

November 20-21, 2026 י״א כסלו תשפ״ז

Candlelighting: 4:26 PM

Parashat Vayetze ויצא Genesis 28:10-32:3
Stone – p 144 Hertz – p 106 Etz Hayim – p 166

Haftarah Hosea 12:13-14:10 הושע
Stone – p 1140 Hertz – p 118 Etz Hayim – p 189

Kiddush following services is sponsored by the congregation

Shabbat ends: 5:26

TRADITIONAL CONGREGATION

Rabbi Seth D Gordon - Rabbi.Gordon@yahoo.com
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WEEKDAY AND *SHABBAT* SERVICES

Tuesday - 6:30 PM *Arvit*
Shabbat - 9:30 AM

Governance Committee:
Florence Schachter, Chair
Marty Levy, Vice-Chair
Ken Bohm, Ellis Frohman, Ron Green,
Dina Rinder, Mindy Strauss
Ellis Frohman, Financial Vice President
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We welcome new members!
If you or someone you know would like to receive membership information,
please contact our office at 314-576-5230
or traditionalcong@gmail.com

On This Week's Torah Portion - Vayetze

What is it that made Jacob – not Abraham or Isaac or Moses – the true father of the Jewish people? We are called the "congregation of Jacob," "the Children of Israel." Jacob/Israel is the man whose name we bear. Yet Jacob did not begin the Jewish journey; Abraham did. Jacob faced no trial like that of Isaac at the Binding. He did not lead the people out of Egypt or bring them the Torah. To be sure, all his children stayed within the faith, unlike Abraham or Isaac. But that simply pushes the question back one level. Why did he succeed where Abraham and Isaac failed?

It seems that the answer lies in parshat Vayetse and parshat Vayishlach. Jacob was the man whose greatest visions came to him when he was alone at night, far from home, fleeing from one danger to the next. In parshat Vayetse, escaping from Esau, he stops and rests for the night with only stones to lie on, and he has an epiphany:

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.... When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Gen. 28:12–17

In parshat Vayishlach, fleeing from Laban and terrified at the prospect of meeting Esau again, he wrestles alone at night with an unnamed stranger:

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."...So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." Gen. 32:29–31

These are the decisive spiritual encounters of Jacob's life, yet they happen in liminal space (the space between, neither a starting point nor a destination), at a time when Jacob is at risk in both directions – where he comes from and where he is going to. Yet it is at these points of maximal vulnerability that he encounters God and finds the courage to continue despite all the hazards of the journey.

That is the strength Jacob bequeathed to the Jewish people. What is remarkable is not merely that this one tiny people survived tragedies that would have spelled the end of any other people: the destruction of two Temples; the Babylonian and Roman conquests; the expulsions, persecutions, and pogroms of the Middle Ages; the rise of antisemitism in nineteenth-century Europe; and the Holocaust. It is truly astonishing that after each cataclysm, Judaism renewed itself, scaling new heights of achievement.

During the Babylonian exile, Judaism deepened its engagement with the Torah. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem it produced the great literary monuments of the Oral Torah: Midrash, Mishnah, and Gemara. During the Middle Ages, it produced masterpieces of law and Torah commentary, poetry, and philosophy. A mere three years after the Holocaust it proclaimed the State of Israel, the Jewish return to history after the darkest night of exile.

When I first became Chief Rabbi I had to undergo a medical examination. The doctor had me walking at a very brisk pace on a treadmill. "What are you testing?" I asked him. "How fast I can go, or how long?" "Neither," he replied. "I will be observing how long it takes for your pulse to return to normal, after you come off the treadmill." That is when I discovered that health is measured by the power of recovery. That is true for everyone, but doubly so for leaders and for the Jewish people, a nation of leaders. (This, I believe, is what the phrase "a kingdom of Priests" [Ex. 19:6] means).

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Leaders suffer crises. That is a given of leadership. When Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Britain between 1957 and 1963, was asked what the most difficult aspect of his time in office was, he famously replied, "Events, dear boy, events." Bad things happen, and when they do, the leader must take the strain so that others can sleep easily in their beds.

Leadership, especially in matters of the spirit, is deeply stressful. Four figures in Tanach – Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah – actually prayed to die rather than continue. This was not only true in the distant past. Abraham Lincoln suffered deep bouts of depression. So did Winston Churchill, who called it his "black dog." Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. both attempted suicide in adolescence and experienced depressive illness in adult life. The same was true of many great creative artists, among them Michelangelo, Beethoven, and Van Gogh.

Is it greatness that leads to moments of despair, or moments of despair that lead to greatness? Do those who lead internalise the stresses and tensions of their time? Or is it that those who are used to stress in their emotional lives find release in leading exceptional lives? There is no convincing answer to this in the literature thus far. But Jacob was a more emotionally volatile individual than either Abraham, who was often serene even in the face of great trials, or Isaac, who was particularly withdrawn. Jacob feared; Jacob loved; Jacob spent more of his time in exile than the other patriarchs. But Jacob endured and persisted. Of all the figures in Genesis, he was the great survivor.

The ability to survive and to recover is part of what it takes to be a leader. It is the willingness to live a life of risks that makes such individuals different from others. So said Theodore Roosevelt in one of the greatest speeches ever made on the subject: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." Theodore Roosevelt, "Citizenship in a Republic", speech given at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910.

Jacob endured the rivalry of Esau, the resentment of Laban, the tension between his wives and children, the early death of his beloved Rachel, and the loss – for twenty-two years – of his favourite son, Joseph. He said to Pharaoh, "Few and evil have been the days of my life" (Gen. 47:9). Yet, on the way he "encountered" angels, and whether they were wrestling with him or climbing the ladder to heaven, they lit the night with the aura of transcendence.

To try, to fall, to fear, and yet to keep going: that is what it takes to be a leader. That was Jacob, the man who at the lowest ebbs of his life had his greatest visions of heaven.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Join us at B’nai Amoona on December 6th!



Adults (13+): $12
Children (3-12): $8
2 & Under Complimentary
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Shabbat Hanukkah Chinese Dinner

Friday, December 11th



6:00pm:
Musical Friday Evening Services
7:00pm:
Delectable Chinese Dinner



Adults (13 -59): $25 per person Adults (60+): $18*
Children (3-12): $10 per person 2 & Under Complimentary

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*Cost is subsidized by a grant from the Women's Auxiliary Foundation for the Jewish Aged & JCA Charitable Foundation

Note: There will be a separate space available for a ***Shabbat*** service without instruments

PRAYER

O Lord –
Number our days this way:

Days of strength to lie,
If the truth brings torment.

Days of weakness,
If strength give rise to suffering

Days of noise,
If silence is the cause of loneliness.

And
Nights of disconcerting dreams
If we turn smug to the taste of hunger.

Pursue us,
Discomfort us,

Destroy our own complacency
With the paradox and contradiction.

Remind us we are Yours.

Danny Siegel
(Adapted)

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

True love doesn't have a happy ending; true love has no ending.

Ed Mckenzie