרמ"ו, ד"ה "בענין המעשה מנשואי לאה").

For our forefather Jacob merited Esau's portion...and when he received this portion, he merited to take Leah as a wife, for she was destined to enlighten [the world] in this manner. Thus Rachel was his beloved, for she was truly intended for him, and Leah was intended for Esau's portion... (Sefat Emet, Vayetze 5647, s.v. "Belnyan HaMa'aseh MiNisu'ei Leah")

See also Gilad Messing, *Ve'At Alit Al Kulana*, ch. 4.

and is confronted with Laban's dishonesty, finally fleeing Laban out of fear; he has a trying family life, including four wives, two of whom are sisters with a complicated relationship; his daughter Dina is raped and afterward there is real concern that the local population will start a war against him; the relations between his sons are strained – to the point where Joseph's brothers sell him as a slave.

Divine Revelation in Jacob's Life

However, this is not the only way to evaluate Jacob's life. God reveals Himself to Jacob at every crucial moment, granting him a sense of purpose and vision.

Jacob's complexity is evident at every stage in his life. Many of his actions hold a double meaning – they are part of a natural human process, while at the same time they are stages in a Divine progression:

A. His journey to Haran is not only to escape Esau, but also to find a wife, and he is accompanied by God's blessing.

B. His return to Israel is not only due to fear of Laban. It is accompanied by God's revelation to him.³⁶

C. His arrival in Beit El is not only because of his fear that the people of Shekhem will kill him. God also commands him to return to Beit El.³⁷

D. Jacob's journey to Egypt is not only to see Joseph

36 See Gen. 31:1-3; 32:1-2, 24-29.

37 See Gen. 34:30; 35:1.

This man must deal with all facets of reality – even the most difficult and problematic ones – while being accompanied by a great vision. This is the essence of the nation of Israel, the children of Jacob.