

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Parshas Vayetze continues the saga of Yakov's journey. It was 2185 and Yakov was 77 years old. Having fled from the wrath of Esav following Yitzchak's blessings, Yakov spent 14 years studying in the academy of his Great-Etc.-Grandfather, Ever (great-grandson of Shem the son of Noach). During that time, his knowledge of the relationship between G-d and nature reached a depth that was exceptional. Urged by his teacher, Ever, who realized that his own death was drawing near, (2187) Yakov left the academy prepared to assume responsibility for the next stage of Jewish national development.

The Parsha begins with the famed dream of "Jacob's Ladder". Yakov was brought to the future sight of the Bais Hamikdash (Temple) and spent the night. Hashem (G-d) appeared to him in a dream and confirmed upon him the blessings of Yitzchak. It was during this momentous prophecy that Hashem revealed to Yakov the exact location of the Holy of Holies. Upon waking, Yakov declared, "...this is the gateway to Heaven", and committed his children to one day build the Bais Hamikdash on that very location. Strengthened by Hashem's promise, Yakov was now ready to wrest from the evil Lavan the next stage of Jewish destiny.

Yakov arrived at the outskirts of Charan and encountered the shepherds waiting to water their sheep. Yakov's physical strength was demonstrated and remained an important feature of Yakov's character. As Rav Samson Rephael Hirsch explains, it was the gift of physical strength that provided Yakov with the means of bargaining with Lavan for his marriage to Rachel and Leah. Yakov committed himself to 7 years of indentured service in exchange for Rachel. At the age of 84, Yakov married both Rachel and Leah and committed himself to an additional 7 years of service. During those 7 years Leah gave him 6 sons and one daughter; Zilpah and Bilhah each had two sons and Rachel gave birth to Yoseph. We are told that the birth of Yoseph was the essential element necessary for Yakov's return to Canaan and the inevitable confrontation with Esav.

Yakov negotiated with Lavan a fair salary in exchange for his continued service. The next 6 years revealed some of Yakov's knowledge of the intimate workings of nature. In what appears to have been the first case of genetic engineering, Yakov amassed an enviable fortune of cattle and servants. Recognizing signs of envy and hatred on the part of Lavan and his sons, Yakov consulted with his wives and they decided to flee from Charan. Their departure had the secondary concern of needing to be in Eretz Yisroel for the birth of Binyamin in whose section the Holy of Holies would one day stand.

They successfully escaped the scrutiny of Lavan and arrived at Mt. Gilad, near the border of Canaan. Lavan pursued Yakov and in the final fateful confrontation with Yakov, Yakov unwittingly cursed Rachel. Lavan's final attempt at destroying the embryonic Chosen People was thwarted by Hashem's intervention, and Yakov signed a pact with Lavan, effectively divorcing his family from any future contact with the diabolical Lavan. The Parsha concludes with Yakov's triumphant arrival at the borders of Canaan.

Copyright © 1997 by [Rabbi Aron Tendler](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
