

# TORAHSCOPE: VaYetze (And he went out)

by Mark Huey posted 05 December, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 28:10-32:3  
Hosea 12:12-14:10(g)

## “Jacob’s Seasoning (Part 1)” The Two Camps

“Then the LORD said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you’” (Genesis 31:3).

When you begin to consider this week’s Torah portion, you are eventually led to conclude that *Vayetze* (And he went out), and next week’s portion *Vayishlach* (And he sent), are a two-part detailed rendition of the life of the Patriarch Jacob. The Scriptures dedicate almost nine chapters to describing many of the trials and tribulations of Jacob, as he develops from a young man in pursuit of a wife to a seasoned patriarch who ends up burying his father Isaac, with none other than his estranged brother Esau:

“Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. And Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, an old man of ripe age; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (Genesis 35:28-29).

This week’s Torah portion covers approximately twenty years in the life of the Patriarch Jacob as he departs for Haran, and then after laboring for father-in-law Laban, begins his return to the Promised Land. Next week, the Torah portion *Vayishlach* concludes the intense description of the reunion with Esau and some of the challenges of living in the Shechem area before the delayed trek back south to Hebron.

During this first score of years described this week, Jacob marries Leah and Rachel, takes on Bilhah and Zilpah as concubines, and fathers eleven sons and one daughter. It is during this twenty-year period in his life that many dramatic encounters with the Holy One occur that begin to solidify his relationship with Him. Here for all to read are some chronicled events that give one a sense of Jacob’s humanity.

### On the Road

Jacob is one of the unique characters in the Scriptures who exemplifies the great dichotomy that exists between the natural man and the spiritual man. Here for all of us to consider is an account of his life story, that in some respects, most can identify with. After all, as Jacob is leaving the comfort of home, under the threat of retribution from his brother Esau, he is in desperate need of assurance that what he is doing and where he is going will achieve two objectives.

First, the immediate need for physical survival was paramount and certainly factored into his decision to obey his parents’ command to head east to find a wife from their relatives in Paddan-aram:

“So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, ‘You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. And may God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you; that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham’” (Genesis 28:1-4).

But what about the promises bestowed upon him as the spiritual heir of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac? Now that Jacob was the recipient of the birthright and the blessing, how was God going to fulfill those promises if he was moving outside of Canaan? Certainly, the

thought might have arisen that perhaps some things had been altered as a result of the ongoing problems with Esau.

From the very beginning of his sojourn eastward, Jacob has an encounter with the Lord as the angelic host appears on a ladder just after his departure from Beersheba, on the road to Haran, at Bethel or Luz:

“And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you’” (Genesis 28:13-15).

Jacob has a very inspiring encounter with the Almighty. Here it is recorded that God reiterates the promises given to Abraham and Isaac about the inheritance of the Promised Land, the multitude of descendants, and the future blessings to the nations that will come through Jacob. Then He adds this final declaration: **“And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”** Here in categorical terms, God affirms to Jacob that everything is under control and that He will not only be with him during his trip eastward, but He will return him back to Canaan to complete all of the promises that have been made.

Apparently, Jacob is convinced that he has heard from the Most High, because his actions reflect convictions that are laced with awe and reverence:

“Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ **And he was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’** So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. **And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz**” (Genesis 28:16-19).

This action speaks for itself, but it is also followed by the first recorded vow in the Scriptures:

**“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You’”** (Genesis 28:20-22).

Here as Jacob begins on his journey eastward, he has an intimate encounter with the Creator. Then, in a gesture of sincerity, He makes an “if/then” vow with God: “If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear” (NJPS).

### Jacob’s Audacity

While reading this statement, in light of the context of the extraordinary encounter with the Almighty, a number of thoughts came to my mind:

- How could Jacob make this statement to the Lord?
- Did Jacob not understand whom he was truly addressing?
- Did he not believe the promises that were already made regarding his welfare?
- Can you imagine making a conditional bargain with the Almighty?

Certainly by his actions of anointing the rock and his statements, Jacob knows that he has been in the presence of God. But then to move from that contrite state to putting conditional demands on God appears to be audacious. Is it possible that this statement is a peek into the spiritual immaturity of Jacob?

Perhaps this is a vivid indication that he is used to striking deals, and in other respects, is used to conniving in order to get his way. After all, he had been the favored child of Rebecca and traded a bowl of lentil soup for the privileges of the firstborn. Then, some time before departing for Padam-Haran, he has deceived his father, and in essence stolen the blessing that Isaac originally had intended for Esau. You could conclude that Jacob was accustomed to getting his way.

This flippant vow seems to be without any great deal of thought or consideration of the consequences of his commitment. It seems that he did not yet possess the wisdom of older and wiser men who understood the broader implications of vowing. Moses codifies the concerns a number of times when he is giving the Torah to Israel:

**“If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth”** (Numbers 30:2).

**“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the LORD your God will surely require it of you”** (Deuteronomy 23:21).

Years later, Yeshua Himself declares the power of vows and oaths and how one should never enter into them hastily:

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘**You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.**’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil” (Matthew 5:33-37).

But here, with just a few miles on his journey east, Jacob *after hearing* a reiteration of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac decides that he is going to strike a bargain with the Lord. If He performs for Jacob by providing food, clothing, and protection, then Jacob would make Him his God. **This sounds like a very natural thing for a natural man to be doing.** He has been so overwhelmed with this encounter with God at this very special place known as Bethel, that he simply does not know how to react other than trying to strike a deal.

For some reason, Jacob decides to pour oil on a rock. Where does that come from in his background? There is no known incident prior to this time written in the Scriptures that refers to anyone pouring oil on a rock. What was Jacob trying to do or signify with this unusual gesture? Well, the truth of the matter is we really just do not know. Many over the years have tried to make something much more out of this action than is truly recorded in the Bible. Entire philosophical and ideological perspectives have arisen to make this gesture into something very symbolic for future interpretations of Scripture. I would suggest that pouring oil on a rock was nothing more than an indication of his spiritual immaturity, rather than some of the other concepts concocted.

If Jacob simply knew the history of his forefathers, he would have known that somewhere in the Bethel area his grandfather had an encounter with the Holy One. Instead of pouring oil on a rock, Abraham actually constructed an altar and called upon the Lord, just after arriving in the Promised Land:

**“Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD”** (Genesis 12:8).

After going to Egypt to avoid the famine, and then coming back to the Promised Land, Abraham again returns to Bethel, to “call upon the name of the LORD”:

**“And he went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place of the altar, which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD”** (Genesis 13:3-4).

There was some spiritual significance attached to this part of the geography of Canaan. The fact that it was called Bethel, meaning “house of God,” would have been an indication that there was indeed some spiritual aspect to this known place along the mountain highway that

traversed the hills from Hebron to Shechem. But rather than follow in his grandfather's footsteps and go to the altar to "call upon the Lord," instead after his encounter with God, he offers a conditional vow that requires performance from God in order for Jacob to respond with allegiance. **Does Jacob have a few things to learn about the Creator?**

We might conclude that Jacob was still operating in his flesh as opposed to having a deeper spiritual understanding like Abraham. After all, putting conditions on God indicates that one probably does not know Him. Instead, it is a good indication that the person putting requirements upon the Creator is still operating in the flesh expecting to be able to manipulate God.

## Sacred Pillars

Jacob has a great deal to learn. During the next twenty years, as he labors under the watchful eye of Laban and sires his family, his flesh is challenged as he starts to understand more and more about the God of Abraham and Isaac. Eventually, God reminds him that it is time to return to Canaan:

"Then the LORD said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you'" (Genesis 31:3).

Again, God in His mercy to Jacob indicates that He will be with him. But when Jacob relays to Rachel and Leah what he heard from God, he elaborates on the statement and adds some additional information about his encounter with Him at Bethel:

"I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth" (Genesis 31:13).

First, Jacob states that the Lord has indicated that He is the God of Bethel. Perhaps Jacob is remembering the incident some twenty years earlier with more detail. Obviously, it was a very special place on Earth where Jacob had a significant spiritual encounter with the Holy One. Then he remembers that he "anointed a pillar" at that location. We can remember from the earlier account in Genesis 28, that he poured some oil on a stone to commemorate his experience. But it appears that in Jacob's mind, there was something special about making a declaration at that specific place on Earth, where he had encountered the Creator. If you recall, as he completed his vow twenty years earlier he stated, "And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God's abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You" (Genesis 28:22, NJPS).

Now, as Jacob describes some of the reasons for returning to Canaan, the "stone" has become a pillar or a memorial sign by Jacob to remember this special place on Earth. According to Jacob's rendition, God is instructing him to return to the land, by describing the pillar to Rachel and Leah—as a "pillar." Apparently, Jacob has an affinity for constructing pillars as memorials for significant events in his life. After his twenty years of laboring in Paddan-Haran, he makes an abrupt departure from Laban as he begins his return to the land of his fathers. After seven days of journey, Laban and his cohorts finally catch up with Jacob and his family:

"When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, then he took his kinsmen with him, and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey; **and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead**" (Genesis 31:22-23).

After a lengthy discussion another memorial pillar and heap are constructed:

"So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and **let it be a witness** between you and me. **Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar.** And Jacob said to his kinsmen, 'Gather stones.' So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap" (Genesis 31:44-46).

Jacob is memorializing this place on Earth in a similar fashion to what he did before he left Canaan, when he set up a pillar in Bethel. But there is a distinct difference in Jacob's attitude about what he is doing with this pillar of demarcation between him and his father-in-law Laban. Notice the actions that take place around this pillar and heap:

"And Laban said to Jacob, 'Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. **The God**

of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.' So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain" (Genesis 31:51-54).

Here Jacob is, in essence, cutting a covenant with Laban. Laban promises not to pass by the heap or pillar "for harm" in exchange for Jacob promising the same thing. And then it appears that Laban invokes the witness and judgment of the God of Abraham, Nahor, and their father Terah between them. Then it is stated that Jacob swears by "the fear of his father Isaac." He makes a solemn oath or vow with Laban. Now, for the second time in his discussions with Laban, Jacob refers to "the fear of Isaac," making a linkage earlier in his defense of his actions to the God of Abraham and Isaac:

"If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night" (Genesis 31:42).

After the covenant is agreed to by Laban and Jacob, Jacob offers a sacrifice on the mountain. Interestingly, this is the first time that it is recorded that Jacob offers a sacrifice. Is it possible that during the previous twenty years that Jacob is beginning to finally have an appreciation for the God of his fathers? Here at a relatively perilous moment in his encounter with Laban, we begin to see the transformation that is taking place in Jacob. Even though he resorts to setting up a pillar as a memorial marker, it appears that Jacob is growing in his understanding of just who the Creator is and how He indeed factors into the affairs of mankind. By invoking the witness and judgment of the God of Abraham and Isaac into the covenant, Jacob is admitting that He is a part of the covenant. Then by sealing the covenant and offering up sacrifices, he is resorting to the old patterns that he had witnessed as a child and young man growing up and hearing about the lives of Abraham and Isaac.

## Two Camps: The Natural and the Spiritual

As you read the story and follow the sequence of events, you can sense that Jacob is definitely being prepared for even greater dependency upon the Almighty. Now that he has successfully handled a touchy situation with his father-in-law, this week's Torah portion comes to an end. Interestingly, as the two parties depart in their separate directions, Jacob is met by a company of angels:

"And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place. Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. And Jacob said when he saw them, 'This is God's camp.' So he named that place Mahanaim" (Genesis 31:55-32:2).

Here, after twenty years of growth as a man, husband, father, and most importantly, a spiritual forefather for the multitude to follow, Jacob is greeted by a host of angels. No doubt he remembered one of his last recollections of his departure from Canaan, when he encountered the angels ascending and descending on the ladder at Bethel. He believed he was at the house of God and he was witnessing what he referred to as the gateway to Heaven. All of these lofty terms were given to describe events that were very real to Jacob. Now, as he perceives the angelic host he declares, "this is God's camp," or in Hebrew, *machanei Elohim zeh* (מַחֲנֵי אֱלֹהִים זֶה). But then, when he names the place, rather than calling it God's Camp, he names it *Machanayim* (מַחֲנַיִם), meaning "Two Camps."

Here, on a tributary to the Jabbok River that eventually will take his divided company to the Jordan River and back to the Promised Land, Jacob has an extraordinary encounter, not only with Laban, but now with angels reappearing to him after twenty years. Why does he not name the spot God's Camp? It would almost seem appropriate. He has set up a pillar to demarcate the spot where he and Laban have made their peace. He has called upon the God of Abraham and Isaac to witness and judge his covenant. Then he has even followed their example and actually

offered up sacrifices to consummate the covenant struck. It would almost make sense that Jacob would name the spot where all of this occurred, God's Camp, and yet he names it Two Camps.

Is it possible that Jacob is being seasoned in the ways of the Lord? Is it possible that he is still struggling with his fleshy nature and the call on his life to be spiritual and have faith and trust in the God of his fathers?

Is it possible that the name Two Camps could, in and of itself, represent the classic struggle that all people deal with when it comes to the natural and the spiritual? We know that even the imminent Apostle Paul dealt with this struggle throughout his life. Even after being trained to be one of the preeminent Torah scholars and then being radically saved, he continued to struggle with the two natures that were battling within him. Then in his epistle to the Romans he confesses that very struggle and how it is what ultimately brought him to the knowledge of the Savior:

“What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; **for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’** But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. **For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me.** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. **Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin”** (Romans 7:7-25).

As we continue to follow the transformation of Jacob, we are going to see that Jacob himself is going through a very similar struggle as he is being “seasoned” for the call that is upon his life. Jacob is learning to lose faith in his own ability to manipulate situations and is beginning to trust in the faithfulness of the God of Abraham and Isaac. (To be continued in next week's Torah portion.)

May we all likewise be seasoned and learn to walk in the fear of “Jacob's God” and have our flesh subjected to the will of the Holy Spirit.

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